

The Discursive Identities of Hamas and Israel in British Newspapers: A Socio-cognitive Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the discursive construction of identities in media discourse, focusing on how British newspapers portrayed Israel and Hamas following October 7th. This study, grounded in van Dijk's socio-cognitive frameworks, used a thematic approach to analyse a dataset of 150 news story headlines from 11 British newspapers. The data collection period extended from October 7th to October 15th, 2023. Data analysis reveals that headlines frequently employ specific discursive strategies to depict Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist organisation. The strategies include polarisation, concretisation, compassion move, negative comparison, norm and value violations, self-identity descriptions, negative lexicalisation, victimisation, hyperbole, and warning. The findings show that the discursive strategies deeply related to mental models were used to generate power by polarising Israel as a victim, which can influence the thoughts of news receivers globally. Portraying Israel as a victim bolsters Israel's positive self-image while simultaneously creating a negative picture of the Hamas organisation. The media's incessant depiction of Israel as a victim, with a particular emphasis on the psychological conditions of Israelis, could potentially shape a widespread perception and collective understanding of the country as being victimised. By providing insights into the discursive construction of terrorists and victims, this study is hoped to contribute to a greater understanding of how media discourse constructs identities.

Keywords: terrorism; qualitative; discourse analysis; agenda setting; conflict

INTRODUCTION

The media plays an increasingly important role in informing the public about happenings both at home and around the world. Hence, media portrayals have a substantial influence on the development and manifestation of identity in individuals who have limited interactions with others from specific religious, national, racial, or ethnic backgrounds (see Juan, 2009; Udenze, 2022; Ali et al., 2024). The significance of representations is not intrinsic to the universe but rather a linguistic artefact that people have made (see Alo & Orimogunje, 2013; Wenden, 2005). Western media, especially the British media, have paid close attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict since the 1940s. The media has provided a means for people worldwide to learn about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On October 7th, 2023, the Hamas organisation unexpectedly initiated armed operations against Israel. The media played a prominent role in providing coverage for Hamas' incursion into

Israel during the October 2023 confrontation between Israel and Hamas. Therefore, journalistic narratives have exerted a substantial influence on the depiction of Hamas and Israel in the Western media. The main goal of this study is to analyse how British newspapers portrayed Israel and Hamas following Hamas' incursion into Israel. To achieve this goal, the current study has employed van Dijk's (2014, 2018) socio-cognitive theory, which has helped us acquire a deeper understanding of the discursive strategies used in the British media to portray Israel and Hamas. The implementation of van Dijk's (2014) mental models has enhanced our understanding of how language functions in journalistic content, as these models capture the mental links associated with referential parts of language. In addition, we utilised van Dijk's (2014) socio-cognitive framework to address the research questions and identify the discursive strategies adopted by the British media in their portrayal of Israel and Hamas. The strategies are intricately linked to the mental models put forward by socio-cognitive theory. The following research questions were the focus of this study:

RQ1. What discursive strategies are employed in British newspaper headlines in reporting the October 7th event?

RQ2. How do the discursive strategies shape the portrayals of Israel and Hamas?

By addressing the two research questions, this paper delves into the communication strategies in news headlines, surpassing conventional analyses of visual rhetoric and the language environment. These findings contribute significantly to the field of media research. They provide insights into theoretical discussions and practical endeavours to demonstrate how media creates entities and impacts people's perceptions of reality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model has played an important role in determining identities. Several studies have used this approach to identify positive-negative images of self and others, particularly media studies, which have used it to examine how language use serves to enact ideologies and to portray conflict actors in media reports of conflicts (e.g., Alluhaidah, 2023; Ononiwu, 2024; Rosidi & Jamil, 2024). In our study, this approach helped to highlight the discursive strategies used in British media to portray the victimised and terrorist identities in the Hamas-Israel confrontation following the October 7th events.

VICTIMHOOD AND TERRORISM

Victimhood refers to a psychological condition characterised by cognitive processes, affective states, and behavioural tendencies linked to the personal encounter of being a victim (see Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Fohring, 2018; Vollhardt, 2015). Victimisation results from exposure to adversity, either directly or indirectly. Berbrier (2000) posits that the political utilisation of victimhood by nations is influenced by collective identities and pragmatic factors. Within the current cultural milieu, there is a prevalent tendency among interest groups to manipulate or augment the portrayal of victimhood, particularly when individuals face adversity and are subsequently idolised as paragons. The phenomenon in question exhibits significant prevalence within the context of

violent conflict (Kuperman & Crawford, 2006). Noor et al. (2017) argue that the notion of victimhood carries considerable significance because of its potential to drive social, political, and economic progress while also bolstering the reputation of diverse groups. Consequently, it is widely acknowledged that organisations perceive victim identification as a valuable resource. Researchers have focused their scholarly efforts on the analysis of victimisation, with particular emphasis on the study of traumatic events (e.g. Aquino & Byron, 2002; Idsoe et al., 2021). Bar-Tal et al. (2009) claimed that the occurrence of unjust harm is an essential element in the perception of victimhood.

