

**THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF MEDIA AND TERRORISM IN
INDIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the social implications and the impact that media and terrorism have on each other. The relationship between media and terrorism is a symbiotic one. Its relevance and presence in society is interlinked. This paper aims at providing an analysis of the impact of these two phenomena on each other. Any terrorist attack, national or international is reported by the International media as soon as it occurs. The media brings to the notice of the people across the world the minute details of the attack. However, every time this is not for the good. For instance, many a times the media reporting of an event is detrimental to the cause or perhaps the ongoing operations. This paper brings to notice how the media sensationalises an event and often gives a biased view to it. Terrorist attacks have many a times being portrayed as an attack against a particular religion. However, this research shows that these are simply not terrorist attacks, but attacks against humanity, and no one religion is responsible for the attacks. Further, this paper analyses two of the worst terrorist attacks in history and the role that the media had played in it.

Key words: Media, terrorism, biased view, humanity, religion.

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INTRODUCTION

“The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”²

The word media has been derived from the Latin word ‘*medius*’³, which means ‘middle’ and is the plural form of medium. True to its meaning, media acts as a medium between the people and the world. It conveys to the people about the world scenario and the different things that are going on. It is a communicating device used by governments to convey their messages and ideas to the people of the nation. It’s a mirror of the society. Media is an essential tool for change and progress. However, if misused in an unethical manner, it can lead to utter chaos.

In the current scenario where terrorist activities are growing in an unprecedented way, media is in danger. The relationship between terrorism and media is a symbiotic one. Terrorists groups devise spectacles of violence to draw the attention of the world. They use the media to spread the message of the group around the world. These scenes of violence create fear among the people, and cause chaos in society. The public be-headings committed by terrorists are a shrouded challenge for the governments of every Nation. It brings out the message that these activities will continue and they are powerless to do anything about it.⁴

As stated earlier terrorism and media are very close linked. It is through the media that the message of the terrorist organizations reach the people. Hence, it is the duty of the media to give an unbiased and informed opinion of the scenario, for people tend to believe everything the media says. Another aspect of media’s involvement with terrorism, is the portrayal of the terrorist attacks. Very often articles read “The ISIS claims responsibility of the attack”; through this, the media is encouraging the terrorists. By, taking the word of the terrorists when they ‘claim responsibility’, undue attention and publicity is being awarded to them.

2 Malcolm X.

3 Oxford English Dictionary

4 CBS News- August 2014.

Terrorism is spread across every nation of the world. India too has been a victim of numerous terrorist activities over the years. When we speak of terrorism, the first place that comes to mind is the Middle East. Terrorism in Middle East is a rampant activity and has become the source of all a large number of attacks around the world. The only difference between terrorism in the Middle East, and in the “West”, is the media attention each receives. Attacks in the Middle East, Asia and Africa go majorly unpublished by International media

ANALYSIS

Terrorism and media have had a long standing relationship. Their influence on each other has been major. Media is responsible for reporting the terrorist activities happening all around the world, whereas, it is through the media that the terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, the ISIS, Lashkar-e-Taiba, The Liberation of Tamil Eelam and Boko Haram, among others, convey the message of their group to everyone. Terrorism is not limited to only one country. It can be seen in all parts of the world. Middle East, especially, has been a victim of terrorism for as long as anyone can remember. For this Paper/Research, we shall focus on two terrorist acts from two different countries; one from the Middle East (Kuwait, in specific), and the other from India. The aim behind selecting two incidents in particular is to study and analyse the role played by Media in reporting and investigating these incidents, and to understand the consequences of the relationship between Media and Terrorism.

THE ATTACKS OF 26/11

*“The unlawful use of or threatened use of force, or violence against individuals or property, to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives.”*⁵- The Mumbai attack of 2008 was this and much more. The attacks of 26th November 2008, or commonly known as the 26/11 attacks, was one of the largest terrorist attacks the city and the country has ever seen. It is at par with the world’s most deadly terrorist attacks, falling below only the 9/11 attack of the Twin Towers at New York City.⁶

