TERRORISM DISCOURSE IN POPULAR ARAB MEDIA: REPRESENTATION OF THE TALIBAN IN CNN ARABIC YOUTUBE HEADLINES

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ABSTRACT

In August and September 2021, the Taliban emerged as a prominent subject in many media during the Afghan leadership transition. While prior research has examined the media's portrayal of the Taliban from diverse viewpoints and methodologies, no investigation has concentrated on their representation as the actor in the discourse. This study aims to investigate the representation of the Taliban in mainstream media, thereby addressing the existing research gap. The Taliban news headlines from the CNN Arabic YouTube channel, from August to September 2021, were utilized as data sources in a qualitative-descriptive study methodology. Theo van Leeuwen's discourse analysis was employed to delineate actor representation by mapping inclusion and exclusion tactics. The findings demonstrate that CNN Arabic employs exclusion and inclusion in its representation of the Taliban. Exclusion arises in strategy nominalisation, whereas inclusion occurs in strategies of identification, abstraction, determination, differentiation, and categorization. CNN Arabic depicts the Taliban unfavourably through a severe and hyperbolic storyline. This representation is grounded in political objectives aimed at steering public discourse and provoking insurrection against the Taliban. These findings enhance media discourse analysis by identifying the Taliban as the primary actor, hence expanding the comprehension of representation tactics employed to influence public perception. This study emphasizes the significance of critical media literacy, particularly in understanding the interplay between political objectives and the portrayal of actors in global conflict reporting.

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INTRODUCTION

The recent developments regarding the Taliban have garnered the attention of international political figures. The Taliban conflict, which originated in the 1990s (Hussain, 2020; Hussain & Siraj, 2019), has gained increased visibility across multiple discourse platforms, including various forms of YouTube media. As of August-September 2021, the situation regarding the Taliban has re-emerged as a significant topic on social media due to their return to power in Afghanistan. This situation presents an opportunity for diverse media outlets interested in this issue to engage in the politicization of language. The headline of CNN Arabic news, reflecting a specific ideological orientation, employs a discourse style that polarises interpretation and public responses, as evidenced by the comments section (CNN Arabic, 2021). CNN Arabic media comments exhibit a tendency towards harshness and intensity regarding news subjects, influenced by aggressive discourse (Jiangbin et al., 2022). This trend is observable in 218 headlines released by CNN Arabic media (CNN Arabic, 2021). It is essential to analyze the linguistic units present in Taliban news headlines to uncover the ideological objectives and sentiments expressed through linguistic patterns.

The ideological power inherent in the linguistic units of CNN Arabic YouTube titles related to the Taliban renders this topic suitable for critical examination through a critical discourse analysis framework. CNN Arabic operates as a segment of the CNN network, which is recognised as the foremost television news outlet in the United States. The researcher selected this channel as a source for her study due to the significant role of the United States in the reinstatement of Taliban rule (Zaytoon et al., 2024), and analyzed the Taliban's representation through Theo van Leeuwen's discourse framework. The representation of the Taliban movement by the United States will reveal its tendencies, which influence and shape public perception through the language employed (Malik & Jan, 2021). The representation or identification significantly affects the public's perception of the Taliban's image. The construction of tendencies through linguistic patterns illustrates the interrelationship between the Taliban's discourse and society (Shahid, 2022; Bahar, 2020).

Prior studies indicate that political interests, state ideology, and the contextual framework of conflict predominantly influence the portrayal of the Taliban in mainstream media. The portrayal of the Taliban in both Pakistani and international print media frequently depicts them as violent actors and security threats, framed within the context of war journalism and state agendas, especially during times of conflict escalation and in the aftermath of 9/11 (Hussain & Siraj, 2019; Nadeem et al., 2019). Several cross-national comparative studies indicate that this representation has experienced significant changes due to geopolitical dynamics and diplomatic processes, transitioning from delegitimization to more pragmatic or neutral framings (Yasin et al., 2022; Aksar & Imran, 2025). Official state discourse reflects similar changes, exemplified by the Russian Foreign Ministry's narrative that aligns the Taliban with Russia's strategic interests concerning the United States and Afghanistan (Golubev, 2019; Eijaz et al., 2016). These studies primarily focus on macro-level framing and do not thoroughly investigate the representation of the Taliban as social actors through specific linguistic choices.