Conversely, there has been significant controversy over the exact definition of terrorism. Owing to the lack of a globally accepted definition of terrorism, various entities have created definitions to advance their strategic goals. As stated by Saul (2006), "the more confused a concept, the more it lends itself to opportunistic appropriation" (p. 3). Simon (1994) stated that there is significant variation in the definitions of terrorism, with a minimum of 212 separate interpretations worldwide. Among these, approximately 90 meanings have consistently been employed by governments and various institutions. For several decades, scholars have addressed the challenge of precisely defining terrorism. According to Rapoport (1977), terrorism can be defined as the purposeful employment of violent actions aimed at generating awareness and evoking emotional reactions, such as compassion and disgust. Alexander (1976) presented an alternative perspective on terrorism, focusing on political goals linked to acts of terrorism. From this viewpoint, terrorism is characterised by the intentional use of violence against civilian targets without discrimination, with the primary objective of inducing widespread fear and ultimately achieving political objectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed an analytic lens based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The CDA's primary interest is the analysis of discourses produced by powerful social actors with the ability to shape public discourse. CDA adopts discourse as a manifestation of social practice and examines its interplay with the social structures that influence its formation (van Dijk, 2015). van Dijk (2018) proposed a socio-cognitive paradigm that centres on the cognitive dimensions of both discourse creation and comprehension. According to van Dijk (2015), there is a lack of linear correlation between discourse and social structures. Discourses operate through a cognitive interface known as the mental representation of language users, both as individuals and as members of society. According to Gyollai (2022), the objective of this approach is to analyse and depict the interconnected web of knowledge, beliefs, prejudices, and attitudes that individuals employ when generating and understanding discourse. Additionally, it seeks to elucidate how these cognitive processes influence the formation of discourse structures and their interpretation within specific communicative contexts.

van Dijk's (1995, 2001, 2009, 2018) socio-cognitive approach was employed as the overarching theoretical framework in this study. Incorporating van Dijk's (1995, 2001) socio-cognitive framework in our research was helpful in determining the discursive strategies employed in the British media to represent Israel and Hamas. Applying van Dijk's (2014, 2018) semantic or situation models has improved our understanding of how language functions in journalistic content by representing an individual's subjective judgement of the situation or subject matter. Semantic models represent the mental connections associated with the purposeful and referential aspects of

language. We utilised van Dijk's (2014) pragmatic or context models to understand how they impact the content, style, and genre of journalistic discourse by focusing on the socially and communicatively significant features of the circumstances. Pragmatic frameworks helped us understand how the 'October 7th events' were interpreted and reported.

Discourse production and interpretation are just two examples of many spheres of daily life, and van Dijk (2014) claims that mental models play a crucial role in shaping our perception, interaction, and control of discourse production. Mental models are created based on past experiences stored in the Episodic Memory. van Dijk (2014) defines mental models as “subjective representations of events or circumstances” (p.49), which are characterised by a schematic framework that aids in the classification and recognition of present experiences. One’s subjective representation of an event includes the way one experiences it emotionally, intellectually, phenomenologically, perceptually, acoustically, gesturally, and visually (van Dijk, 2018).

The relationship between media representations, power, and ideology stems from the fact that the interpretation of events requires the existence of multiple meanings of reality. According to Hall (1982), media have the potential to portray events in a specific way. Media function as channels for distributing specific ideas as the ultimate truth, limiting or dismissing alternative claims to reality. According to van Dijk (1988), media power is predominantly symbolic and persuasive, implying that the media have the capacity to influence the knowledge, beliefs, and mental representations of its audience. Using the mental models related to psychology, sociology, politics, and culture proposed by van Dijk, our study provides a deep understanding of how Israel and Hamas were discursively constructed in British newspaper headlines following the October 7th events. Our study utilised mental models to uncover the discursive strategies employed in media discourse that shape positive-negative representations of identities. The components of van Dijk's theory that are applicable to the generated data are polarization, concretisation, compassion move, negative comparison, norm and value violation, self-identity descriptions, negative lexicalisation, victimisation, hyperbole, and warning. These discursive strategies centre on the use of positive and negative descriptors of the self and other, respectively.

DATA AND METHOD

DATA COLLECTION

This study used a sample of 150 news story headlines handpicked from 11 British newspapers. The data were collected over a time frame spanning October 7th to October 15th, 2023. The collection of data from multiple British newspapers was important in analysing the various reoccurring discursive strategies utilised in news story headlines. This compilation of data provides valuable insights for addressing the study questions. The Guardian, Daily Mail, Daily Telegraph, Independent, Financial Times, Sun, Daily Mirror, Daily Express, Times, Evening Standard, and Daily Star databases were searched for news story headlines. Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the media sources utilised together with the corresponding quantities and proportions of news story headlines selected from each source.