5 U.S Department of Defence Publication.

The Attacks of 26/11 took place on November 26th 2008 and lasted for four days, finally ending on the morning of 29th of November. The National Security Guards (NSG), along with the Marine Commandoes and the Rapid Action Force, conducted what was called Operation Black Tornado to rescue the hostages and take down the remaining terrorists. The attacks took place when 10 militants from the Islamic terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba, headquartered in Muridke near Lahore in Pakistan, carried out a series of coordinated bombing attack all across the commercial capital of India. The places chosen by the attackers were popular sites visited by thousands of people every day. Eight of the twelve attacks took place in South Mumbai, starting with the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, The Oberoi Trident, Leopold Café, Cama Hospital, the Metro Cinema, the Nariman House Jewish Community Centre, in a lane behind the Times of India office and St. Xavier's College, and lastly the Taj Palace and Tower. Among all the areas, the Taj Palace Tower was the worst hit, along with the Nariman House, which saw the death of innocent civilians, including a child and a six-month pregnant woman. The other places which were targets of these serial blasts were Mazagaon, in the Port area of Mumbai, and a taxi in Vile Parle.⁷

There has been much speculation about the mastermind of these deadly attacks.⁸ Reports show that the attackers were trained Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives based out of Pakistan.⁹ At first Pakistan denied having any knowledge about the attackers and pointed fingers at Bangladesh.¹⁰ It blamed the Bangladeshi militant organization, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al, for being behind the attacks.

Apart from the assailants in Mumbai present during the blasts information was found on a Pakistani-American citizen by the name of David Headley. Headley was trained and recruited by the Lashkar's foreign recruiter Sajid Mir. He visited India before the attacks to collect GPS information, pictures and videos along with blueprints for the plotters. In 2013, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to thirty five years by the US Federal Court.

6 'Worst Terrorist Strikes- Worldwide,' compiled by Wm.Robert Johnston, Last updated 2nd January 2017.

7The Attacks of 26/11 ; Wikipedia.

8Lashkar-e-Taiba Trained 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attackers ; Omar Farroq Khan ; November 12th 2012

9 Perpetrators and Masterminds of the 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attacks ; The Indian Express November 3rd 2016.

10 'Investigators See Bangladesh link in Mumbai Terror Attacks ' ; Dawn ; February 5 , 2009.

The attackers of the Mumbai blasts were carried out by ten young men trained by the LeT. Among the ten, only Ajmal Kasab was caught alive while fleeing from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. He was kept in prison, where he was interrogated and put on trial, whereafter he was sentenced to death. Ajmal Kasab was hanged to death at Yerwada Jail in 2012. The other attackers involved in the blasts were Hafiz Arshad or Abdul Rehman Bada, Abdul Rahman Chhota, Fahadullah alias Abu Fahad, Ismail Khan alias Abu Ismail Nasir also known as Abu Umar, Shoaib or Abu Soheb and lastly, Javed or commonly known as Abu Ali. Pakistan had initially denied having any part in the attacks of November 2008, but reports later revealed otherwise. In the January of 2009, the Pakistani government confirmed the survival of a sole perpetrator and originator of the attack, Zakiur Rahman Lakhvi. In April 2015, he was granted bail in exchange of 1900\$. He was instrumental in involving Ajmal Kasab in the Mumbai attacks. From the time of the attack, the Pakistani Intelligence Agency has tried to protect and hide crucial evidence against Lakhvi for involvement in the 26/11 attacks.

The execution of the Mumbai attacks was planned meticulously to every last detail. The arrival of the terrorists by the port, through to the attack on the Taj Mahal Hotel, everything was on schedule. The first phase began at 20:00 pm on the night of 26th November when the ten armed terrorists arrived at the Colaba shore. At 21:30 the same evening, Ajmal Kasab and Ismail Khan attacked the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. More than fifty people were killed and hundreds injured. After the assault on the station, the attackers headed to Cama Hospital, but by the time they reached the hospital staff had bolted the doors preventing the attackers from proceeding inside. What ensued thereafter this was a gun fight with the police in which Ismail Khan lost his life and Kasab was arrested.

The blasts in the taxis in Vile Parle left one person dead while fifteen people were injured. At first this attack seemed unconnected to the others occurring across Mumbai, but investigations revealed that this blast too was connected to the 10 perpetrators from Pakistan. The attack on Leopold Café was carried out by Shoiab and Abu Umer. The attack on Taj Mahal Palace and the Trident Oberoi were the most fierce. Six bombs went off at the Taj. The hotel staff fought bravely to save the guests staying and they were a prime reason, why so many people returned to their homes safely. By the efficient strategy of the

