



A Study into the Discourse of American Print Media about Representation of Islam and Muslims

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Abstract:

Print media discourses mirror social reality related to a particular context and time. Most often, they serve as a distorting prism to construct and represent a desired version of reality. The data for the present study comes from the articles of 'The Washington Post' about the representation of Islam and Muslims. The time span for data collection ranges from August 2019 to October 2019. Van Dijk's (2006) research model for critical Discourse Analysis has been employed to analyse the data. The analytical categories of the model include representation, actor description, metaphor, polarization, number game, authority, lexicalization, topos, comparison, distancing and consensus. The data has been analysed at the level of word, sentence and discourse. The findings of the study highlight that the adjectives of negative social connotations such as militants, hard liners, belligerent, extremists, suicide bombers, jihadists, heaven seekers, the squad, terrorists, etc. have used to represent Islam and Muslims negatively. Highly politicised terms such as Islamic racism and islamophobia are alluded to Islam and Muslims. The frequency of occurrence of the article related to Islam and Muslims during the selected time span is significantly higher. The themes associated with Islam, Muslims through the articles include ISIS, Islamic state, and jihad, Talibanised Ideology, Islamic Militants, fight against terrorism, Political Islam etc. It contends that 100% negative representation of Islam and Muslims has been observed. Besides, it concludes that print media discourses are one of the best sites for ideological investment and to shape mindset of target readership accordingly.

Keywords:

Islam, Muslims, Representation, Print Media, CDA, Ideology

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Introduction:

Representation of Islam and Muslims in western media post 9/11, 7/7, war on terror in Afghanistan, New Zealand land incident, and many more has never been problem free. The role of western media has been very decisive in understanding representation of Islam and Muslims across the globe. The terms like 'banal and Ontological Islamophobia' are used frequently to disseminate stereotypical image of Islam and Muslims. Ideologically loaded discourses are used for Islam and Muslims before the world to let them know how violent the followers of Islam are. The terms which carry negative social connotations such as terrorism, suicide Bom (ers) (ing), #jihad, terrorism, extremism, violence, rigid, Talibans, heaven seekers, mujahedeen, Al-Qaida, ISIS, terror mothers, the squad etc. are used to let the world know that every negative attribute belongs to Muslims.

(Khan et al. (2021) maintains that one of the fundamental reasons of this (mis) trust is the ever-increasing (mis)representation of Islam and Muslims especially post 9/11. The essentialist depiction of the Muslims and Islam constructs them as the other; as immature even backward ethnic or foreign groups who need to be managed or tolerated. (Dunn, 2001). Through such media representations Muslims are constructed and represented as 'dangerous others'. The western print media discourses represent the west as a norm and Islam and Muslims as deviation from the norm.

Poole (2010) argues that during the last three decades representation of Islam and Muslims has increased significantly in western media. Numerous researches have been conducted in this regard. However, western perception and representation of Islam and Muslims up to great extent is stereotypical. Said (1997) opines that it has become a common practice for the western media to associate negativity with Islam and Muslims to gain vested interests. In this regard, the adjectives carrying negative social meanings are used to represent Islam and Muslims. Every attempt is made to represent Islam and Muslims negatively. This is not an accidental rather a deliberate attempt to position Islam and Muslims in the spotlight. The print media discourses of America and the west depict the Muslims as opponents to Western culture and society. Fear based discourses that comprise the terms like Islamophobia, Islamonausa, banal Islamophobia and ontological Islamophobia are to propagate a fear-based impression of Islam and its followers. The prevailing situation around the world regarding terrorism and security, concerns appears to have made matters worse. Such media representations are ideological in nature and are meant to represent in-group positively and outogroup negatively.

Therefore, this study attempts to highlight how American media perceives and represents Islam and Muslims to propagate a stereotypical image of Muslims in America and abroad. The discourse of articles of The Washington Post (American daily) which appeared during July 2019

to December 2019 about Islam and Muslims have been deconstructed by using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach.

Representations and Reality:

Hall (1997) argues that what appears in media must be viewed critically because media representation of something is most often far from reality. Every individual sees reality through his/ her own prism and cultural norms. Every society constructs its own reality keeping in view its stakes. One's reality may be twice removed from reality for others. What we perceive as reality it may be recapitulation of reality. The powerful group creates reality for the consumers to follow. This is done to disseminate a desired version of reality to the general masses and to make things common sense for them. Similarly, the Western and American print media construct and propagate a stereotypical version of reality regarding the representations of Islam and the Muslims to the target audience. The continuous (mis)representation of Islam and Muslims through western and American print media paves the way for the audience of other culture that there might be some flaws in Islamic ideology and the way Muslims follow it. In this way, the Muslims are Othered linguistically and socially.