The literature has expanded to include visual and multimodal analyses of Taliban representation, in addition to text framing analysis. Political cartoons, propaganda videos, and photography serve to either reinforce or challenge the Taliban's prevailing identity as militant and terrorist entities (Ahmad et al., 2024; Mehran et al., 2021).

Pakistani political cartoons frequently depict the Taliban as aggressive and dominant figures, reflecting regional geopolitical anxieties (Ahmad et al., 2024; Nadeem et al., 2019). In contrast, alternative visual methodologies, utilizing studio photography and aesthetic narratives, depict the Taliban within an ambiguous context, challenging the conventional logic of enemy identification following the War on Terror (Chao, 2019; Ibrahimi, 2023). Simultaneously, research on social media diplomacy reveals that the Taliban strategically cultivates a self-image via digital platforms to acquire symbolic legitimacy and international social approval (Chen et al., 2025; Mehran et al., 2021). This study primarily examines communication strategies and the creation of visual meaning, rather than the methods by which the news media portray the Taliban through the representation of actors in succinct texts.

Recent studies have analysed the Taliban through social and political lenses, placing the group within the context of societal structures and state power dynamics. Bergemann & Wright (2023) and Maley (2023) characterize the Taliban as social actors engaged in a network of local relations, cultural norms, and strategies for post-conflict legitimacy. In contrast, Nainggolan (2021) examines the Taliban's political orientation in relation to regional interests and state stability. These studies primarily emphasise macro-level analysis and do not specifically investigate the media's construction of the Taliban through everyday discursive practices. Research on the Taliban within digital media, specifically YouTube headlines, remains scarce. Nonetheless, headlines play a crucial role in shaping media credibility and eliciting emotional reactions from viewers (Yusuf et al., 2022; Bergemann & Wright, 2023). Previous research has primarily examined Taliban discourse on Twitter, analysing its use as a tactical propaganda instrument aimed at diminishing the morale of the international coalition, as well as a platform for counter-extremism employing particular linguistic strategies (Wani, 2023; Maley, 2023). This limitation underscores the need to investigate YouTube headlines as a relatively underexplored area of discursive representation.

It can be concluded that the majority of prior research predominantly examines long-form news articles, editorials, or extensive visual products through the lenses of framing, content analysis, or war-peace journalism methodologies (Shaheen & Tarique, 2022; Yasin et al., 2022). Digital media formats, particularly headlines on algorithm-driven platforms like YouTube, have not been sufficiently analysed, despite their crucial role in influencing audiences' initial perceptions and simplifying the portrayal of social actors (Nadeem et al., 2019; Hussain & Siraj, 2019). Moreover, while Theo van Leeuwen's actor representation analysis framework has been utilized in semiotic and critical discourse studies, its application to representations of the Taliban in Arab media and the global digital media context remains quite limited (Aksar & Imran, 2025; Golubev, 2019). This study addresses the gap by analysing the representation of the Taliban in CNN Arabic's YouTube headlines through Theo van Leeuwen's framework, aiming to reveal the media's discursive strategies in constructing the Taliban as an actor in the international digital public space.

This study employs Theo van Leeuwen's social actor representation analysis to identify and critically assess the representational strategies employed by the Taliban in the headlines of CNN Arabic on YouTube. The analytical framework of Theo van Leeuwen was selected for its capacity to examine discursive practices at the textual level, systematically reflecting the relationships among power, ideology, and social legitimacy. This study extensively employs discourse analysis, extending beyond linguistic structures to encompass the external contexts that influence the creation and dissemination of media texts, including institutional interests and associated ideological