TABLE 1. 150 purposively selected news story headlines and media sources

British Newspapers	N	Percentage
1) The Guardian	8	5.3
2) The Daily Mail	7	4.7
3) The Daily Telegraph	14	9.3
4) The Independent	4	2.7
5) The Financial Times	11	7.3
6) The Sun	14	9.3
7) The Daily Mirror	28	18.7
8) The Daily Express	26	17.3
9) The Times	8	5.3
10) The Evening Standard	16	10.7
11) The Daily Star	14	9.3

Purposive sampling was used to compile the data. This sampling method enabled us to choose instances that contained a significant quantity of information (see Patton, 2002) and enhanced our capacity to address the research questions. Furthermore, the purposive sample allowed us to choose headlines that incorporate discursive strategies closely linked to the mental models provided in van Dijk's (2014) socio-cognitive framework. This streamlined the process of developing themes pertaining to the discursive strategies employed in portraying identities in a negative or good light, such as polarization, concretization, and victimisation. After amassing 289 headlines from 11 British newspapers, we reviewed each and filtered out those that did not include enough information to answer our research questions. For instance, we deemed the Daily Mail headline reading ' Hamas terrorists were sent millions in crypto before Israel attack ' to be informative enough to employ in answering our research questions. Data pertaining to Israel and Hamas were used in this study. Simultaneously, we excluded 139 headlines from the dataset because of their lack of relevance to the study inquiries. For instance, because our research focuses on the depictions of Israel and Hamas, we did not include The Guardian's headline, 'First UK evacuation flight to depart from Tel Aviv later today,' in our analysis. Our selection of headlines was also based on the breadth of discursive strategies related to mental models of the socio-cognitive framework. That contributed to the constant generation of thoughts around positive and negative representations of Hamas and Israel.

DATA ANALYSIS

The raw materials were identified, categorized, and analysed. Patton's (2002) thematic analysis steps were used to determine the codes, categories, and themes. We began by learning more about the information at hand. An in-depth reading of the data was followed by note-taking to aid the next coding process. Preliminary codes were derived from the collected information. Data-driven sample initial codes were developed, as listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Example of data and the corresponding initial codes applied to that data

Data Extracted from a News Story Headline	Initial Codes
1) Israel's Military Repeats Claims	1) Repeating claims
2) Hamas beheaded babies	2) Killing babies
3) Amidst concerns of misinformation	3) Expressing concerns about news

(source: *THE DAILY MIRROR*)

The initial codes were derived by conducting extensive analysis of large volumes of data (Table 2). Subsequently, a systematic arrangement of various codes was conducted to generate the thematic categories. To address the first research question, the coded data were scrutinized to determine the possibility of theme patterns (Table 3). After generating themes pertaining to the discursive strategies, a thorough evaluation procedure was conducted. Table 3 presents some instances of thematic elements in conjunction with the discursive strategies.

TABLE 3. Themes in the classified data

Data Extracted from News Story Headlines		Themes	
1)	1,200 Israelis Killed since Saturday (source: <i>DAILY MIRROR</i>)	1)	Victimisation/ Positive self
2)	Hamas terrorists 'killed families in their beds' in horror massacre (source: <i>THE DAILY EXPRESS</i>)	2)	Terrorism/ Negative Other

This study was grounded in van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory, which was employed to evaluate and explain identified themes. We learned more about the discursive strategies used to build the themes (i.e., victimisation; see Theme 1 in Table 3) by analysing the mental models embedded in the coded data. We were able to respond to the second research question by considering the role of discursive strategies in the construction of Israel and Hamas in the discourse of British newspaper headlines. The themes in this study align with semantic models (van Dijk, 2014) that reflect individuals' subjective evaluations of situations (e.g., Example 1, Table 4). Semantic models show language's intentional and referential cognitive relationships. Our analysis of van Dijk's (2014) context models revealed the impact of circumstances on journalistic discourse content, style, and genre. We focused on the social and communicative components of the event (see the theme of negative lexicalization, pp. 13-14). Using semantic and context models helped us understand the interpretation of the 'October 7th events.'

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings suggest that several discursive strategies were utilised in the headlines of news stories in British newspapers to depict Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist organisation. The data provide additional evidence that these discursive strategies emphasise the promotion of positive self-assessments and negative perceptions of others. Drawing on van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, this study examines the discourse on headline news stories in British newspapers, uncovering how they constructed Israel and Hamas. Through the utilisation of various discursive strategies such as polarization, concretisation, compassion move, negative comparison, norm and value violations, self-identity descriptions, negative lexicalisation, victimisation, hyperbole, and warning, the analysis demonstrates the construction of victimhood and terrorism in these news narratives. The information presented in Table 4 illustrates the emerging themes pertaining to discursive strategies together with their corresponding frequencies.