The study in hand delves deep to explore representation of Islam and Muslims through the discourse of articles of The Washington Post as representation of Islam and Muslims has become an important issue to be explored. Mis-representation of Islam and Muslims through print media discourses has created a sense of unease on both sides. This study is an attempt to know how Muslims are represented and how this stereotypical representation is causing trouble.

Islam and the West:

Said (1997) argues that western agenda has been anti Islam, the use of fear- based discourses about Islam, and Muslims has become a prominent phenomenon there in the west. Every negative thing that happens anywhere in the world is associated with Muslims and their religion Islam. Through the discourses of print and electronic media, this has been made a common sense that everywhere Muslims are dangerous to the civilised west. In this regard the incidents of 9/11, London bombing (7-7 2005) and Bali bombing have been significant to target Islam and Muslims. The term Islamophobia and its association with violence in Islam further widens the gap between Islam and non- Muslim west. The adjectives carrying negatives carrying negative social meanings such as Islamic militants, jihadists, the squad, heaven seekers, belligerent, # jihad, and hate speakers are used to describe Muslims. As a result, the Muslims in the west are facing problems of racism, alienation and vilification in western society. They are taken as a threat to the cohesion of civilised British society. Powel (2018) contends that Muslims are held responsible for all terrorists activities.

After the terrorist attacks at different places in the world, it is believed that all terrorists are Muslims. This gross- overgeneralisation is resulting in so many troubles. Consequently, the Muslims in the American and western societies are facing marginalisation, alienation and hostility from others only because of observing identity in the public.

Literature Review:

Alharabi (2017) maintains that representation of Muslims in U.S.A is never problem free. Not only the Muslims but also the people who look like Muslims are spotlighted and stereotypically represented. The terms like Islamophobia and its biased association with Islam and Muslims is a characteristic feature of media representation there in America. It is propagated through media discourses that Islam and Muslims hate west. Anti- Islam rhetoric is very much in vogue. Omi and Winanat (1994) opine that Islam is associated racial crimes and negative identity is assigned to Muslims in America. Representation of Islam and Muslim through popular culture is fear- based. Mostly Muslims are shown as villains. The Arabs are shown as brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil rich dimwits and abusers of women. Carr's (2014) research highlighted that Islam and Muslims are portrayed in negative light such as cold, money hungry, incept villainous terrorists that seek to destroy western and American civilisations. Rane (2017) asserted that the association of hate speech and #jihad has become a prominent feature of western media representation about Islam and Muslims. Muslims are shown as unresponsive to any positive change initiated by west. Miller (2002) is of the view western and American perception and representation of Islam and Muslims is stereotypical. Muslims are represented as violent and belligerent. They are in search of seeking military advantages. Saeed (2007) conducted a research which documented that representation of Islam and Muslims has been centre of attention for academics and civil sector of society for the last two decades. Smith (2005) believes that representation of Islam and Muslims in Australian newspapers highlighted that Muslims are represented as dangerous others. The dichotomy of Us vs them is prevailing rapidly among the masses and Muslims are treated like wise. Besides, the study contends that the Muslims are labelled as intolerant, misogynists, violent, cruel and intolerant. Sajid (2021) argues that western representation of Islam and Muslims through linguistic and semiotic discourses post 9/11 is fear based. Every negative attribute is mostly associated with Islam and Muslims. Muslim women are represented as deprived and oppressed with limited exposure to see the world around her.

Research Question:

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- How have Islam and Muslims been represented discursively through the discourse of articles published in The Washington Post (Daily) from august 2019 to October 2019?
- What linguistic modes have been employed to represent Islam and Muslims through the selected newspaper articles?

The criterion for selecting the data:

The following words were focused to collect data about Islam and Muslims from the articles:

Islam	ISIS
Muslim	Holy Quran
Terrorism	Hamas
Suicide Bomb(ing)(er)	Mosque
Jihad	Hardliners
Mujahideen	Radicalization

Taliban	Fundamentalists
Al-Qaida	Bearded
Paradise	Terror Mothers
# Jihad	The followers of caliphate

Methodological Perspectives:

The present study employs Van Dijk's (2004) of Critical Discourse Analysis. The rationale behind using this research model is that it deals with social, cognitive and discourse analysis levels. It studies social structural features of language. Cognitive analysis is a prominent feature of this research model. He argues that mental models are created and controlled by media discourses. He sees discourse analysis as an ideological analysis of language. His Ideological Square illustrates the concept of Otherisation. He is of the view that in order to analyse a text comprehensively one needs to take into account its linguistic and meta-linguistic features. He has operationally defined the analytical categories of his model. The definitions of these categories are as under:

Actor Description: The way persons discussed in the text do things.

