Full Length Research Paper

Reporting terrorism among Kenyan media: Should journalists be cautious?

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The study examined how journalists report terrorism and why they should be cautious in their reports in Kenya. The actions in which the media can take in covering terror attacks were also discussed and literature from selected books, journals, magazine, the internet and the press were used. We predicted that terrorism drive in the media by staging dramatic events which tend to attract large audience and in turn the media as well benefits. The media gives minor coverage to counterterrorism measures. In addition, journalists never detach themselves from reporting terrorism for they praise people known or suspected to be Al shabaab members. Moreover, the main terrorist targets are the USA, France and Israel, and those perceived to support war on terrorism including Kenya. Although current and future research has to review terrorist acts, it appears that terrorists are changing shape. The media should deny terrorists an opportunity to access publicity.

Key words: Terrorism, Terrorist, media, journalists.

INTRODUCTION

This study is motivated by terror attacks and the key responsibility of the media in adhering to the ethical issues in journalism and more importantly the Media Council of Kenya Act, 2013, which calls for all groups (whom the Act applies) to ensure the protection of national security and public order is safeguarded[i]. Besides, the role and responsibility of the media is in promoting understanding between individuals and groups in Kenya; it has been recognized in a number of documents. A particular reference should be made, in some cases, to Article 33 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 which provides every person the freedom to seek, receive or impact information or ideas and freedom of artistic creativity among other. However, this does not extend to propaganda of war incitement, vilification of others or incitement to cause harm. The code of conduct for the practice of journalism in Kenya states, in part, that: The media should avoid presenting acts of terrorism activities in a manner that glorifies such anti-social conduct[ii]. In addition, it states that the media should not present news reports or commentaries in a manner likely to inflame passion, aggravate the tension or accentuate between the communities concern[iii]

Arguably, while media freedom and self regulations are considered important in any democratic society, the media are required to adhere to or subjected to same rights and responsibilities as envisaged in the Constitution. Yet the media still presents terrorist attacks in a way likely to strain the available relationship between various groups especially Christians and Muslims. To

illustrate further, when terrorists killed two pastors on October 20 and 21, 2013 in Mombasa, some church leaders demanded to be given guns to protect themselves and their members from attacks. Such counterattacks measures are evident that there is serious need to address the issue of terrorism not only by the government but religious groups, the media among everyone else in the society. However, the recurring of terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Mombasa, needless to say, suggest a bigger challenge for the government in the war on terror. This has been necessitated by the fact that the media usually whenever a terror attack occurs, tend to rekindle the earlier attacks by selecting a few images of terrorist while questioning the government's efforts in the war against terror.

This research provides an opportunity to examine critically why the media should play a greater role in counter-terrorism and why they ought to be cautious. It does not seek to influence the way the media report terror attacks but perhaps share results from the investigative stories. The study seeks also to highlight areas for improvement among journalists covering terrorist attacks. The research forms part of large reports which seek to explore the best practices on how media can best be used in the war on terror and on the one hand porch a relationship between the media and the government without compromising their quality of reporting. While citing Bowyer Bell, an author of the book "The Secret Army", Kenya's Chief of General Staff Julius Karangi during a breakfast meeting hosted by the Media Council of Kenya to review media coverage of Westgate said "the key to success in fighting terrorism is measured by media coverage".

The first terrorist attack occurred in Kenya in 1975 when assailants attacked Starlight Nightclub in Nairobi but since then, there have been a series of attacks. The most notable attacks occurred in 1998 when Al-Qaida group bombed US embassy in Nairobi killing over 200 people and injuring over 1000 people. And perhaps surprisingly, the attack occurred simultaneously with the bombing of US embassy in Dar-es Salaam, Tanzania. And again September 2013 attack on Westgate mall where 67 people were killed. Considering the trend of terrorist attacks in Kenya, counter-terrorism strategies should be changed completely while recognizing the place of the media. Since Westgate mall terror attacks, in which Al shabaab claimed responsibility, there has been increased attacks particularly in Nairobi, Mombasa and parts of Northern Kenya targeting churches, buildings, individuals etc.