TABLE 4. Emerging themes in relation to discursive strategies, illustrated with selected examples from the collected data of British news story headlines

Recurring Discursive Strategies		Frequency	Examples from British News Story Headlines
1)	Polarisation Polarization	20.7 % (n=31)	1) Israel-Hamas war live: We failed to (source: <i>THE TIMES</i>)
2)	Concretisation	14.7 % (n=22)	2) Israel publishes picture of baby murdered by Hamas (source: <i>THE DAILY TELEGRAPH</i>)
3)	Compassion move	4.6 % (n=7)	3) People who survived the Holocaust found another one (source: <i>THE DAILY EXPRESS</i>)
4)	Negative comparison	9.3 % (n=14)	4) IAN AUSTIN Hamas is no different from ISIS-butchering kids at a music festival & kidnapping toddlers in terrorism, pain & simple (source: <i>THE SUN</i>)
5)	Norm and value violations	12.7 % (n=19)	5) Hamas terrorists 'cut baby out of pregnant woman's womb,' Israel says. (source: <i>THE DAILY STAR</i>)
6)	Self-identity descriptions	7.3 % (n=11)	6) Israel's war on Nazism must never be restrained (source: <i>THE DAILY TELEGRAPH</i>)
7)	Negative lexicalisation	8.7 % (n=13)	7) UNIMAGINABLE EVIL Hamas beasts 'sliced baby out of pregnant Israeli's womb' while bodies of 20 children found tied up and burned (source: <i>THE SUN</i>)
8)	Victimization	13.3 % (n=20)	8) "Don't kill me screams as victims snatched by Hamas, and families find out in videos.' (source: <i>THE DAILY STAR</i>)
9)	Hyperbole	9)	Mr. Biden described the attacks as the 'deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust' (source: <i>THE DAILY TELEGRAPH</i>)
10)	Warning	5.3 % (n=8)	10) Horror as hundreds of drones appear in skies above Israel (source: <i>THE DAILY EXPRESS</i>)
		3.3 % (n=5)	11) Hamas issues ominous hostage

THE DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN BRITISH NEWSPAPER
HEADLINES TO CREATE IDENTITIES

Research findings indicate a disparity between the frequency with which discursive strategies portrayed Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist organisation in the headlines of news stories published in British newspapers. The primary discursive strategy identified within the selected sample of British newspaper headlines was polarization, as shown in Table 4. The findings from the data analysis indicated the presence of recurrent polarised structures, constituting approximately 20.7% of the dataset. There are several possible explanations for this observation. An illustration of the phenomenon of polarisation in discourse serves as evidence of the presence of inclusivity within the dynamics of an in-group (van Dijk, 2006a). The abundance of polarised structures in the headlines suggests that the Israeli public is collectively striving to assert their authority and safeguard their interests while also attempting to weaken the power and legitimacy of the Hamas organization. Concretisation is a discursive strategy that is observed less frequently in news story headlines than polarization. This accounted for approximately 14.7% of the sample (Table 4). This finding implies that the headlines of news stories were primarily centred on portraying the Hamas organisation in an unfavourable light (van Dijk, 2001), achieved by emphasising the violent actions carried out by Hamas.

The data presented in Table 4 clearly indicate that victimisation is characterised by a significant incidence of recurrence, ranking third among the various strategies utilised and accounting for approximately 13.3% of the total occurrences. This finding implies that news headlines attempted to portray Israel as a victim, cementing its character as a defensive state. Strategies that include norm and value violations are also evident. According to the statistics in Table 4, the reported recurrence rates of norm and value violation strategies were 12.7%. This finding can be interpreted as the media's role in framing Hamas' operations as acts of terrorism that deviate from human rationality. A significant matter arising from our findings is that the four strategies (i.e., polarization, concretisation, victimisation, and norm and value violations) account for 61.4% of the overall instances of strategies, thus indicating their significance in constructing Israel as a victim through positive representation.

According to the data shown in Table 4, the findings revealed that the utilisation of negative comparisons accounted for 9.3% of the recurrence rate, whereas negative lexicalisation accounts for 8.7%. The recurrence rate of the self-identity description strategy was similar at 7.3%. The findings indicate that these three discursive strategies have lower rates of recurrence when compared to the strategies of polarization, concretisation, victimisation, and norm and value violation. Nevertheless, collective implementation of these strategies contributed to approximately 25.3% of the total recurrence rate. The dominant interpretation of this finding suggests that within the realm of journalistic discourse, there exists a proclivity to polarise Israel and portray it as a victim by highlighting the transgressions of the Hamas organisation that infringe on human rights.