commandos, more than two hundred hostages were rescued from the hotel on the first night. On the morning of the 28th, media reports showed that all hostages were freed. However, this was misinformation. It was revealed that two terrorists still held hostages, which included some foreigners Delegates of the European Parliament Committee on International Trade, who were present at the hotel during the attacks, but no one was injured. Nariman House, the last place attacked, was probably the most vulnerable as it was a residential complex with civilians, including children and old people. Nariman House was high on the target list for the attackers, as 'Jewish lives were more valuable than that of Non-Jews'. The attacks killed Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his six months pregnant wife Rivka, along with four other residents. The attacks of Mumbai 2008 saw the death of a large number of innocent civilians and police officers. While attacks were taking place at Mumbai, people from all over the world were getting updates through the media. News channels were running the news of the attacks round the clock. Newspapers carried other details; social media was full of accounts of the condition of Mumbai. Most will think that this was beneficial for all those sitting at home worried about the safety of their loved ones. Although it had positive functions, there was a dark side to it as well. The constant reporting of the media aided the terrorists to know about the positions of the commandoes and the police. Through the help of phones and other means, the attackers inside the buildings received information regarding the plans of the forces, which gave them an added advantage. However, this was soon corrected as the Indian forces jammed all phone and radio lines.

Media can be a boon and a bane. It caused unwanted speculation and panic among people all around the city, and country. The misreporting of the presence of the terrorists inside the Taj Palace Hotel created chaos and trouble. The report of the dome of the Taj Palace Hotel catching fire reached the terrorists through the television reports, which they used to their advantage. The news of the helicopters on the terrace during the siege of Nariman House was also conveyed through the media. All these instances suggest that there media has a role to play when a terrorist attack is in the process. The media has liberties, but it is on them to decide how to use it efficiently so that it does not cause the attack to escalate. The media should be responsible enough about the news they print for it is the voice of the nation and the people living in it.

It has been nine years since the Mumbai attacks, but its effects can be seen even today. The families of the victims and the officers who lost their loved ones still grieve and think of that fateful day. Terrorism can never be forgotten; the action might have finished, but the scars remain.

THE KUWAIT MOSQUE ATTACKS OF 2015

Kuwait is a West Asian country situated at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It shares its borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait is a Sunni dominated Nation, but has a strong Shia presence. Unlike other Sunni dominated countries, like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait has managed to avoid sectarianism for the most part. The people maintain that the Government respects and protects every person, irrespective of their beliefs. This probably is the reason that Muslim Extremism never had any overt presence in the country. The desire to maintain stability in the volatile Middle East ensured that the Government took stern measures to ensure peace and security of every citizen. Since the Iraq Invasion of 1990, no country has been able to disturb the fragile peace of this relatively stable Middle Eastern country. This was true until June 26, 2015.

26th June 2015 is a day that no Kuwaiti would ever be able to forget. On this day, which fell during the holy month of Ramadan, a suicide bomber wreaked havoc in a Shia-mosque in the middle of Kuwait City¹¹. The *Imam Jafar as-Sadiq Mosque*¹² is one of the oldest mosques in Kuwait and was filled with worshipers on the Holy Friday of the Ramadan Month. A sole perpetrator, Fahd Suleiman Abdulmohsen Al Qabaa, positioned himself at the end of the congregation and detonated a bomb. The casualties included not just Kuwaitis, but devotees from different countries. Other than the bomber himself, 26 others were killed, which included 18 Kuwaitis, 3 Iranians, 2 Indians, 1 Bedoon¹³, 1 Pakistani and 1 Saudi National. 227 others were injured. Soon after the blast, Prime Minister of Kuwait, Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak al-Sabah, reached the site, despite warnings against it by his security personnel. The Prime Minister's prompt arrival and vow to find and punish those behind this attack shows that the perpetrator was unsuccessful in attaining his objection-

11 Capital of Kuwait (the country).

12 Named after the 6th Imam, who was a revered Shia leader.

13 Those individuals who are considered Stateless by the Government of Kuwait.

creating a divide between the Shias and Sunnis of Kuwait. ISIS soon claimed responsibility for the attack, applauding the sacrifice of the bomber.

This attack followed 2 similar bombings in the previous month in Saudi Arabia. The rise in attacks on Shia-mosques seems to be a direct result of the ISIS urging all the Sunni Muslims of the world to '*purge the Arabian Peninsula of Shias*'. The terrorist group is fundamentally Sunni, and considers all Shias and non-Muslims as heretics, and believes that cleansing the world of such non-believers is their sacred duty.

The ISIS, or rather its Saudi affiliate, identified the bomber as Abu Suleiman al-Muwahhid, but the Kuwaiti Government soon clarified the attacker was Fahd Suleiman Abdulmohsen Al Qabaa, a Saudi citizen. Government reports state that Fahd flew into Kuwait the morning of the attack. Within a few days, the Government reported that some of the people who had assisted the bomber, such as the driver who drove Fahd to the mosque, the owner of the car and the owner of the house in which the driver was hiding from the police after the attack, had been arrested. The perpetrators had planned to flee from Kuwait. But their plan was foiled due to the rapid action of the Kuwaiti Government.