After Westgate September 2013

The terror attack on Westgate mall on September 21, 2013 seems to have aroused investigative journalism in Kenya. For instance, it was KTN's "Jicho Pevu"; then came NTV's "The Foul Winds" and more recently special documentaries observed in most media outlets. Despite proliferation of investigative journalism in Kenya, no systematic efforts have been made to develop policies and guidelines on the reporting of terrorism among Kenyan journalism. By and large, Westgate mall terror attack and more recently Mombasa church attack have challenged the ability of the media in reporting acts of terrorism going by the images shown on the television screen or newspaper pages.

To demonstrate further, going by the dramatic scenes observed in the media, there have been attempts by journalists to exclusively focus on "shooting" the target. By this, the report does not mean the media shooting the victim but in reality, showing terrorist aiming their guns on their targets – victims of terror attack as demonstrated by some Westgate images. A considerable amount of terrorist and victim images are being replicated by the media in supporting their current stories a move questioned by analysts; hence pointing to their level of decision making. In investigative reporting, decisions on stories selected for broadcasting should be based on logic rather than emotions (Protess et al, 1991). As it will be shown later in the following sections, Kenyan journalists use positive words in describing people linked to terrorism and really such descriptions are bound to idolize them and hence motivate their followers. Similarly, they use words such as s/he possess oratory skills, is unapologetic, defiant, knowledgeable, expert etc.

Whereas the government of Kenya enacted Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2012, the frequent attacks by terrorists is a testament the Act has not deterred terrorists from carrying their activities example recruiting, attacks, business etc. Besides arrests and imprisoning of people aiding terrorists or those found in possession of property, the government have – in recent weeks – resorted in deportation of people found without legal documents (passports, IDs or any other document offered by authorities). Specifically, Interior Cabinet Secretary Joseph Lenku on April 9, 2014 announced the deportation of 82 Somali national to their country, Somalia. Analysts might have questioned the logic behind deportation as a counterattack measure to terrorism but whether the strategy will favour the war on terror is something to be attested later most likely not by this study.

Meanwhile, there has been sustained media coverage of terrorist activities following Mombasa church attack on March 23, 2014 in which 4 people killed while other injured among them one and half year old boy. Moreover, police launched operation (Operation Usalama Watch) in which mainly concentrated in Eastleigh following similar attacks in the area where six people died. Earlier, President Uhuru Kenyatta had assured Kenyans that Jubilee government was not fighting any religion or community but only terrorists who attack and kill innocent people. While some Kenyans as well as Somalis

supported the operation, those opposed cited the legality considering Kenya's relationship with Western world. Accordingly, too much media coverage seems to divert attention from the war on terror to Muslim vs Christians, Kenya vs Al shabaab or vice versa something which should not be there in the first instance. Kenyans are united when discussing terror attacks but divided when discussing strategies for combating terrorism.

Investigative reporting: Whose side are they on?

As mentioned earlier, in another section, this report sought to examine two investigative stories by KTN and NTV regarding their presentation of terrorism activities. Discussing balance in journalism is not complete unless the code of conduct for the practice of journalism in Kenya is first brought to the attention of many. According to this view, journalists are required to report news stories fairly and impartially but it does not define boundaries for the journalists. More likely the way journalists present news stories points to the history of investigative journalism in Kenya. Absolutely, there is no doubt on Kenyan journalists in reporting for they have presented insightful news stories which have extremely captured world attention; some of whom have won national, regional and international awards. Precisely, they include but limited to Linus Ole Kaikai, Kenya Television Network[iv], Tom Mboya and Evanson Nyaga of Citizen TV[v] etc. By camping Westgate mall during the terror attack, they sacrificed their time and in fact risked their lives to ensure Kenyans were informed about the events.

On the contrary, some journalists presumably while enjoying media freedom have exclusively deviated from the normative role of journalistic principles in guiding them. Of particular concern is their requirement to report all sides of the story but intelligently, they report stories that portrays weakness of one side despite giving them airtime. This report questions the extent to which the media used almost similar stories especially during recent terrorist attacks in Kenya. The media need not to describe events to be seen to support which side but selection of stories (including but not limited to videos, photos, text etc) without verbal description is certainly perfect to say that the media can take sides in their coverage of events. As the report will demonstrate in the following sections, the media have to balance their reporting as much as they don't compromise their independency but they must place primary value to national security. To this end, it is worth mention that the media ought to take caution when reporting terrorism unless there is some form of friendship among them which will be addressed in the following sections.

