

**EXPLORING REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLIMS IN WESTERN DISCOURSE:
AN ANALYSIS OF SALLY KOHN'S MOST DEBATED TWEET**

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ABSTRACT

The representations through discourse reflect the attitude and mindset of the people of one society towards people of other society or one individual towards another individual, whereas, discourse interpretations are contextualized to understand the human mind. In the present time, tags of extremists, terrorists and fundamentalists are attached to people of different ethnicities and faiths, especially the Muslims which result into natural reactions by those who are not involved in such activities. Due to wider popularity and influence of Western media, Western discourse is considered as the leading and dominant discourse in the current scenario. The present study has targeted of the most prominent tweets of Sally Kohn which reflects the biased labeling of people on the basis of their ethnicity and faith. The qualitative analysis is carried out through Van Dijk's notion of ideological square, which is characterized by the dual standard of positive self-presentation and at the same time negative other presentation. The analysis of the lexical and structural choices used in the tweet shed light on the way Islam, Muslims and blacks are (MIS) represented. The tweet captures the bias in representation as it very satirically points out to the ways Muslims, Islam, and blacks are negatively stereotyped in Western media.

Keywords: Western discourse, US Vs Them, 9/11, Black, White

INTRODUCTION

The advent of online communication through Social media platforms has completely transformed the landscape of communication and information sharing. The social media has rapidly evolved since the turn of the century. It has acquired the status of almost necessary and essential tool for local, national and international organizations, think tanks, media houses, world leaders, political analysts, religious scholars, social activities and all. The institutions as well as individuals use social media handles to communicate with their national and global audience. The information being shared through social media platforms is accessible to huge global audience within seconds. The world leaders and analysts of international recognition have huge fan following in millions on their social media handles on twitter and facebook, as people across different geographical locations and political ideologies follow them to have an insight into their perspectives. These

platforms provide them the fastest means of getting to know the reaction of global public about their stances and ideologies. The moment a tweet or post is shared on the twitter or facebook accounts by institutions or people of international profile, there comes a huge response in the form of likes, comments, re-tweets and reposts. This quick feedback and response from people across the world determines whether their stance has been appreciated or challenged by the audience. At the turn of the 21st century, with the advent of online communication, the social media handles of influential actors have become carriers of certain worldviews and ideologies which have led to a debate on the way various actors, events, religions, ethnicities, are represented and projected. Since the turn of the century, such representations have been crucial in constructing stereotyped images of various actors.

However, the potential of social media is not just limited to the (UN) biased representations and projections, the real potential lies in the significant role which social media can play for social and political transformations. It can act as the fastest and most economic platform for public mobilization for social, political, and global causes and hence play its role in social change.

The focus of this paper is to unravel the dual force of the representations on social media. Social media plays a key role in constituting identities and constructing a positive self-image and a negative-others image of different political players in international politics. An objective analysis of social media communication in post 9/11 scenario can very well show how the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 generated a new wave of representations of Muslims and Islam. These representations are loaded with prejudices and very conveniently generalize and reinforce the anti-Islamic feelings and prejudices. In the post 9/11 scenario, the Western media representations of Muslims and the Islamic religion have built an association between Islam, Muslims, and terrorism. The media representation does ideological work as carriers of certain ideologies held by those who are the powerful actors in the global picture. Hence the media representations not only sustain and serve strong political powers but also advance ideological claims.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY/ SELECTION OF TWEET

This analysis is based on tweet posted on Twitter-21 December, 2014, by Sally Kohn (@sallykohn), a liberal political commentator. The tweet was posted in the context of some recent shooting incidents in the US particularly since May 2014. There have been four shooting incidents which triggered polarized public opinion because of biased and discriminated representation and response from the grand jury as well as various groups from public. These shooting incidents include the following:

- May 23, 2014 Santa Barbara shooting, by a 22 year old Elliot Rodger (white) near the campus of University of California.
- July 17, 2014 the death of a black man Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York. He died when a white police officer put him in a grappling hold.
- On August 9, 2014 an 18-year-old black man Michael Brown was shot dead in Ferguson, Missouri. The shooter was a 28 years old white police officer in Ferguson named Darren Wilson.
- December 20, 2014 –New York police shooting by Ismaaiyl Brinsley.