claims (Al-Khazraji, 2017; Sahmeni & Afifah, 2019). This approach is essential as media representations can significantly influence public perceptions of conflict actors in a simplified or biased way. Misunderstandings regarding the Taliban influence the perception of this group and have broader social implications, such as the potential normalisation of radicalism or the reinforcement of intolerance (Coster et al., 2024; Sandberg et al., 2023). This research aims to promote critical public awareness in responding to Taliban news discourse in a reflective and informed manner, grounded in a sufficient understanding of media literacy.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive methodology to analyze the representation strategies of the Taliban in the YouTube news headlines of CNN Arabic. The research data comprises linguistic units such as words, phrases, sentences, and utterances found in Taliban-related news headlines on the CNN Arabic YouTube channel (https://youtube.com/c/cnnarabic). This channel was selected due to its substantial influence on public opinion in the Arab world and globally, evidenced by the millions of views garnered by CNN Arabic's coverage of the Taliban since August 2021 (CNN Arabic, 2021). The data collection period was confined to August and September 2021. The selected timeframe corresponds to the pivotal event of August 15, 2021, when the Taliban captured Kabul and declared the establishment of an "interim government." Until the end of September 2021, the Taliban issue remained a significant subject of news coverage, garnering extensive attention within the digital media public sphere.

This study employed data collection methods that included documentation techniques, as well as descriptive and reflective observation. The researcher initially analysed CNN Arabic news headlines concerning the Taliban, subsequently examining the linguistic elements present within them. Data were selected, recorded, and compiled in a research document, supplemented by screenshots from the source. The analysis employed Theo van Leeuwen's discourse analysis framework, emphasising the representation strategies of social actors via processes of exclusion and inclusion (Leeuwen, 2008). Exclusion processes encompass passivation, nominalisation, and actor omission. In contrast, inclusion processes consist of differentiation–indifferentiation, objectivation–abstraction, nomination–categorization, determination–indetermination, assimilation–individualization, and association–dissociation. The analysis phases encompass data reduction, coding, a critical examination of exclusion and inclusion strategies, and the formulation of conclusions by evaluating the interplay between linguistic structures and the external context of the discourse.

RESULT

CNN Arabic has 835,000 followers on YouTube and has uploaded 9,000 videos (CNN Arabic, 2021). Between August and September 2021, 122 news videos were uploaded. The news about the Taliban is discussed in 31 of these videos, which is 25.4% of the total. With regard to the framework developed by Theo van Leeuwen, out of the thirty-one videos examined, fourteen headlines contain seventeen statements that exemplify the processes of exclusion and inclusion in the portrayal of the Taliban. These statements are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Representation of Taliban on CNN Arabic

Representation	Strategies	Headlines	Percentage
Exclusion	Nominalization	3	18%
Inclusion	Identification	5	29%
	Abstraction	4	23%
	Determination	3	18%
	Differentiation	1	6%
	Categorization	1	6%
Total		17	100%

Representation of the Taliban in the Exclusion Process

The exclusion process is highlighted in headlines concerning the Taliban on CNN Arabic as part of a unified strategy. CNN Arabic, as a discourse producer, aims to omit or obscure specific actors, events, or actions that influence the existence and perception of the Taliban movement. CNN Arabic represents the Taliban by changing the linguistic form of the verb to a noun using a nominalization strategy. The aim is to omit certain actors in order to present a different image of the Taliban. This strategy is evident in the following statements.

Excerpt 1	كاميرا سي إن إن ترصد حصار قندهار من قاعة حفلات زفاف تحولت لجبهة قتال أمامية ضد طالبان
	CNN camera captures siege of Kandahar from wedding hall turned frontline against Taliban