Why do the media cover terrorist attack?

Terrorism occurs in almost all societies: it occurs in rich and poor countries; in developed and developing nations; among Muslims and Christians and by its nature, terrorism is considered the world's big problem in which no research has ever concluded on its causes. Previous research has documented the relationship between the media and terrorist. As noted by J. Bowyer Bell (1978) the media and terrorism have symbiotic relationship and by so doing the media can help spread effects of spatially him led act to a wide public. Walter Laqueur (1987) sees the media as a terrorist's best friend. Well, if this holds true for Kenya media, the government and the media owners should rethink ways on how to incorporate media in counter-terrorism measures.

Apparently, there is evidence to suggest that terrorists value the mass media for they can sell their ideologies to the public but the only critical issue is that they don't attack randomly; they select their target carefully with the believe that it attract media coverage. For Walsh (2010) the attention the media offer to terrorists is understood by the length of broadcast segments devoted to terror attacks. Looking at newspaper page or TV screens following a terror attack tend to verify this logic considering the size of newspaper articles or time allocated to the coverage. As a matter of concern, television in the USA is 10 likely to report terrorist attack with known perpetrators (Weimann and Win, 1994). As per as this statement is concern, individuals such as late Abubakar Sharif Ahmed alias Makaburi, Abdulkadir Mohamed Abdulkadir alias Ikrima and Aboud Rogo had been identified by UN Monitorign Group as known associates of members of Al Qaida in East Africa, a group linked to Al shabaab. Most likely this explains why the media have repeatedly reproduced their stories.

Combs and Slann (2007) have compared terrorist attacks in Africa and Europe and explain that terrorist benefit from amplification of effect as a result of messages reaching audience at a large region. They looked at terrorism attacks in Angola and Mozambique which occurred a decade ago without media attention but similar attacks by Palestinians in Europe and Middle East became a topic of discussion in most of the TV stations. Indeed, they attribute this to terrorist proximity to TV news reporters. This report is cognizant of the fact that the media not only highlights terrorism activities but they play a key role in the war on terror; it only raises questions when the media presumably display nail-biting battle scenes and the stories of real people affected by terrorism. A study by Holfman et al (2010) on two USA newspapers (The Washington Post and USA Today) on media coverage of terrorism found that the media not only report government's position but they play a key role in the war against terrorism. According to Altheide (2009) by reporting in clear, most factual and most balanced information it strengthens the public's interpretation of acts of terrorism. And, perhaps surprisingly, the media determine information consumed by the public and this reduce tension arising from terror attacks.

In 1985 UK prime Margaret Thatcher termed media coverage of terrorist attacks "the oxygen of terrorists (National Communication Association, 2012); what this means is that the media can 'breed' the deed of the terror by providing useful tools that serve terror propaganda and psy-war ends (Yonah, 1978). Suppose, the media report terrorist's attacks without 'oversimplifying' events in a manner likely to give them prominence, the public still can understand occurrence of events. Why do the media while reporting new terror attacks rekindle old images of Al shabaab, for instance, holding weapons or at times in a training session? Well terrorist experts such as Brian Jenkins have warned that terrorism is not aimed at the actual victims (the death, injured or even building etc), their main target perhaps are the people watching (Jenkins, 1975); that is the public in this case Kenyan population.

Media and counter-terrorism

Can the media act as a responsible tool for fighting terrorism in Kenya? Are Kenyan journalists aware of terrorists' aims in attracting the media coverage? How should the media and the government share the same thoughts in the war against terror without compromising independents of the media as enriched in the Media Act, 2013? In his book *A First Look at Communication Theory*, Griffen (2009) states that the public depend on the media for news segment that captures their attention. Consequently, the media are able to influence the way the public interprets events (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Furthermore, research shows that framing stories helps journalists package the content which, in effect can, influence specific interpretations by selecting and emphasizing on exclusion (Afonso et al., 2008). In essence, the ability of the media to select a section of events reporting places them in a better position in the war against terror.