The findings of this study indicate that the least frequently occurring discursive strategies in the sample are compassion move, hyperbole, and warning, which collectively account for 13.2% of the total instances of strategies (see Table 4). The discursive strategy known as the compassion move accounted for 4.6% of the overall instances of recurrence among the various strategies employed. The unexpected nature of this finding implies that prioritising the portrayal of Israel as a victim by showing compassion in news story headlines is not a focal point. We postulate that the underlying rationale for this phenomenon is strategic. If this strategy was consistently employed, it could potentially expose Israel's vulnerabilities after the attack by Hamas on October 7th. Furthermore, journalistic texts should show impartiality when portraying entities (Wahl-Jorgensen

et al., 2017). Although hyperboles are used as a discursive strategy, they are not frequently observed within the provided sample. This strategy accounts for 5.3% of the overall recurrences, as shown in Table 4. One potential explanation for this finding is that it serves to mitigate the influence of Hamas since consistently overemphasising Hamas' capabilities may have adverse implications for the perception of Israel as a nation contending with a terrorist organisation. The analysis further showed that the warning strategy rarely recurred, accounting for 3.3% of cases. It is likely that this strategy received scant attention in the media because reporting took precedence over informing the public of the risks posed by Hamas' aggressive actions on October 7th.

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ISRAEL'S VICTIMISATION AND HAMAS TERRORISM IN BRITISH NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

The extensive investigation and explanation provided in the preceding section demonstrate that the use of 10 different discursive strategies in news headlines contributes to the development of views about Hamas' terrorism and Israel's victimisation. This is accomplished by refocusing attention on Hamas' violence, targeting Israeli citizens, and the security threats that Israel faces. It also attracts attention to the Hamas organisation's bad behaviour and portrays it as a terrorist organisation by instilling fear among Israeli residents. Furthermore, it entails displaying compassion for Israelis who are perceived as victims of Hamas fighters' cruel actions, thus assisting Israelis in developing a positive self-image. The subsequent subsections analyse the mostly, restrictively, and sporadically recurring discursive strategies in 11 British newspaper headlines.

THE DOMINANT DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

POLARISATION

The root of the term 'polarization' is the adjective 'polarity,' which means "having two opposite directions or viewpoints" (McCarty, 2019, p. 8). According to van Dijk (2000), polarisation emerges whenever two parties are actively working to undermine one another. The intentional utilisation of footings in news headlines influences the portrayal of one's own identity and that of others. The footings 'we,' 'us,' 'our,' 'I,' and 'my' seem to convey a positive self-image, whereas 'they' and 'them' seem to convey a negative perception of others. In Example 1, 'Israel-Hamas war live: We failed to protect Israel, army chief admits' (Table 4), the use of the collective 'We' emphasises the unity of the ingroup 'Israelis' in contrast to the negative outgroup 'Hamas' (see van Dijk, 1998). Expanding on the strategic deployment of footing, news story headlines demonstrate polarisation by highlighting how Israelis downplay their negative behaviours because of their failure to safeguard Israel. The way the viewpoint of 'the other' is portrayed also adds to the intensification of polarization. Moreover, the findings suggest that polarization might also stem from the depersonalisation of individuals, as described by Juan (2009).

The footings 'we,' 'us,' 'our,' 'I' and 'my' were noted to emphasise the victimisation of Israelis and present a positive portrayal of them. On the other hand, the footing 'they' is strategically employed to highlight the negative portrayal of others, often associated with the aggressive behaviour of Hamas fighters and their acts of terrorism, as stated in news headlines. Our research on footings reveals that headlines frequently utilise van Dijk's (2018) 'semantic models,' which depict an individual's subjective interpretation of the situation. By incorporating Israeli subjective experiences into news headlines, we believe that this has helped strengthen the

depiction of Israel as a victim. This finding on footings aligns with the aim of this study, which is investigating the depiction of Hamas and Israel in British newspapers. Table 5 presents the most common footings and the frequencies with which they appear in 31 news headlines.

TABLE 5. Footing frequency, with examples drawn from data acquired from British news headlines

Footings	N	Percentage	Examples from British News Story Headlines
1) We, us, and our	13	41.9	1) Hamas terrorists set our house on fire... we thought we were going to die as smoke came in under the door (Source: <i>THE SUN</i>)
2) They and them	14	45.2	2) Hamas terrorists brutal 'Stone Age' tactics that helped them carry out attacks undetected (source: <i>THE DAILY EXPRESS</i>)
3) I and my	4	12.9	3) Inside Israel's Supernova Festival: My terror as Hamas bombs fell on us during desert rave (source: <i>THE INDEPENDENT</i>)