The original form employed a headline-naming approach to the linguistic unit. This source nominalises "besieged." A rigorous study shows that no nominalisation technique exists without a goal. CNN Arabic can use the verb form "حاصر" in its active, passive, and transitive conjugations. Switching to the noun form (source name) eliminates undesirable actors from the discourse, marginalising others. When using the verb form, especially the recognised verb, a ' subject' must be included in the sentence structure. In this sense, "siege" means Taliban hostility. The Taliban is seen negatively due to the resistance movement's history. CNN Arabic excluded the siege's perpetrator to stress the Taliban's poor image. A Taliban correspondent at the siege confirmed that the Afghan Special Forces carried it out. If stated, perpetrators of sieges can be identified. However, using the generic phrase "siege" hides the culprit, reducing public anxiety. Negative naming will position the Taliban as a movement requiring resistance. Discourse producers deliberately change the title to frame Taliban messaging. This technique uses the name form to portray the Taliban as a movement worthy of opposition. CNN Arabic stresses the Taliban and omits the actor's identity; however, the CArA0801 remarks reveal military activity during the siege. Taliban is portrayed poorly in the headline.

There is also a nominalization strategy of the same pattern in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2	شاهد..مقاتلو طالبان يتفحصون مروحيات عسكرية تركت بعد انسحاب أمريكا
	Watch: Taliban fighters inspect military helicopters left behind after US withdrawal

The headline employs a nominalisation strategy utilising the source form "withdrawal." This source represents the noun form of the verb 'withdrew,' derived from the root "reacted-reacts-reaction." Speech producers may opt to utilise the established verb form "withdrew" in news headlines. Utilising the noun form "withdrawal" can be critically interpreted as an element of a naming strategy. This strategy seeks to obscure the agent, as there is no verb necessitating an agent. If Excerpt 2 employs the verb "withdrew," it indicates that the agent to be identified is the United States. In this context, research indicates that the United States was the entity that systematically withdrew troops from Afghanistan. The United States withdrew its embassy personnel and Afghan nationals who collaborated with them. A clear statement would likely lead public opinion to perceive the United States as the loser. The use of the term "withdrawal" allows for the United States to be obscured as the agent in news headlines. Nonetheless, the discourse producers emphasise the Taliban, whose actions are intrinsically linked to military operations.

Representation of the Taliban in the Inclusion Process

CNN Arabic incorporated certain actors or events into linguistic units in news headlines to strategically represent the Taliban. The inclusion process at CNN Arabic continued throughout August and September 2021, as described below.

Identification Strategy

Taliban are presented in clearly defined linguistic and syntactic units through a definition strategy, as in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 3	استمع إلى استغاثة سيدة أفغانية يائسة مع هجوم طالبان عليهم فى كابول
	Listen to the desperate plea of an Afghan woman as the Taliban attacks them in Kabul.

Excerpt 3's subordinate sentence contains the identifying strategy. CNN Arabic uses powerful wording to draw attention to an Afghan woman's struggle, such as "listen to the cry for help of a desperate Afghan woman." Subordinate clause "Taliban attack on them in Kabul" adds detail and focuses on the important person or event. The headline had a subordinate clause linking to a significant sentence by "with," implying a temporal tie. The subordinate clause is not significant in news headlines about a sad Afghan woman. A subordinate clause explains that the melancholy is due to Taliban strikes. CNN Arabic can use this method to portray the Taliban as a movement that harms people's minds, especially women. Details, such as the use of "desperate" to describe Afghan women, support the Taliban's psychological impact. The Afghan woman's "desperate" predicament emphasises the audience's impression that Taliban strikes deeply harm Afghans' mental health, particularly women. The Taliban's inhumanity and chaos are brought into sharper focus by this. Framing was used in this headline in order to accomplish a goal. The goals of CNN Arabic will therefore have an effect on public opinion. In order to persuade the general people that the Taliban is an extremist movement that needs to be resisted, a specific phrase was utilised in the description of

the incident. The Taliban are portrayed as a disorderly movement in the media, which leads to the formation of public opinion.

Abstraction Strategy

The news headlines about the Taliban on CNN Arabic's YouTube channel will be written vaguely through an abstraction strategy. This will impact the Taliban's image because the information conveyed is unclear and inconsistent. This may also have an impact on public opinion, as mentioned in the following Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4	ناشطات أفغانيات يتحدين طالبان.. ومحبوبة سراج: هل سيقتلوننا جميعًا؟
	Afghan women activists defy the Taliban... Mahbouba Siraj: Will they kill us all?