   Recently, there have been some instances that Kenyan media reports or uses old images of Al shabaab to support current news stories. In brief, by rekindling terrorism old stories the media tend to enhance the message sent by the terrorists to their audience but Herman and Herman (1998) advises journalists to report only new attacks. It is advisable for the media to understand values and norms of terrorist (Howard, 2001); because the media are able to identify new segments that can either support the ideologies of terrorists or assist authorities in the war on terror. Moreover, as a responsible actor who often features on the scenes of the terrorist act, plays a key role in counter-terrorism. In any case, the media advised not to romanticize or sensationalize terrorist activities (Archetti 2013). In one hand, as per as terrorism experts, fighting terrorism is a challenge for many governments around the world considering their nature of activities. There appears as if the media is in competition with the government for these

raised questions during Westgate mall terror when the media took over from government the role of information dissemination.

METHODOLOGY

With increased attention to media coverage of terrorism through special features or investigative stories, this study analyzed clips in KTN[vi] and NTV[vii] TV stations. Selected TV clips were analyzed using content analysis approach. The method is widely accepted in investigating text: It involves careful examination of human interaction; analysis of character portrayals in TV commercials, films and novels… and much more (Neuendorf, 2002. P1). Previously, content analysis has been used to analyze television video clips. For example, in 1997 DuRant et al conducted a content analysis of television music video focusing on portrayal of violence and weapon carrying among four networks: MTV, Video Hit One, Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Country Music Television (CMT) (DuRant et al, 1997). It has also been used in analyzing information extracted from image frame and spoken words that can be deciphered from audio track (Wang et al… 2000). This approach was chosen as it helps in understanding meaning, structure, and patterns within the language of text rather than the interconnection among and impact of particular texts or authors (Mahraj, 2012). Content analysis is distinctive from other qualitative analyses in that it attempts to meet standards of scientific (Bird, 1995). Based on the suggestions made by Newbold et al (2002) stages adopted during analysis were:

1. Selection of media forms – TV clips
2. Selecting issues i.e. investigative stories, events
3. Sample relevant voices of the reporter or interviewed person in the TV clip

In this study, text categories were broken down according to their relevance. The analysis resulted to over 20 voices but only 10 voices were selected for analysis. In this study, voices are strong words or responses from the reporter or person speaking in the TV clip which helps the researcher quote verbatim to support his interpretation and meaning (Mugenda, 2013).

RESULTS

Following 7 July 2005 London bombing and later September 2011 attack in the USA, academic and terrorism experts have shifted attention to role of extremist and radical mosque. And perhaps, recently universities as recruiting center for terrorists (Malik, 2011). Based on results from this study, I propose also the media to be added into this list. To illustrate, for instance, text analyzed reveals how the media offered people known or suspected to have links with terrorists a platform to justify their activities and/or seek public sympathy. Marx and Frost (1998) claims that attention should focus on the depth of learning that occurs using the video because video has the capability of generating interest and according to this view, as terrorists use the media to justify their action on one hand continue to influence public minds. This is in tandem with Albert Bandura's assertion that anybody who preaches courage and heroism inspires other people (Bandura, 1977).

According, social learning theories, "Identification occurs with another person (the model) and involves taking on (or adopting) observed behaviours, values, beliefs and attitudes of the person with whom you are identifying" (McLeod, 2011).

"ku-revenge iko katika Quran na iko dini yetu kuwa ukiwa pushed ama ukiona mwenzako akunyanyaswa, you have to stand up, sio kwa kislamu peke yake ata dini zote". (To revenge is stated in Quran and our religion explains that if you are pushed or even see you colleague being exploited, you must defend and it is not only in Islam, even other religions).
Unidentified man, NTV April, 2014

"Many of the youth here (referring to the mosque) believe Rogo died a martyr and they are following in his footsteps" (shows photo of Rogo). Unidentified man speaks: "…there is no one like him men…" (Okari April, 2014)

To put it briefly, terrorism can be seen as a propagandistic strategy as Qualter's observes, a few individuals attempts to influence behaviours and attitudes of the majority public (Schmid and de Graaf 1982 cited by Carruthers, 1994). Publicity as Laqueur (1987, p.143) puts is an essential part of terrorist strategy. It is a fact terrorist attacks are newsworthy and they perfectly fit into media logic and "news values which includes drama, visuals, sound bites, relevance and general newsworthiness" (Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2008, p.53). An empirical study of 6,714 international terrorist incidents confirms that terrorist acts apply to media logic (Weimann, 2008).