A total of 29 people of Kuwaiti and Saudi nationality were put to trial in Kuwait for helping the bomber achieve his goal, 7 of them being women. The Prosecutor on the case demanded that Death Penalty be awarded to 11 of the accused. By 14 September 2015, the trial was over. 15 out of the 29 accused were found guilty, and 7 were awarded the Death Penalty (five in absentia) and 8 were sentenced to a term in prison, ranging from 2 to 15 years. 14 were acquitted. The Kuwaiti Courts ensured that each procedure was followed to the letter. All sessions, except the 4th one, were Public, and the all accused had access to Lawyers and could interact with them. Those who did not have a lawyer were provided with one by the Government. Of the seven who were awarded the Death Penalty, 5 were in absentia; the other 2 appealed to the higher court. One of those who had received the death penalty was ISIS leader in Kuwait, FahadMuharib. His sentence was reduced to 15 years in prison. The second person who was sentenced to death was Adel Eidan, the man who drove the bomber to the Mosque. He also brought the explosives into the city, from 2 Saudi brothers¹⁴ from near the Saudi-Kuwait border. Eidan's sentence was upheld by the Appeals

14 Mohammad and Majed Al Zahrani (still absconding; 2 of the 5 awarded Death Penalty in Absentia.)

Court. Eidan was thus, the only perpetrator put to death. The sentences of the 5 remaining accused who were sentenced to death did not come up for appeal, as their presence is required for the same. The Court of Cassation¹⁵ upheld the decision of the Appeals Court.

The period following the attack was one of uncertainty. Though the Government claimed that the solidarity of the Nation remained unshaken, the country is not immune to the growing instability of the region. Weeks after the bombing, the Kuwaiti Police arrested members of the Hezbollah with a massive amount of ammunition. The country is trying to balance the sectarian issue, and fight Islamic Extremists at the same time; a challenge which most countries in the region have succumbed to.

The role played by the media was crucial. Moments after the blast, videos and photographs flooded the Internet. Most people, if not all, had phones with them. Photographs of men stumbling out of the smoke-filled Mosque were picked up by news channels soon thereafter. Many Kuwaiti nationals residing outside their home country received information via social media, much before the conventional media picked up the news. The telecast of the event National and International News Channels ensured the maximum coverage of the terrorist attack, giving the Terrorist what they want the most- Publicity.

Another thing that may be noticed is that despite the fact that this region has faced repeated terrorist attacks, it took an attack on a relative peaceful country to draw the attention of the International Media. Some of the attacks seen in the Middle East are probably as deadly as, if not more than, the attacks on 'Western' countries. Attacks on Non-Muslim majority countries gather more attention, and we see headlines that are demeaning to Muslims. The media has created a prejudiced outlook, making the world believe that every Muslim is a terrorist. Responsible Journalism, and most importantly Non-Partisan Journalism, is the need of the hour. The Islamic State attacks Shia Muslims as much as it targets Non-Muslims. The media must take on the responsibility to make this clear, as it they who had planted this in the minds of their viewers.

CONCLUSION

¹⁵ The Highest Court in the Kuwaiti Judicial System.

Charles Kegley Jr, once said “all terrorism is international”¹⁶ A few decade ago, this statement would not stand true. But now, with the global and advanced nature of the media, this would seem plausible. Any terrorist event happening in any part of the world receives global attention within minutes of its occurrence. Taking the November 2008 Mumbai Attacks and the Kuwait Mosque Attack of 2015, we have aimed to draw a comparison on how International Media reacts to two different terrorist activities in two different parts of the World. Media plays a huge role in times of terrorist attacks. Terrorists use media to communicate with their followers, recruit new candidates and publicise their actions. It has been seen that the extensive presence of the media can hamper the situation. Many times they cause an obstruction for the authorities. As seen in the 26/11 attacks, it was because of the media that the attackers inside the Taj Hotel received the news of the main dome catching fire which was detrimental to the rescue operations of the government.¹⁷ Sometimes, the incorrect information provided by the media caused panic, which is harmful for those sitting at home and waiting for news of their loved ones caught in the attack. According to a survey, 41% of the news coverage on the Mumbai attacks was overdosed, unnecessary and even exaggerated. It showed that unnecessary information was conveyed to the people, causing chaos.¹⁸