The abstraction strategy was "Afghan women activists." The number and identity of Afghan activists were unknown. Nevertheless, the feminine plural form disguised this. A precise statement with a number, like "many Afghan women activists," is unneeded in Excerpt 4. This may mislead and increase expectations. The speech's context suggests that employing the feminine plural to disguise the number will lead the audience to believe that all Taliban opponents are Afghan women activists. Women are intimidated by the Taliban. Legitimacy assumes all Afghan women activists oppose it. Mahbouba Saraj holds a significant role for Afghan women activists, using "we" to symbolise them collectively. According to research, 15 Afghan activists—NGOs, educators, and homemakers—oppose the Taliban (Alaraby.co, 2022). Excerpt 4's abstraction strategy employs a feminine plural, implying a broad range of topics. Its explanations are unclear. Actor and event explanations may be concealed, which can affect overall assumptions. Form assumptions may be overstated.

Determination Strategy

CNN Arabic uses an identification strategy to report on the Taliban, clearly highlighting the actor. This will therefore affect the image of the Taliban, as the actor is clearly presented. This is evident in the following Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5	ملالا يوسف زي: تعليم المرأة يشكل تهديدًا لأيديولوجية طالبان
	Malala Yousafzai: Women's education poses a threat to Taliban ideology

The identification strategy is predicated on the explicit mention of the name "Malala Yousafzai." CNN Arabic could assert that women's education challenges the Taliban's ideology. By explicitly referencing Malala Yousafzai, CNN Arabic effectively depicts the Taliban in alignment with their ideology while maintaining a politically neutral stance. Malala Yousafzai is recognised as an activist in education and women's rights, independent of her identity. The mention of Malala Yousafzai's name indicates that the speaker is an activist. It would be appropriate for CNN Arabic to refrain from exposing her identity, including the use of descriptors such as girl, woman, or advocate for women's rights. As a result of her lack of recognition, her credibility is called into

question. It is highly possible that Malala Yousafzai's significant mention will have an effect on public opinion, highlighting the fact that an internationally renowned individual has acknowledged the Taliban's intimidation of women and their education. The presence of the Taliban in Afghanistan is highlighted by this, as is the level of authority and influence that the Taliban possesses within this setting.

Differentiation Strategy

The differentiation strategy will shape these two events, one of which relates to the Taliban. By comparing these two events in a single headline, CNN Arabic made a strategic effort to represent the Taliban. This is evident in the following Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6	مقاتلو طالبان يواجهون بعدائية مراسلة شبكتنا أثناء تصوير تقرير بأفغانستان
	Taliban fighters confront our correspondent while she is filming a report in Afghanistan

The strategy of differentiation is evident in the contrast between the Taliban and the CNN Arabic correspondent. CNN Arabic characterises the Taliban as an "aggressive" movement through the phrase "Taliban fighters face hostility." The CNN Arabic correspondent is identified by the phrase "our network correspondent while filming a report in Afghanistan." This strategy will shape public perception of the Taliban as a disordered entity. CNN Arabic is depicted not merely as a victim but also as an entity that positions itself as superior to the Taliban. CNN Arabic depicted the Taliban employing a differentiation strategy, presenting the group in a negative light through specific language choices. The verbs are articulated in a manner that shapes public perception of the Taliban as a radical and anarchistic entity. CNN Arabic seems to support the perception of the Taliban's brutality through its comparative reporting of their activities. Journalists occupy a more favourable position, as the repercussions of their actions are less violent compared to those of the Taliban. The reporter's stance seems to reflect that of a victim. Consequently, the Taliban's status as an extremist movement is likely to become more firmly established in public perception.

Categorization Strategy

Categorization was a strategy employed by CNN Arabic in its headlines about the Taliban, which involved adding linguistic units such as actor or event categories. This aims to provide a clearer picture of the actor. This strategy is presented in Excerpt 7.

Excerpt 7	استمع إلى استغاثة سيدة أفغانية يائسة مع هجوم طالبان عليهم في كابول
	Listen to the desperate plea of an Afghan woman as the Taliban attacks them in Kabul.