Table 5 reveals that the footings 'they' and 'them' are the most prevalent in the 31 news headlines, accounting for 45.2% of the total. Following closely behind are 'we,' 'us,' and 'our,' which account for 41.9%. Håkansson (2012) states that the footings 'we' and 'our' are linked to a feeling of unity and a technique of presenting oneself positively, while 'they' and 'them' are used to create distance and present others negatively. The usage of 'we' and 'our' in Example 1 (Table 5) serves to convey a sense of unity and victimisation among Israelis, thus constructing a positive image. In contrast, the footing 'them' (see Example 2, Table 5) portrays a negative depiction of Hamas fighters. The negative other is produced by utilising the attribute 'terrorist' and the action verb 'carry out attacks,' as demonstrated in Example 2 (Table 5). According to Håkansson (2012), the use of the footing 'us' paradoxically serves to attribute guilt to the 'other,' thereby establishing a negative depiction of the opposing party. According to Example 3 (Table 5), the footing 'us' is influenced by 'Hamas bombs,' resulting in an unfavourable portrayal of Hamas. Moreover, the use of 'I' and 'my' is found to be more effective in expressing a sense of self-value, although it is limited in journalistic communication (Håkansson, 2012). Table 5 illustrates that the usage of footings 'I' and 'my' was limited, accounting for 12.9% of the total. Example 3 (Table 5) demonstrates that the footing 'my' is linked to the sensation of 'fear' to convey a sense of self-importance through the experience of being victimized. The strategy of polarisation is in line with van Dijk's (2014) concept of 'subjective representations of events' (p.49), illustrating how Israelis perceived and felt the brutality of Hamas' acts on that day. We argue that the frequent use of collective footings (e.g., 'we') in journalistic contexts aimed to highlight the tragic event of October 7th by emphasising the common experiences of Israeli victims. Building on van Dijk's (2014) context models, polarization has the potential to shape readers' ideologies and attitudes. Thus, Israel's victimisation may be perceived by readers.

CONCRETISATION

A major component of the victimisation of Israelis and terrorism perpetrated by Hamas was the concretization process. This was accomplished by drawing attention to the bad actions taken by the Hamas militants on October 7th and using them as examples. Concretisation contributes to Hamas' negative outgroup image in this manner (van Dijk, 2001). According to van Dijk (2001),

texts convey specific events, sensations, or phenomena so that the reader can truly see, hear, or feel the entity being described. The portrayal of Hamas in a negative light was intensified using a concretisation strategy that involved providing detailed descriptions of the actions carried out by Hamas fighters. An instance of this strategy may be observed in the headline 'Israel publishes picture of baby murdered by Hamas' (see Example 2 in Table 4). Example 2 demonstrates that Hamas is depicted as a terrorist organisation by emphasising the killing of an infant, whereas Israel is portrayed as a victim of Hamas' malevolent behaviour (see Table 4). Utilising evidence to showcase Hamas' cruelty is consistent with van Dijk's (2014) notion of 'fact', which pertains to a verifiable statement or item that substantiates a viewpoint. We argue that the frequent portrayal of Hamas engaging in the killing of infants and young individuals at social gatherings enhances the global impression of Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

VICTIMISATION

The crux of this strategy is to cast Israelis in a victimising light while highlighting the evildoings of Hamas militants. An effort to depict ingroup members as genuine victims is made when victim narratives are inserted into the I, we, us/you, they, and their pairs of ingroup and outgroup members (van Dijk, 2000). Essentially, the portrayal of outgroup members as abusers creates the perception that ingroup members are victims. By examining Example 8, which states '“Don't kill me” screams as victims snatched by Hamas and families find out in videos' (see Table 4), we can observe that the deliberate choice of the first-person pronoun 'me' along with the imperative verb 'Don't kill' presents the Israeli speaker as a victim, while Hamas is depicted as a terrorist through their ferocious actions of 'snatching.'

Given the historical exposure of Jewish people to the Holocaust, the emphasis on Holocaust narratives in news story headlines serves to strengthen the portrayal of Israel as a victim (Tasseron, 2023). According to Dashorst et al. (2019), the Holocaust (1935-1943) refers to the state-sponsored persecution of six million European Jews. Example 9 demonstrates the incorporation of the Holocaust into Israeli victim narratives as well as its adoption by the American president. According to the headline, 'Mr. Biden described the attacks as the 'deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust' (see Example 9 in Table 4). We contend that Biden's association of the events of October 7th with the Holocaust is an official affirmation of Israel's victimhood while characterising Hamas as a terrorist organisation with the intention of inflicting harm on the Israeli populace. The finding that the news story headlines highlight Biden's use of the 'Holocaust' aligns with van Dijk's (2014) concept of 'socioculturally shared knowledge,' which refers to widely held and communicated social and cultural beliefs. We propose a link between 'The Holocaust' and van Dijk's (2014) 'epistemic communities,' which are groups of social actors who share common knowledge. Referencing van Dijk's (2014) concept of mental memory, the constant reappearance of traumatic memories from the Holocaust in news headlines leads to greater awareness of the current struggles with Hamas' violence, ultimately shaping the picture of Israelis as victims. This finding aligns with the research's goal of identifying both negative and positive portrayals of Hamas and Israel in news headlines. The finding is also in agreement with van Dijk's (2014) concept of 'epistemic communities,' as described in the socio-cognitive framework.

NORM AND VALUE VIOLATIONS

Meanings involving the standards and principles of good and evil, as well as right and wrong, are present in the ideological discourse. Norms and value violations are the focal points when describing enemies. This leads to the portrayal of others as rude, ineffective, or unbearable (van Dijk, 2015, 2018). This discursive strategy illustrates the outgroup's anti-human beliefs, practices, and values in relation to humanity's central principles (van Dijk, 1995). Consequently, individuals or groups that violate norms can provoke unfavourable reactions from others (Gentry, 2018; Stamkou et al., 2019). Hamas is thought to have violated norms and values by infiltrating Israeli land and engaging in violent acts.