The tweet is very important because of multiple reasons. First it comes from Sally Kohn, who is widely recognized for her progressive voice. Sally's work has been highlighted by prominent media outlets e.g. the New York Times, and Colbert Report to the National Review. She is also ranked by Mediate as one of the top 100 most influential television pundits in America. Posted on December 21, 2014, within a short span of less than twenty four hours, this particular tweet by Sally Kohn received 25.7 thousand re-tweets and 17.5 thousand favorites which show the impact and importance of what comes from a renowned voice like hers. Second important reason is that Sally Kohn, although an influential Western Media person coming from the in group does not actually align with their way of representing and labeling "others". In this tweet, she satirizes the biased representation of people on the basis of their race, religion and ethnicity.

Although tweets can be said to be an expression of the personal opinions and feelings of individual but Sally Kohn's this particular tweet subtly hints at the biased representations of people in western media. Hence, third and the most crucial reason for selecting this tweet is that it refers to the broader post 9/11 scenario, the war on terrorism, and the representations of Islam and Muslims in the Western Media which reflects on the ideological basis behind such representations. Since the tweet carries a heavy ideological load, an attempt at its analysis will help in exploring the way ideologies get reflected in discourse and how they get reproduced, strengthened and legitimized.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The tweet satirically hints at the prejudice in the representations of different races and religions. This study aims to critically analyze the bias which leads to the marked differences in the way Muslims, Islam, blacks, and whites have been represented. The nature of the shooting incidents is almost the same but the way these incidents have been written and talked about in western media discourse draws a prominent contrast on the basis of race and religion. The key focus of this analysis is on the representation of Muslims

and Islam. The analysis is based on exploring the relationship between language and ideology because language is an important tool for initiating and sustaining certain ideologies. The second level of analysis is focused on the linguistic forms and means used to embed the desired ideologies whereas the third level of analysis takes into consideration the potential effect of such representations.

This analysis is carried out using Van Dijk's notion of ideological square. The analysis will explore the ways in which the two polarized ends of ideological square emerge in discussion. While using Van Dijk's ideological square as a lens for analysis, at one end of the spectrum lies the positive self-representation whereas at the other end of the spectrum lies the negative other representation. The analysis will shed light on the US vs Them representation with its key focus on Islam and Muslims. The analysis seeks to investigate the way Muslims are repetitively stereotyped and negatively represented through various types of linguistic choices selected. The aim of this investigation is to identify and explain the ideological traces which are at work behind such representations.

In most of Van Dijk's (1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998a, 1998b) research and writings analyzing and drawing explicit and contrastive dimension of US vs Them is central. As for him, to make an ideological dichotomy transparent in such discourse, one needs to analyze discourse in the following manner (1998b:61-63):

- a) Discourses are embedded in contexts; therefore it is important to examine the context of discourse in order to get an insight in to the way a particular discourse is shaped. Hence, for Van Dijk an important level of analysis is to examine the context of the discourse: historical, political, or social background of a conflict and its central participants.
- b) Power relations between groups are important dynamics to analyze as power is important in determining the impact of a discourse. Therefore for Van Dijk it is pertinent to analyze, power relations, groups and conflicts involved.
- c) Furthermore in order to explore and expose the positive self-representation and negative other-representation the analysis should aim to identify positive and negative opinions about the Us vs Them. Meaning making is a dynamic and complex process. Language is employed in various ways to convey the desired meaning but meaning making is not only confined to the said and written component. In order comprehend the subtle and tacit elements of a discourse, we have to be conscious of the fact that some part of meaning resides in the unsaid and it requires some pragmatic competence to unfold the tacit component of a discourse. So the analysis should also make explicit the presupposed and implied.

- d) At the micro level the analysis should examine all formal structure: syntactic structure, lexical choice. This level of analysis enables the analyst to identify the words choices and syntactic structures manifesting polarized group opinions.