Through the use of the label "Afghan woman," the categorisation is demonstrated in the seventh excerpt. CNN Arabic makes a conscious effort to highlight the portrayal of Afghan women as tragic people in its depiction of the Taliban on purpose. The conclusion that women are the population that has been most psychologically and mentally affected by the Taliban's assault in Afghanistan was formed by the headline,

which influenced the audience's perception. The upshot of this is that the Taliban will be perceived as being ruthless due to the public's overwhelming sympathy for them. Due to the widespread belief that they are incapable of putting up a fight against the Taliban, women in Afghanistan are considered to be among the most vulnerable demographics in the country.

DISCUSSION

By utilising Theo van Leeuwen's discourse analysis framework, mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion are identified. The channel portrays the Taliban unfavourably through these two processes. The process of exclusion involves three headlines that employ nominalisation strategies. This strategy employs linguistic processes, including the utilisation of the "*mashdar*" pattern as a nominal form (Kholifaturrohmah et al., 2022). The nominalisation strategy functions to obscure the identities of those opposing the Taliban, including the United States and Afghanistan. Consequently, extremist acts that might have been ascribed to these groups are instead ascribed to the Taliban (Budiawan & Utomo, 2023). This strategy reveals that CNN Arabic, as a discourse producer, tends to politicise the portrayal of the Taliban within the context of extremism, utilising media figures who reinforce extremist language to emphasise the negative image of specific groups (Flusberg et al., 2024).

CNN Arabic employs five strategies for integration. The concepts include differentiation, identification, determination, categorisation, and abstraction. The differentiation strategy employed by CNN Arabic facilitates a direct comparison between the portrayal of the Taliban and its own representation, thereby rendering the Taliban's actions as chaotic and more conspicuous. This aligns with research by Handayani and Pranoto (2023), which distinguishes political figures from their opponents to depict one unfavourably. The identification, categorisation, and determination strategies elucidate the characteristics of the Taliban, depicting them as extremist and exclusionary. The absence of exaggerations would facilitate a more diplomatic understanding of the discourse, allowing for a neutral and more universal representation of the Taliban (Wang et al., 2025). CNN Arabic employs abstraction as a form of camouflage. This strategy entails the presentation of exaggerated assumptions regarding the Taliban, associating them with chaos and further reinforcing this characterization through the depiction of a general absence of sympathy.

The definition strategy is the most prevalent approach in the inclusion process, as it delineates the discourse with greater clarity and precision. This aligns with research (Majid & Mubarok, 2023), indicating that the media frequently employs identification strategies due to their greater public comprehension. This is evident through the inclusion of supplementary sentences (Iskandar et al., 2023). The audience easily comprehends the intended discourse of CNN Arabic, as it is articulated clearly without requiring interpretation of implied meanings. The definition process does not encompass the inclusion of strategic elements. The inclusion of subordinate clauses represents a typical pattern in sentence structure. The audience will perceive the pattern solely as a component of the sentence. This differentiates it from identification and classification strategies, which are also categorised as figurative processes (Ernanda, 2025), wherein speech producers concentrate on selecting a style of delivery. The audience more readily identifies the delivery method employed by CNN Arabic. The emotional style employed by CNN Arabic presents a more intense portrayal of the Taliban.

The abstraction strategy involves obscuring actors or events, while maintaining a consistent orientation centred on the portrayal of the Taliban as extremists. This strategy is frequently and extensively utilized. This is because, while it pertains to the style of delivery, abstraction is often utilised in the plural form (Shurma, 2024). The discourse can affect the audience; however, it does not explicitly convey the strategic intent on an emotional level. The plural form results from syntactic choices influenced by morphological processes, rather than being solely a matter of lexical choice. This does not negate the recognition of it as a sharp discourse. Nonetheless, while it lacks strategic awareness in presentation patterns, it objectively fosters exaggerated speculation and may generalise the news discourse surrounding the Taliban. For instance, it encompasses the various groups opposing the Taliban, including women and the Afghan populace (Imran & Ismail, 2022). The strategy of abstraction is apparent in the generalisation of the Taliban's image, depicted as detrimental and harmful to the specified groups.