The analysis of the Kuwait Bomb Blast gives a different view of International Media and a rather startling one at that. The terrorist attack on the Kuwaiti Mosque was the third such attack on a Shia Mosque within 2 months¹⁹; the other two being in Saudi Arabia. The other difference between this attack and the previous ones was the location. Kuwait is still perceived by the ‘West’ as a relatively stable and peace-loving country. It tries to balance the sectarian conflict between the Shias and Sunnis, and reduce hostility, unlike Saudi Arabia, where the sectarian divide is starkly visible. It took a Bomb Blast in a stable country to draw the attention of International Media. This begets the question- Does International media discriminate against some countries? This seems to be the most logical

16 ‘International Terrorism’; Characteristics, Causes and Controls; 1990, Charles Kegley Jr.

17 The Times of India; ‘26/11 attack: Media pulled by Supreme Court for its role’, S.Ahmed Ali; August 31st 2012.

18 The Print Media Coverage of the 26/11 Mumbai Terror Attacks: A study on the coverage of leading Indian newspapers and its impact on people; M. Neelamalar, P.Chitra and Arun Darwin; Department of Media Sciences, Anna University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India, October 23rd 2009.

19 The Kuwait attack occurred in June; 2 attacks in Shia Mosques took place in May.

conclusion as terrorism in the volatile Middle East is barely ever reported, despite, most probably, having higher casualties than many attacks in other countries.

Media represents the mouthpiece of the people. It is a link between the common people and the governments. It communicates to people what policies are being introduced and whether it is being implemented or not. It is through the media that the people know about terrorism and the events connected to it. Hence, it can be said that media has an impact on all spheres of man's life, be it education, business, culture or society at large.²⁰ It is the responsibility of the media to give an unbiased and honest coverage of the events which have taken place because the reports of the media have the power to influence the attitude of the people and how they think. As it has been seen, after every terrorist attack takes place, Islam and Muslims are portrayed in a negative light by global media. Muslims are depicted as violent, fanatics and extremist terrorists. This is far from being the truth. This negative portrayal of Islam gives rise to a phenomenon called Islamophobia, which is the fear of Islam and the Muslims.²¹ This intensified especially after the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Charlie Hebdo Attacks in 2015. What the people and Media seem to forget is that Terrorist Organisations like ISIS and Al-Qaeda target not only Non-Muslim places or countries, but also those nations which profess Islam. Kuwait is one such example. The attack was on a Mosque in a Muslim-dominated country. The victims were Muslims. Yet, these attacks had less media coverage than attacks of a similar magnitude in the 'Developed world'. Even the Attacks of 9/11 and 26/11, the casualties included Muslim men and women who were injured or killed. The point of terrorism is not always Religious Belief, but mostly Ideological Fanaticism. Attributing it to any one religion is unfair and prejudiced.

Violence begets violence. Research and surveys have shown the frequent and excessive reporting of violence can lead to the occurrence of further attacks. It has been reported that the sensational coverage of the terrorist's activities leads to more of these acts being committed. An analysis done by Professor Michael Jetter²² shows that there has been an

20 'Social Media Its impact with Positive and Negative Aspects' ; International Journal of Computer Application Technology and Research - Volume 5- Issue 2; 71-75, 2016 ; ISSN 2319-8656.

21 Islamophobia and the 'Negative Media Portrayal of Muslims ', Global Research Centre for Research on Globalization; by Dr. Belinda P.Espiritu.

22 Professor at the School of Economics and Finance at Universidad EAFIT in Medellin, Colombia and research fellow at the Institute for the study of Labour in Bonn, Germany.

exponential increase in the number of terrorist attacks within 1970 and 2012²³.The Global Terrorism Database listed the attacks in 1998 at 1,395 whereas in 2012 it went up to 8441. Casualties in these attacks too rose from 3,387 to 15,396.The media reporting of the terrorist activities have led many scholars to ask the question-Should the terrorists get what is called the ‘oxygen for publicity?’

Terrorists and terrorism is a dark part of our society. It hampers the well being of individuals and the society at large. By granting them what is known as ‘ oxygen for publicity’, we are giving them unrestricted power to carry out their propaganda. Through the media they can reach millions of people across the world and brainwash them to join in their cause. In such a scenario, it is the duty of the governments to regulate the media. This will stop the rampant misuse of it by the terrorist organizations around the world. Media is a powerful tool and it should be used cautiously. It should be used for the betterment of the people, and not for the destruction of mankind, by war and terrorism.

23 The Guardian; ‘Media Coverage of Terrorism leads to further violence’; Jamie Doward August 1, 2015.