RATIONALE FOR USING VAN DIJK'S IDEOLOGICAL SQUARE

Van Dijk's ideological square, is an important tool in doing CDA. The notion of ideological square has proved quite effective in handling various discourse genres, especially political, immigration and racist discourse. The racist discourse generally emphasizes, our good things and their bad things, and deemphasizes (mitigates, hides) our bad things and Their good things. The positive/negative representations of US/THEM are not only present in the explicit expression but it is also embedded in the subtle structures of meanings, form, and action. The same polarized representation is quite evident in the way Muslims and Islam have been represented in the Western media discourse especially in the post 9/11 years. By building an association of terrorism with Muslims, they have been presented as security threat. This general ideological concept not only applies to racist domination but in general to in-group/out-group in social practices, discourse, and thought (Van Dijk, 1998, 2007:130). Thus, the utility of ideological square is not just limited to the racist discourse, rather it is an analytical tool which can be applied to wider social practices and discourse which operate along in-group/out-group divide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media refers to a set of internet-based applications built on the technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that enable user-generated content to be created and exchanged (Kaplan & Heinlein 2010). The different forms of social media include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. These three types have strongly crept into the lives of human beings. Since the beginning of 21st century, the advancement of ICT and social media technologies have revolutionized human social communication and interaction. The rise of social media platforms has introduced complete new communication practices through which new interaction patterns have emerged. These platforms have created new forms of expressions and given rise to civic voice and participation.

In van Dijk's view, the strength of CDA is its orientation to making discourse analysis socially and politically relevant, concerning linguistic knowledge to forms of social action. Van Dijk suggests three levels of analysis to unpack and analyze the ideological load of discourse. These levels include social analysis, cognitive analysis, and discourse analysis. (Van Dijk 1995). The first level i.e. social analysis helps in exploring the

wider context and overall societal structures. The focus of the third level of analysis is on the text which helps to examine syntax, lexicon, local semantics, topics, schematic structures, etc. By incorporating these two levels of analysis Van Dijk's approach blends the two traditional approaches in media education: the interpretive, which is based on text and the social tradition which is based on context. However, there is one important component of Van Dijk's approach which distinguishes his approach from the other approaches in CDA. This distinguishing level of analysis in Van Dijk's approach is the cognitive analysis.

For Van Dijk (1995) socio-cognition acts as the interface between society and discourse. According to him the influence of ideologies on the personal cognition of the member of a group is indirect. Thus, ideologies indirectly influence the way members of a group comprehend and make sense of a discourse among other actions and interactions. He calls the mental representation of individuals during such social actions and interactions "models". These models have great influence on the way individuals produce language and comprehend the language of other peoples. The way people act, speak or write and the way people comprehend the social practices of others is mainly controlled by their mental models. The most crucial aspect of this approach is the articulation of mental representations along 'US' vs 'THEM' dimensions. When mental representations work along the US vs THEM poles, the members belonging to the US group will be generally represented in positive terms, whereas the members belonging to THEM group will be represented in the negative terms (Van Dijk, 1995).

Furthermore, for Van Dijk (1995) ideology takes an important focus in discourse analysis. He perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis. The focus of analysis in his notion of an "ideological square" unpacks the linguistic choices utilized for projecting 'a positive self-presentation and negative other presentation. This bipolar representation is observable across all linguistic dimensions of a text under analysis. There is a marked difference in the lexicon and syntactic structures used to construct the US vs Them categories. This difference is not only reflected in the linguistic structure but is also evident from the meanings of sentences, the coherence relations between sentences, and the broader pragmatic-directed and functional concerns of the text.

The ideological square parallels the *shield* and *weapon* uses of language, especially through euphemism and dysphemism (Allan, 1991; Burridge, 2006 & Mazid, 2004), and the classical Arabic concept of *beautifying* the ugly and *uglifying* the beautiful (Van Gelder, 2003). Language is used as a shield when the bad things of in-group are mitigated whereas language is used as a weapon to emphasize the bad things of out-