The recurrent pattern of Hamas' consistent violation of values and norms on October 7th in journalistic texts is thought to contribute to the depiction of Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist organisation. The headline, 'Hamas terrorists 'cut baby out of pregnant woman's womb,' Israel says,' utilises this strategy (see Example 5 in Table 4). The situation depicted in Example 5 portrays Hamas as a terrorist group, specifically referring to its members as 'Hamas terrorists.' Additionally, it promotes Israel's position as a victim of violent acts, such as the heinous act of cutting a newborn perpetrated by Hamas militants. This finding supports Nigatu's (2023) role of creating adversaries. We argue that focusing too much on Hamas' violations of values and norms portrays Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES WITH LIMITED RECURRENCE

NEGATIVE COMPARISON

By drawing parallels between the outgroup and an already established demon outgroup, this strategy aims to highlight the negative aspects of the 'Other' (van Dijk, 1995, 2018). Hamas' negative view is magnified by drawing comparisons with an undesirable outgroup. Headlines that used this discursive strategy helped perpetuate the negative image of Hamas as a terrorist organisation. A news headline using this method reads, 'IAN AUSTIN Hamas is no different from ISIS-butchering kids at a music festival & kidnapping toddler in terrorism, pain & simple' (see Example 4 in Table 4). Example 4 draws parallels between Hamas and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (see Table 4), another terrorist organisation, to build and sustain Hamas as a terrorist group while simultaneously maintaining Israel's victim status. Drawing parallels between ISIS and Hamas by saying that the two groups are interested in 'butchered kids' and 'kidnapping toddlers' is in line with van Dijk's (2011) concept of 'local coherence,' in which discourse can manage explaining social realities.

NEGATIVE LEXICALISATION

The use of very derogatory terminology to describe the actions of the 'Others' is an important part of this rhetorical strategy (van Dijk, 2009, 2014, 2018; Al Ramahi & Rashid, 2019). According to van Dijk (2000, 2006b), this strategy involves expressing ideas and views using specialist vocabulary. An examination of the data reveals a consistent trend of using words and phrases that portray Hamas in an unfavourable light. This strategy aims to maintain the public perception of Hamas as a terrorist organisation. Table 6 presents a compilation of often employed words and phrases that depict Hamas in an unfavourable manner as the 'Other.'

TABLE 6. Negative words and phrases used to describe Hamas in British news headlines

Verbs		Adjectives	Nouns		
1)	Kidnapping, sliced	5)	evil	9)	terrorists
2)	beheading	6)	bloody	10)	barbaric acts
3)	butchering	7)	barbarian	11)	Second Holocaust
4)	slaughtering	8)	bloodthirsty	12)	beasts

Table 6 presents the explicit words and terms used in the news headlines to depict Hamas' incursion into Israel. As shown in examples 7, 2, and 11 in Table 6, the use of harsh language like 'barbarian,' 'beheading,' and 'Second Holocaust' helps paint Hamas in a negative light as a terrorist organisation. Our finding is consistent with van Dijk's (2015) 'communicative situation,' in which text producers modify their style and word selection according to the receiver's expected interests, relevance, and knowledge. By drawing attention to the textual components of negative lexicalisation and connecting them to social reality, the finding further serves to expose the negative-positive portrayals of Israel and Hamas in British newspapers. Evidently, the headline in Example 7 of Table 4 highlights the use of derogatory language to describe Hamas' actions, including allegations of forcibly removing a baby from a pregnant Israeli woman's womb and the discovery of the bodies of 20 children who were bound and burned. Example 7 employs negative terminology, such as 'beasts,' 'evil,' and 'sliced,' which effectively accentuates the depiction of Hamas as a terrorist organisation (see Table 4). The finding that Hamas is dehumanised aligns with how the media depicts terrorists (Alfano & Görlach, 2023; Altheide, 2007; Chiluya & Chiluya, 2022; Gonen et al., 2022; Hase, 2023).

SELF-IDENTITY DESCRIPTIONS

This strategy focuses on highlighting the favourable aspects of a group when it is under attack by another group (van Dijk, 1995). According to van Dijk (2001, 2006b), the good aspects of personal, cultural, and institutional characteristics are attributed to 'us,' while the 'other' is portrayed as having only negative attributes in these areas. Portraying Hamas as a terrorist organisation, it has been compared to Nazism in Example 6, which states that 'Israel's war on Nazism must never be restrained' (see Table 4). As shown in Example 6 in Table 4, Israel, as a victim of a terrorist group that poses a threat to its identity and existence, has a justified right to defend itself without any limitations. According to van Dijk (1995), the detrimental perception of the Other is significantly influenced by the negative lexicalisation (Hamas represents Nazism) as demonstrated in this example.