Authority: It is a process of supplementing an argument by quoting some authoritative or powerful person/s

Topos: Self-supported arguments are called topos.

Categorization: It is a process of dividing the groups as positive or negative because of their attributes

Comparison: It means to compare one group with another by using different metaphors

Consensus: It is an attempt to show solidarity among the nations or groups

Distancing: It is a process of showing solidarity with or distance from a particular group

Illustration: It is a process of proving one's stance through forceful arguments

Hyperbole: It is semantic rhetorical strategy used for emphasis. Metaphors are also used to give hyperbolic impression

Implication: It is study of invisible meanings in language. As everything is said against something un-said

Lexicalization: It is ideological use of language to lay stress on something

Number Game: The use of statistics or numbers to bring certainty and objectivity in analysis. Here, facts are presented against mere point of view

Polarization: It is a process of showing in-group and out-group as two poles apart from each other

Victimization: It is a technique of representing out- group as threats for the in-group

Data Analysis and Discussion:

Dijk (2006) maintains that media discourses are one of the best sites for ideological investment. Things are made common sense by using ideologically loaded lexical items. This is usually done

to propagate a desired image of in/out group. Similarly, the selected article from The Washington Post (August 22,2019) is replete with the examples about (mis)representation of Islam and Muslims. The very title of the article illustrates that there is more militancy in Islam as compared to peace, which its followers usually claim.

“Islamic Militants are targeting Christians in Burkina Faso: They are planting seeds of religious conflicts”

The very title of the article implies that most of the Muslims are rigid in their approach and are not ready to cope with the non- Muslims. The use of the adjective ‘Islamist’ with the noun ‘militants’ is loaded with meanings. It connotes that only violent Muslims are intolerant to others and instead of having dialogue with them they prefer violence. Indirectly, the clash between Muslims and Christians has been highlighted and the Muslims have been represented victimisers and the Christians as victimised. It is also obvious from the language use that the violent activities from the Muslims have become a regular practice and it is ever-increasing as has been mentioned by the use of present continuous tense i-e (are targeting). Here, the very mentioning of African country (Burkina Faso) represents ‘evendality technique’ to support the stance of the writer of this particular article. The use of third person pronoun ‘they’ in the article represents the Muslims as dangerous others. On one hand, the Muslims are targeting the Christians by using co-ercive means of power and on the other hand they are investing the ideology of violence among the masses of the mentioned country as well. The implied meanings conveyed through the title of the article are that on both fronts, the Muslims are proving hostile to the people Burkina Faso. Here, the vey use of the name of African country is metaphorical in nature. It connotes that everywhere in the world, the Muslims are hard upon the non- Muslims and are involved in using discursive and co-ercive powers to invest their religious and political ideologies. The Other examples related to otherisation of the Muslims from the text of the article have been discussed as under:

“They found four men wearing crucifixes-----Christains. They executed them.”

“They are planting seeds of religious conflicts”

They want to create hate and difference”

“They (terrorists) want to destroy harmony”

“They appear to be using’ divide and conquer strategy.”

‘They sought and killed a Catholic priest in the eastern town of Britto....everyone convert to Islam”

‘They ambushed a Sunday mass in the same region....killing four local.”

‘They were sending a signal: Do not display your faith.”

Dijk (2006) believes that language imparts the concept of Us-ness or Them-ness among its users. The concept of social othering through the use of pronoun ‘they’ has been plaid up through the examples mentioned above. The frequency of occurrence of pronoun ‘they’ to represent Muslims as dangerous other implies writer’s stance about the concept of Us-ness and Them-ness. The Muslims have been out-grouped by using third person pronoun about them and associating negative attributes with them. Through these examples the Muslims have

shown as intolerant to Christianity and other religions. Indirectly, the writer of the article wants to convey the message through the discourse of the article that Muslims do not allow the Christians to observe and display their religious identity. This has been made obvious through execution of four men wearing ‘crucifixes’.

Dijk (2006) believes that alliteration technique is one of the significant features of print media discourses. It is used to lay stress on idea being discussed. It makes the underlying meanings more persuasive. In the same way, the use of third person pronoun ‘they’ has been made thrice in a small paragraph mentioned above. It is meant to position the Muslims as dangerous out-group spreading terror to the members of in- group. Besides, the use of present continuous tense implies that Muslims are continuously targeting the Christians to impose their violent ideology on the civilised west. Such ongoing activities by the Muslims are meant to reap political advantages in future. They, therefore, are planting seeds of hate and terrorism socially and linguistically. The remarks of the bishop are mentioned below to support the stance:

“Do not display your faith.”