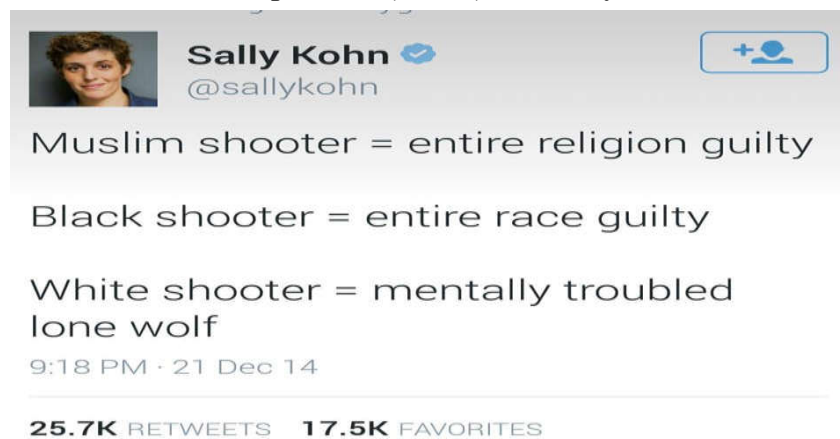
group. The ideological square is the most comprehensive model which Van Dijk proposes for analyzing ideology in discourse.

The notion of ideological square provides an analytical tool to researchers which enables them to expose the macro level embedded polarized ideologies through examining the micro level lexical and structural analysis. Van Dijk (1998) gives this suitable theoretical concept of the ideological square which sums up the dual strategies of in-group description in positive terms and out-group description in negative terms. The dual strategy of binary opposition is established in discourse either at the lexical level which is manifested in choice of words as well as other linguistic features. Van Dijk upholds that many group ideologies comprise the representation of Self and Others. The polarization emphasizes the good in US and the bad in THEM– We are Good and They are Bad and the “ideological square” functions to polarize in- and out-groups in order to present the “We” group in a favorable light and the “They” group unfavorably (Kuo & Nakamura, 2005).

Hence Van Dijk (1993) stretches the strategy to express or represent the “other” in a negative position which is known as “negative other presentation” (Tardy, 2009). This implementation of ideological polarization can take a variety of forms such as implementation at the lexical level through choice of lexical items that imply positive or negative evaluations. The ideological polarization can also be manifested in the structure of the propositions and their categories (activation or passivisation). This strategy of polarization entails emphasizing our good properties/actions and mitigating their good properties/actions, mitigating our bad properties/actions, and illuminating their bad properties/actions (Kuo & Nakamura, 2005).

ANALYSIS

Sample Text (Tweet) for Analysis



This analysis follows the above mentioned five steps for exploring the ideological dichotomy as reflected in the sample text (i.e. Tweet). Apparently the tweet is just few words, which is very brief and concise, but the reason why it triggers thousands of conflicting replies and favorites within a short span of less than 24 hours is due to the heavy ideological load it carries. In just few words, the tweet very satirically captures the whole post 9/11 scenario and how Islam and Muslims have been perceived, portrayed and stereotyped by the West. Therefore understanding the socio-political context of such discourse becomes crucial in exploring the ideological dichotomies of such texts.



Historical, Political and Social Context of the Discourse: This research uses Van Dijk's approach for analyzing ideologies which works on three levels of analysis. Social analysis, cognitive analysis, and discourse analysis. The focus of social analysis is on the context and it helps in exploring the overall societal structures and the wider historical, social and political context of the discourse. As far as the broader political and social background of the Tweet is concerned, it is the post September 11, 2001 scenario and the 'war on terrorism' which covers almost more than a decade and a half. The September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City was one of the most critical incidents of 21st century which not only shaped the foreign policies and world politics but also had huge implications for Muslims and Islam because of involvement of Al-Qaeda in the attacks. In this scenario the portrayal of Muslims in Western media was full of negative stereotypes. Muslims were portrayed as terrorists and extremists. The frequent and repeated representation of Muslims as terrorists in the influential Western media has constructed an association between Islam and terrorism which has increased an element of animosity towards Muslims and Islam as a religion. Since 9/11 the negative impact of this constructed association between Islam and terrorism has had serious

implication for people who bear stereotyped physical resemblance for example, the Arabs, Middle Easterners, and Muslim elsewhere. Consequently Muslims have faced the fear and borne the brunt of hatred and hostility from people of other cultures especially west.

The deadly 9/11 incidents greatly affected the Western outlook on the Muslim community. The actions taken by Al-Qaeda had very serious and long lasting implications for the entire Muslim community. The negative view of the Middle East and the Muslim world arise from a number of complex conditions which have been twisted and exaggerated over time. As with many stereotypes and vicious portrayals, the origins of such outlooks have often stemmed from longstanding racism and cultural differences.