Moreover, based on the statements analyzed, it is clear that the media conveyed blatant stereotypes. For instance, visual images and languages used by Al shabaab and their members denigrated Christians; trivialized government's achievement in the fight against terrorism; they tend to glorify or justify Al shabaab terrorist violence behavior. Some tactics are considered working for terrorist groups example, identify their targets among a list provided by the media. Comparatively, the media provide terror individuals the platform to compare themselves with governments as demonstrated in the following statement:

"if terrorism is a description for aggression, brutally and those who destroy life and property for no reason, then the United States is a terrorist itself. America is just trying to show us its might and power". The man does not hide his joy by stating that: *"we are happy to be included in the list of terrorist … only regret is that we are number 41 on the list and not number 1"* Unidentified man, KTN, Oct 2013

In addition, as presented in one of the TV clips, Ilunga Hassa Kapungu, Tanzanian Muslim cleric incites their

members *"akiwaua Sheik, tafuta patre muue… mkiwaua watawashika adhabu…* Ilunga (continues), *dawa ya kafiri*[viii] *kwa dunia hii ni bunduki* (if they kill Sheikhs, look for priest and kill… if you kill them, they will learn a lesson, the solution for "kafiri" in this world is a gun). Surprisingly, the media broadcast it without placing primary value to Media Act 2013 section 23

(1) The media shall avoid presenting acts of violence, armed robberies, banditry and terrorist activities in a manner that glorifies such anti-social conduct.
(2) Newspapers shall not allow their columns to be used for writings which tend to encourage or glorify social evils, warlike activities, ethnic, racial or religious hostilities.

By listing and identifying responsibilities of countries that play a key role in the war on terror, the media tend to reinforce Al shabaab's assertion that America, Israel and their partners was their target. It was evident in Makaburi's description of late Fazul Abdullah Mohammed who was killed in Somalia. He praised Fazul as a brave and courageous who only targeted America and Israel or even Kenya. Despite Pelton (2003 cited in Kondrasuk, 2005) agrees that 21% of the world's terrorism are directed at the USA, the media should not play the tune of terrorists by reinforcing the hatred of their enemies. Also, the media enhance the activities of terrorism group by praising their leaders and Mohammed Ali's and Dennis' Okari's description of Rogo attests to this fact:

"aliyekopewa sana Aboud Rogo kutokana na msimamo yake didi ya serikali na wanajeshi ya Kenya nchini Somalia" (*one who was feared so much Aboud Rogo for his stand over government and KDF's intervention of Somalia*). "licha ya kuwacha shule katika msingi, Rogo alijulikana kwa hotuba kali ambazo zilifutia hatira kila alipoufiri… Alikuwa na ufasaha na ustadi wa kusema wa kiongosi wa Palestina Sheihk Abdul Kasam" (*despite dropping out of primary school, Rogo was renown for his powerful speech which attracted several followers whenever he preached… he was knowledgeable and expert in speaking equated to Palestine Sheikh Abdul Kasam,* (Ali, October, 2013); *"Sheikh Aboud Rogo who was defiant, unapologetic and had powerful oratory skills often drawing many youths to Masjid Musa", (Okari, April, 2014).*

Journalism in the face of terrorism

Terrorist attacks in Kenya have long and extremely been destructive in terms of human lives and property. But what are the roles of the media in the war on terror? This study found that the media provided terrorist organization and its affiliates much opportunity to sell their ideologies to the public. This was demonstrated by journalists' description of people known or suspected to be members of

the Al shabaab. In some other instances, the media play clips of Al shabaab members sharing their views. In fact, most parts of the analyzed media clip gave prominence to terrorist acts while depicting Kenya and its partners as weak and incomparable to the Al shabaab. Based on the information from the study, it was obvious that the reporter's coordination of stories allowed terrorists to attack those perceived to be their enemies while defending their members from accusation. The USA in its National Strategy for Combating Terrorism[ix] identifies the media as a challenge in the war on terrorism:

"Increasingly sophisticated use of the internet and the media has enabled our terrorist enemies to communicate, recruit, train, rally support, proselytize, and spread their propaganda without risking personal contact".