INFREQUENTLY REPEATED DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

HYPERBOLE

Hyperbole is a discursive strategy that involves describing an event or action in extremely exaggerated terms (van Dijk, 1995, 2001). Although sparingly used, this strategy helped build a violent image of Hamas and portrayed Israel as a victim in the British news headlines. Example 10 in Table 4, titled 'Horror as hundreds of drones appear in skies above Israel,' provides an exaggerated depiction of the number of drones observed, leading to a sense of terror among Israelis who perceive themselves as targets. According to van Dijk (1995), the semantic operation of

hyperbole is more closely linked to social beliefs and underlying models. Despite its limited use in headlines, we argue that this strategy paints Hamas as a hostile group that destroyed Israel.

COMPASSION MOVE

An important part of this strategy is empathising with the victims of Others' acts to heighten the 'Other's' harshness (van Dijk, 1995). The analysis of the headlines in Table 4, specifically Example 3, which states, 'People who survived the Holocaust found another one,' demonstrates empathy for Israelis who endured a particularly difficult day on October 7th. By drawing parallels between October 7th and the Holocaust in headlines, Israelis' suffering in the hands of Hamas can be justified, and empathy for their predicament can be shown (see Table 4 and Example 3). Moreover, this comparison reinforces the negative portrayal of Hamas and positions Israel as a recipient of victimhood. This finding is consistent with van Dijk's 'discursive narrative,' in which the textual presentation is centred on reporting current events while relating them to historical events. We argue that emphasising Israeli narratives that evoke the horrific memories of the Holocaust and the Masada tragedies in news headlines contributes to a culture in which Israelis identify as victims. This can potentially influence the perception of Israel as a victim (Amir, 2012).

WARNING

This strategy prioritises highlighting potential dangers and acts of terror with the intention of both vilifying the 'Other' and mobilising actions within the ingroup (van Dijk, 1995, 2001). The data analysis showed that a warning strategy is not frequently used. This could be because the widespread use of this strategy leads to a media bias. Example 11 in Table 4, which states, 'Hamas issues ominous hostage execution warning in fresh threat to Israel,' signifies a warning of a potential act of terrorism that Hamas members (outgroup) are expected to carry out against Israeli hostages (ingroup). Using van Dijk's (2014) theory of mental memory, we can see how warnings help spread panic, which in turn can make people more aware of the ongoing problems caused by Hamas' violence and, in the end, how the public perceives Israeli victims. It is possible to conclude that employing this strategy contributed to Israel's portrayal as a victim of Hamas terrorist activities.

CONCLUSION

This study analysed 150 news story headlines in 11 British newspapers from van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspective to identify the various discursive strategies employed in the linguistic expressions of these news headlines. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model guided this investigation not only as a theoretical framework but also as a foundation for the discursive strategies that contribute to revealing the depiction of Hamas and Israel, which are closely related to the semantic and context models proposed in this model. The findings of this study suggest that headlines have the potential to shape public perceptions of Israel and Hamas through the strategic use of discursive strategies. Our findings show that the image of Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist group appeared regularly in news headlines. Additionally, the process of concretisation further highlights Hamas' violent actions against Israel, reinforcing the perception of Hamas as a terrorist organisation. Israel was portrayed as a victim in the headlines by consistently referring to narratives related to the Holocaust. Hamas' persistent disregard for norms and values accentuates

the portrayal of Israel as a victim and Hamas as a terrorist outfit. Furthermore, the findings indicate that when Hamas is compared to other terrorist groups and when its negative characteristics are emphasised, it reinforces the perception of Hamas as a terrorist organisation. In news headlines, the concept of 'othering' creates a negative portrayal of Hamas as a terrorist group, while Israel is depicted as a victimised entity. This study offers novel insights into the existing body of research on the linguistic properties of victimisation and terrorism in media discourse. We hope that by demonstrating how language influences entities in journalistic writing, these findings will contribute to expanding the corpus of evidence. This work contributes to media research by addressing the theoretical and practical aspects of how media creates entities and shapes reality.

However, this study has some limitations. The news story headlines analysed in this study were restricted to the timeframe from October 7th to October 15th, 2023. Furthermore, this study employed a restricted sample size consisting of only 11 British newspapers and a comparatively small number of handpicked news story headlines, namely 150. Owing to the qualitative nature of this study, our focus was on selecting instances that contained a significant amount of information for full analysis rather than prioritising the amount of data. A further constraint arises from the logical use of van Dijk's cognitive concepts in data analysis. The study analysed ten cognitive concepts, potentially resulting in the limitation of discursive strategies that influence conceptions of victimhood and terrorism.

The findings of this study should prompt a fresh look at how the media present stories of terrorism and victimization. Future research can contribute to the existing corpus of information on the topic by examining these two concepts in global media, as the conclusions of this study are limited to British media. Future research should examine this discourse within the context of war journalism.

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