Conflicts of Power Relations Among Participant Groups:

According to Bloor and Bloor (2007:5) ‘much social practice in a complex modern society is institutionalized’. The role of institutions is very important especially the powerful institutions because power determines the level of their influence. The organizations which are highly structured and powerful control the way we live and influence the way we think. In today’s age of advanced communication, much of this control and influence operates through language because an integral part of that control is language. Media houses as well as social Media have taken huge importance in the current times. Because the communication coming from Media houses and social media has swift distribution and wider circulation and public outreach which have huge potential to create an impact by shaping and circulating the desired narrative? Fowler (1991) asserts that some texts have a direct role in shaping attitudes and ideas within a specific society. The fact that powerful institutions have control and influence which operates through language has also lead to a shift of focus in discourse analysis within Linguistics. Whereas the traditional focus has been on the linguistic structure of text, there is a shift in focus now which explores how texts figure in the social process. The micro level analysis of the text alone with its focus on Phonology, morphology, semantics, and grammar does not bring complete understanding of the text. The rhetorical intent, the coherence and the worldview that the author and receptor bring to the text are equally essential (Kaplan, 1990) which means that the analysis of the text has to go beyond the micro level in order to examine how a particular text comes into being and what ideological load it carries. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that language does not merely reflect our reality, but it is central in creating that reality. The words which we speak or write are never neutral, they are not the only versions of reality that we speak or write about. Rather our words carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak or write.

Since 9/11 the Western media as well as the governments played a critical role in influencing the general public perception and attitude to direct

blame on the whole Muslim community. This influence created US vs Them divide between Muslims and Westerners by illuminating the perceived differences among them. These differences were illuminated to an extent that they were brought to the forefront of Western politics and culture. There has always been a gap between Muslims and other ethnically diverse Americans with respect to the socio-economic conditions and political aspirations and this gap has hampered the relations between Muslims and Americans. However, September 11, 2001 gave an impetus to these differences because the domestic attitudes resulting from the attacks transformed into cultural associations with Muslims resulting in negative stereotypes and representations. The mass media played key role in perpetuating deep-seeded stereotypical racism and inequality in the country.

There was a drastic shift in the social and political perception of Muslims after 9/11 attacks as it they added bitterness to the relations between Muslims and the West. There are so many factors which lead to the domestic backlash against Muslims which mainly include federal, media, religious and social forces. The post 9/11 catch phrase 'War on Terror' was also perceived quite differently by the Muslims and the West. It often manifested Western beliefs against Islam mainly because of the misinterpretation of the actions taken by al-Qaeda leader whose actions were generalized towards whole race and religion. The war on terror was main conduit used by Western media to develop the cultural associations of Islam and terrorism.

Positive and Negative Opinions about US versus THEM: The most important feature which distinguishes Van Dijk's approach from other approaches in CDA is the element of cognitive analysis. For Van Dijk, the element of cognitive analysis helps to explore the interface between society and discourse. For him it is the socio-cognition, social cognition and personal cognition that mediate between society and discourse. He defines social cognition as "the system of mental representations and processes of group members". In this sense, for Van Dijk "ideologies.....are the overall, abstract mental systems that organize.....socially shared attitudes" (Van Dijk, 1995).

So, for him, the ideologies reside in the cognitive system in the form of mental representations or mental 'models' and have an influence on the acts of people. These mental models not only control how people act, speak or write, but also play role in how they understand the social practices of others. The most crucial aspect to note is that, according to Van Dijk, the mental representations work along 'US' vs 'THEM' dimensions. When mental representations operate along this binary the people of one group will present themselves and their group in positive terms by emphasizing the positive only whereas they will present the other group in negative terms by emphasizing and illuminating the negative. Furthermore, for Van Dijk (1995)

ideology analysis is central to discourse analysis. His notion of an "ideological square" is characterized by "a positive self - presentation and negative other – presentation"