The imperative nature of the sentence has been co-related with violent activities of Islam and Muslims.

Another negative attribute has been associated to Islam and Muslims i-e association of hate speech and #jihad. It is believed that in order to spread Violent Islamic ideology the Muslims are using discursive and co-ercive means either in the forms of persuasive speeches (hate speeches) or in the propagation of jihadist activities. Dijk (2006) maintains that media discourses are never neutral but highly polarized. Similarly, the concept of harmony and destruction has been alluded to the west and Muslims deftly. Post 9/11 representation of Islam and Muslims confirms the western belief that world has been bisected into two pole i-e ‘good vs evil’ (west vs Muslims). The western ideology is aa meant to bring peace and harmony in the world. Whereas, The Muslims are doing everything to disturb the harmony created by the west. Therefore, through, competing discourses the underlying ideology of dividing the world into poles has been plaid-up.

The use of number game technique highlights degree of authenticity on the part of the writer to support his stance about the violent nature of Muslims. The text of the article is replete with such examples:

“04 men executed, 70,000 people forced to flee from their homes, 1110 people killed during last year, led 05 men outside and shot them,”

The implied message being conveyed to the world through the discourses of the newspaper is that whatever, America and the west claim about the militant and violent nature of Islam and Muslims is based on facts and figures. The same ideology has been disseminated through the use of number game technique in the article under analysis.

Another analytical category in the form of ‘authority’ has been employed to lay stress on the underlying message of the article. This is done to make something more factual. The textual references in this regard are as under:

“In feb, they sought and killed a Catholic priest, attacks on Protestant and Catholic churches in ...Tialboanga, Bishop Laurent Dabire.....the results will be the elimination of Christian presence”

The names of persons and places mentioned above illustrates that everybody in the mentioned city of Africa and its surrounding is being targeted because of being non-Muslims. At the same time these persons and places are the metaphorical representation of the world at large suffering from fear and violence because of Islam and Muslims. Dijk (2006) asserts that discourses are layered in nature and everything is said against something unsaid. Similarly, the textual references mentioned above illustrate that western perception, construction and representation of Islam and Muslims is fear based. It is believed and propagated that Islam and Muslims are hostile to others. Muslims are doing violent activities to wipe out other religion from the face of earth.

The use ideologically loaded lexical items is one of the prominent linguistic moves to represent the people who belong to in-group positively and vice versa. It connotes either degree of solidarity or a sense of distance among different groups. Similarly, the use of noun 'elimination' implies that the Christians are terribly afraid of Muslims. They assume that if Muslims are not stopped from their violent deeds they will completely remove/destroy Christians/ Christianity. In this way, politically coined term 'Islam-o-phobia' is used to represent Islam and Muslims accordingly. The important thing to infer from the text of the article is that religious leaders of higher ranks express such apprehensions. In this way, all the activities of the west in marginalising Islam and Muslims are justified by disseminating to the world that they are threat to the civilised western and American people.

The picture that emerges after analysing the selected article (as a representative of the population) is that by media discourses are never neutral. They are one of the best sites for the investment of desired ideology. This is done shape the mind-set of the target readership accordingly. The adjectives of negative social connotations have been employed to represent Islam and Muslims. Such ideologically loaded use of language is one of the parameters to judge whether a story has been reported positively and vice versa.

Findings and Conclusion:

The present study was undertaken to achieve the objectives related to discursive representation of Islam and Muslims through the articles of the mentioned American newspaper. An attempt has also been made to find out the use of linguistic moves to Islam and Muslims positively or negatively. As far as the answer of the first question designed for the present study is concerned, it highlights that 100% negative representation of Islam and Muslims has been observed. The ideological moves used to other the Muslims as dangerous and deviation from norm include actor description, topos, lexicalization, otherisation, polarization, consensus, metaphor, comparison and authority. Using mentioned analytical categories Islam and Muslims have been positioned as out-group. The dominant emerging themes through which this negative representation was done include Islam and Militancy, Radical Islam, Islamophobia, Terrorism and Islam, Talibanised Ideology and representation of ISIS. The study concludes that representation of Islam and Muslims is frequent feature of American print media discourses and this insidious weapon is very deftly used to propagate a desired image of Islam and Muslims to reap political advantages.

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