The strategies employed often depict the Taliban as extremist, authoritarian, and chaotic. This inclination towards a negative portrayal was not arbitrary; it was deliberate and systematic, particularly when examined through a critical lens. Research indicates that media outlets associated with CNN, particularly CNN Arabic, were among the most active in reporting on the Taliban movement following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and were the first to cover news related to the movement (Khan et al., 2025; Shahid, 2022). This interest arises from the significant relationship between CNN Arabic and the United States of America. CNN Arabic is associated with American media organisations established in 1980 (Fearon & Rodrigues, 2019; Gries & Jing, 2019). This elucidates the connection between CNN Arabic and the United States. CNN Arabic operates as a segment of a media conglomerate governed by US authorities due to its association with the American CNN network. The United States exerts ideological hegemony over CNN Arabic's portrayal of the Taliban.

The United States holds an ideological opposition to the Taliban. This is associated with the sanctions enacted by the United Nations against the Taliban for providing refuge to Osama bin Laden, a principal actor in the attack on the World Trade Centre in the United States (Abdillah et al., 2024). The United States previously supported the Taliban. As a result of this event, the Taliban was not granted international recognition and was instead condemned by the United States, which characterised it as a group linked to international terrorist organisations, including Al-Qaeda (Crews, 2021). Political interests and conflicts regarding Afghanistan, alongside ideological factors, significantly influence the situation. The United States' ambition to exert control over Afghanistan began to surface in 1952 (Fanani & Andri, 2021), coinciding with the initiation of a strategic approach towards the Middle East. The presence of oil in the Middle East served as a mechanism for exerting control over the international political landscape (Sella, 2023). This factor led to Afghanistan becoming a contested region among major powers, including the United States. This ambition, alongside ideological factors, contributes to the tensions between the United States and the Taliban (Yawar, 2024).

The relationship between the Taliban and the United States, coupled with CNN Arabic's affiliation with the United States, has influenced the portrayal of the Taliban by the US media. This is based on research conducted by Ibrahimi (2023), which indicates that the Taliban and the United States have historically maintained a robust political relationship. The relationship has fluctuated between friendship and antagonism, resulting in a breakdown of amicable relations. Consequently, the Taliban and the

United States have emerged as adversaries in the political arena. The United States' influence over CNN Arabic results in a predominantly negative portrayal of the Taliban. Consequently, the United States employs media discourse as a strategy to combat the Taliban (Hussaini & Morris, 2020), particularly following the establishment of the peace agreement between the parties. This suggests that public opinion and sympathy for the United States will be positively influenced, thereby diminishing support for the Taliban and categorising it as extremist, potentially fostering a spirit of rebellion against the Taliban. The situation of women under Taliban rule, frequently characterised as oppressive and extremist (Amiri, 2024), may incite increased female resistance as a result of amplified media narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that CNN Arabic primarily depicts the Taliban using a negative discourse that highlights themes of radicalism, extremism, and violence. This representation is systematically developed through language, notably through exclusive and inclusive naming practices, as well as linguistic patterns that include identification, abstraction, determination, differentiation, and categorization. The patterns delineate a distinct identity for the Taliban, reflecting the portrayal desired by CNN Arabic and aligning with the media's political objectives. CNN Arabic's reporting functions as both an information source and a tool for shaping ideological discourse. This study helps readers critically distinguish between objective reporting and politically charged information in news headlines related to the Taliban. This study presents several limitations. The analysis was limited to CNN Arabic news texts; thus, the findings are not generalisable to other media outlets. This study lacked audience analysis and was constrained by a specific timeframe, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the dynamics of discourse change. Further research is recommended to broaden the scope of the study by comparing the representation of the Taliban across various Arab and international media. This should involve combining discourse analysis with audience studies and conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in media representation strategies in relation to developments in the global political context.

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