Sally Kohn very satirically draws up a sharp contrast between the way Muslims, blacks and Whites are perceived and labeled differently in America. Although she herself is an American, belonging to the in group, she does not seem to align with their biased conception and labeling of Muslims as terrorists. In a very terse and subtle way she highlights the difference in representations of US vs THEM. The very first proposition in this tweet (Muslim Shooter=entire religion guilty) exposes the biased representations of Islam in the western media discourse as it aptly captures the demarcation between US and Them. The act of an individual is very conveniently generalized towards the whole religion which is a clear example of the operation of the ideological square, which involves emphasizing 'their' bad properties/actions. If by chance the individual (Muslims) who has committed a violent act happens to be a Muslim, the whole religion (Islam) is held accountable for an individual act. Therefore the first proposition hints at this biased generalization of blaming entire religion for individual acts. In fact since 9/11 this bias has intensified manifold. The second proposition (black shooter=entire race guilty) satirically hints at the racist elements in West. In both these propositions the writer very subtly points to the fact that how the actions of individuals (Muslims and blacks) are generalized across the whole religion and race. On the basis of individual actions, either whole religion or race is labeled and represented in a negative way.

In the third statement of this tweet (white shooter=mentally troubled lone wolf) the writer draws a contrast with the previous two statements. When it comes to the white shooter, we no more see the strategy of generalizing and holding the whole race guilty or accountable. White shooter is conceptualized in an individualistic manner whose actions are not presented as generalizable for the whole race. Sally Kohn in a very subtle manner criticizes the way racist discourse. There is a marked difference between these representations particularly in the way they emphasize 'Our good things and 'Their bad things'. The difference does not solely lie in the emphasis but it also resides in the way the media representations deemphasize, mitigate, or hide 'Our bad things' and 'Their good things'. Hence, the tweet clearly reflects that this general ideological concept not only applies to racist domination but in general to in-group/out-group in social practices, discourse, and thought.

Making Explicit the Presupposed and the Implied: This tweet presents a very clear picture of the way 'presupposed' and 'implied' are made explicit. If one critically investigates the difference in representations of Muslim, Black, and White shooters it will expose all the biases,

prejudices, and stereotyped ideologies behind such representations. The tweet reflects the bias in the media coverage and representations of all these shooting events. The three statements focusing on the contrasting representations of in group and out group members very clearly make explicit the presupposed and the implied meanings. When the entire religion is declared guilty on the basis of an individual's action, either it is presupposed that there is a strong link between an individual Muslim's action and his religion Islam or the proposition implies this. Whereas if the individual violent action is committed by someone who is 'white' the presupposition is that it should be viewed purely as an individual act in isolation which bears no connection either with the religion or the race of the individual. Rather, what it aims to imply is that the 'white' shooter even does not commit such act while being in his senses rather he is termed 'mentally ill'. The blame is not even fully put on the individual but rather the effect of blame is mitigated by referring to the individual as mentally ill.

Examination of the Formal Structure: Language is a rich resource which is used to construct individuals as social subjects. The particular linguistic choices made to construct and represent individuals are not neutral but these choices are ingrained in the ideological processes. The linguistic choices we make and the language which we speak and write tell a lot about us, and it is not only the verbal aspect of language but it also includes the non-verbal. The language we speak and write does so many things: representing, transforming, resisting, (de) legitimating, among other things. Language is a powerful resource in this sense as it not only presents the reality and individuals but also is crucial in constituting that. So language carries a potential and agency to represent as well as resist and redefine the people and reality. When we say that language tells a lot about US this 'Us' is no less rich. It includes our identities, attitudes and ideologies, socio-historical backgrounds, the 'interpretive packages' we carry, the contexts and schemas we use discourse within.

Reath (1998) asserted that language is one of the pivotal means in which "attitudes towards groups can be constructed, maintained or challenged". Here lies the potential and agency of language. Language is a functional instrument which individuals acquire from the society in which they live. "It is a key instrument in socialization, and the means whereby society forms and permeates the individual's consciousness" (Hodge & Kress, 1993).

Social media, due to its immediacy and accessibility, is the driving force behind constructing, maintaining, changing or challenging public opinion on national as well as international issues. If we look at the lexical choices in the object text (i.e. Tweet) we will observe that selection of particular lexical choices not only reflects on the biased representation of US

vs THEM but it in a way also appears to challenge these differences. The same noun i.e. Shooter has been described and particularized by using three different identity titles i.e. Muslim, Black and White. This particular lexical choice and way of identification is quite meaningful as it shows the shift in labeling and generalization pattern of in-group and out-group members.