It is distressing to note that whereas the media are aware of terrorist acts; they provided much airtime. Some Muslim leaders supported recent attacks in Kenya and in fact demonized Christian; by doing so, the media tended to violate journalistic principles which requires them to take caution when handling acts of violence: *"dawa ya kafiri kwa dunia hii ni bunduki* (the solution for "kafiri" in this world is a gun). Altheide (2007) asserts that the media promote terror acts by stressing fear and uncertain future. This holds true considering Tanzanian Muslim cleric call to revenge by killing Christian leaders in the event any Muslim leader is killed. Furthermore, the cleric challenges their members to use guns in carrying its activities against Christians. Against this backdrop, US strategy on combating terrorism asserts that by denying terrorism access to the media, "Terrorist groups cannot effectively organize operations, execute attacks, or spread their ideology. We and our partners will continue to target the communication nodes of our enemy". This study observes that considering the terrorist network, it is not exaggeration to say that media's role should not be limited to reporting only but challenges acts of violence. By focusing only on the Al shabaab and its affiliates, the media emphasized on terror acts while ignoring effects of terror acts or measures aimed at combating terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism is a form of political communication where violence is used to gain attention (Kondrasuk, 2005). By dramatizing events terrorists satisfy news values of newsworthiness, in turn, attract journalists searching for news stories to tell their audiences. Terrorism in not, certainly, a recent phenomenon in Kenya but it has been occurring only that modern terrorism has become technologically savvy. While the government has stressed the war on terrorism is not between religious groups, too much media coverage portrays a different picture where war on terror is seems as religious. The findings, when looked critically, reveals that the media gave prominence

terrorism while ignoring their role in building relationships among different groups in the society. For instance by identifying countries supporting war of terrorism, they reinforce their activities. Also praising people known or suspected as Al shabaab members, the media glorified terrorism activities despite giving limited space to counter-terrorism measures. In effect, Social Learning Theorist Albert Bandura (1977) sees this media coverage as inspiring to Al-shabaab members and hence might act as recruiting centres for terrorism despite reporting facts behind the terror attacks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given these findings, the paper recommends the media should deny anyone known or suspected to have links with terrorist organizations the platform to sell their ideologies. Despite their difference in some issues, the media should cooperate with the government in the war on terrorism for during attacks, as terrorists never isolate their targets. There is an urgent need to develop guidelines for journalists covering terrorist attacks in Kenya and in the world.

Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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[i] Media Council of Kenya Act, 2013 was assented on December 24, 2013 and came to commencement on January 10, 2014.

[ii] See the Media Council of Kenya Act, 2013 second schedule Article 23 (1). Government printer, Nairobi

[iii] See Section 12 (2) of the Media Council of Kenya Act, 2013 second schedule.

[iv] See CNN African Journalist of the Year Awards. http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/africa/9903/africanawards/

[v] Overall Winner CNN MultiChoice African Journalist 2012. See http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/africa/africanawards/finalists_2012.html for more details

[vi] KTN released 'Jicho Pevu', investigative story, only a few weeks after Westgate mall terror in September 21, 2013 in which 67 people died and media sources report Al shabaab claimed responsibility for the attacks.

[vii] NTV released 'Foul Winds', an investigative series on terrorism in Kenya and this came just hours after terrorist attack on a church in Mombasa in which four people were killed in April 2014.

[viii] Kafiri ni mtu asiye swali (Kafiri is a Kiswahili word meaning someone who doesn't pray) Retrieved from www.alhidaaya.com/sw/node/613. Accessed on 9th April 2014.

[ix] USA strategy in the war on terror and was first published in 2003. http://2001-2009.state.gov/s/ct/rls/wh/71803.htm