The first lexical combination of ‘Muslim Shooter’ and its equating with ‘entire religion’ being held ‘guilty’ shows how actions of individuals are manipulated and exploited to label and represent the whole religion negatively. Same generalization principle applies in the lexical choices made in the second statement. ‘Black shooter’ and its generalization across the whole race follow the same labeling strategy as in the first. But when it comes to the ‘white shooter’ there is a shift, both in the perspective and lexical selections. We no more see the generalization strategy operating here rather a ‘white shooter’ is taken in his individual capacity whose actions are not generalized or generalizable across his religion or race. The interesting thing to observe here is that a ‘white shooter’ is not even held accountable for his very own actions on individual level, rather his ‘bad things’ are ‘deemphasized’ and he is said to be ‘mentally troubled lone wolf’. ‘Mentally troubles’ implies that his crime is not a conscious or intentional or planned action which seems to provide a sort of justification for a ‘white shooters’ action. The word ‘lone wolf’ stresses his action as an individual’s action which has nothing to do with his race or religion. This contrasting difference in the lexical choices made reflects the labeling shift from entire religion (i.e. Islam) to race (i.e. black) to mere individual (i.e. White ‘lone wolf’).

The second important aspect to note is an analysis of the syntactic structure which is very subtle and meaningful in the context of model text (tweet) for this analysis. There is no mention of active agents which the tweet is actually hinting at i.e. the ones who represent and label the various categories of ‘shooters’ mentioned in the text. It seems that the writer has intentionally left the agents unmentioned to keep the focus fixed on ‘what’ she wants to highlight without going into the ‘who’ debate. Although the use of phrases ‘Muslim shooter, Black shooter, and White shooter’ seems to be giving a sense of agency but the overall structure of the text shows that they are presented here as ‘objects’ and not as ‘agents’ because the focus of the Tweet is the way their actions are interpreted and labeled rather than their actions per se. A critical analysis of the tweet points to the discursive strategies which have been employed in constructing the identities of Muslim, Black, and White shooters and exposes the dichotomy of positive representation of self and negative representation of others. These discursive strategies are used exposing the biased labeling of the identities of Muslims, Blacks, and Whites by creating in-groups and out-groups. The emphasis on the differences between US and THEM play a key role in creating a divide of

positive and negative, of good and bad. The analysis exposes the repetitive stereotyping of Muslims and blacks through negative representation. The analysis also demonstrates that language is the main tool used for the stereotyping and misrepresentation which is evident from the selected linguistic choices and the construction of the sentences.

CONCLUSION

With the advancement in technology and the means of communication language has become crucial in constituting social and cultural realities among the people of different societies through global media discourse. The above analysis demonstrates that language is a powerful tool which constitutes social realities but an important point to be taken into consideration is that language is not powerful on its own. It is not just about the language, but equally important is to consider who is using that language, because language gains power by the use powerful people and institutions make of it. Power determines the impact of what is said and written. What is said or written by the powerful individuals and institutions has increased chances of being readily taken up and sustained. If the counter narrative is not coming from equally powerful individuals or institution, it may have fewer chances of being reproduced and sustained. The negative representation of Muslims and Islam in the Western media after the attacks of September 11, 2001 indicates that Western Media as a power structure has been influential in building the association between Muslims, Islam and terrorism. These associations are quite evident in the lexical and structural choices used in the tweet. The representations highlighted in the study are inclined towards stereotypical and negative connotations regarding Islam and Muslims. They portray a negative image of Muslims as social deviants and extremists. Muslims are labeled as security threats against the backdrop of the 'war on terror'. In this analysis, the notion of ideological square has enabled the researcher to capture a crucial aspect along US vs THEM dimensions. The analysis reveals the way negative representation is minimized along the US dimension but illuminated, maximized, and generalized along THEM dimension. The micro level analysis of the lexical and structural choices also sheds light on the macro social structures and incidents which shape the negative labels and representations of Muslims and Islam. However, present study has elaborated the representation of Muslims through developing a connection between ideology and language in the perspectives of its forms and subsequent effects.

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