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The Language of Sports Media on El Heddaf TV about Sports Crises El Harrach-Rouissat match crisis as a model

Abstract

This study examines sports media discourse during times of crisis, using the coverage of the match crisis between USM El Harrach and Mostakbal Rouissat by El Heddaf TV as a case study. It applies both linguistic and communication analysis to assess how the event was portrayed.

Findings revealed the use of emotional language and a clear bias, which contributed to escalating rather than calming the crisis. The study also highlighted a lack of balance, objectivity, and diversity of perspectives in the media coverage.

The study recommends adopting a more professional and neutral approach in crisis reporting and emphasizes the need to train sports journalists in crisis communication to strengthen the media's role as a constructive actor in the sports field.

Keywords: *media discourse, discourse analysis, sports media, sports crisis*

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İdman böhranları ilə bağlı El Heddaf TV-də idman mediasının dili model olaraq El Harrach-Rouissat matçı böhranı

Xülasə

Bu araşdırma, bir nümunə kimi El Heddaf TV tərəfindən USM El Harrach və Mostakbal Rouissat arasındakı matç böhranının işıqlandırılmasından istifadə edərək, böhran dövrlərində idman mediası diskursunu araşdırır. O, hadisənin necə təsvir olunduğunu qiymətləndirmək üçün həm linqvistik, həm də ünsiyyət təhlilini tətbiq edir.

Təpintilər emosional dildən istifadə edildiyini və böhranı sakitləşdirməkdən daha çox yüksəltməyə kömək edən açıq bir qərəzliyi ortaya qoydu. Tədqiqat həmçinin mediada işıqlandırmada tarazlığın, obyektivliyin və perspektivlərin müxtəlifliyinin olmamasına diqqət çəkib.

Tədqiqat, böhran hesabatlarında daha peşəkar və neytral yanaşmanın mənimsənilməsini tövsiyə edir və medianın idman sahəsində konstruktiv aktor kimi rolunu gücləndirmək üçün idman jurnalistlərini böhran kommunikasiyasında hazırlamaq zərurətini vurğulayır.

Açar sözlər: *media diskursu, diskurs təhlili, idman mediası, idman böhranı*

Introduction

Sports media is one of the most important actors in the socio-cultural and social field, due to its immense ability to shape public opinion and create a state of emotional and intellectual interaction with sports issues and events.

It doesn't just convey news; it also acts as a mirror reflecting societal tensions and contributes to shaping public perceptions and attitudes, especially in situations marked by tension or those that touch upon belonging and identity.

With the increasing importance of various types of sports in Algerian society, media outlets, especially specialized sports channels, have become central in shaping public discussions about sports as a social, cultural, and economic system. In this context, the ethical and professional responsibility placed upon these media outlets is growing.

They should not be merely neutral transmitters, but responsible actors who balance the public's right to information with the necessity of maintaining social calm.

From this perspective, the "El Heddaf" sports channel stands out as one of the most prominent players in the Algerian sports media landscape. according to its wide reach and strong influence, it has become a reference in broadcasting and analyzing various sporting events.

However, its coverage of some controversial events, such as the crisis in the Union of Harrach and Future of Rouissat match, has raised several questions about the nature of the media discourse used, the limits of neutrality in its coverage, and the extent to which it adheres to the rules of media professionalism.

Research

This crisis, with the accompanying public tension, exchange of accusations, and tense security containment, serves as a significant example through which the discourse of the sports channel can be deconstructed using the media discourse analysis method, which focuses on understanding linguistic content, pragmatic levels, and how mental images are constructed in the recipient. In recent years, sports media discourse has become one of the most influential forms of discourse in shaping public opinion, particularly in societies where sports hold a central place in daily life, such as in Algeria. The importance of this discourse increases when it comes to tense situations or events that spark controversy and tension, such as the crises witnessed in some local matches in various national leagues, whose repercussions are not limited to the field but extend to fan behavior and broader societal interaction.

In this context, a main question arises about how the media, particularly sports channels, deals with these crises: Do they contribute to calming the situation and providing professional and balanced coverage? Or could it sometimes turn into a passive actor that fuels tension and directs public opinion towards charged and emotional positions?

The crisis surrounding the Future of Rouissat and union of El Harrach match has brought this issue back to the forefront, after the coverage of this encounter by the "El Heddaf" channel sparked mixed reactions. Some considered that the language used in the coverage did not take into account the sensitive context and contained harsh expressions and content that could be understood as inciting public opinion and being biased at the same time.

This is where the study's problem stems from: an attempt to understand and analyze the nature of this media discourse during a crisis moment, by deconstructing its linguistic structure, communication style, and investigating the extent to which the channel adheres to neutrality and objectivity, as well as exploring the potential impact of this discourse on the receiving audience.

The absence of scientific analysis of such discourse keeps sports media beyond accountability and evaluation, and perpetuates practices that may negatively impact sports and social peace. Therefore, this study seeks to answer a central question:

What is the nature of the media discourse presented by "El Heddaf" channel during its coverage of the crisis in the Union of Harrach and Future of Rouissat match? And was it a neutral professional speech or a biased and charged one? What are the communication and linguistic dimensions that shaped this discourse?

This question leads to a set of sub-questions:

1. - What linguistic and terminological characteristics distinguished the channel's media discourse during the coverage?
2. - How were communication messages formulated and presented to the public during the crisis coverage?
3. - What type of communication strategies are used (de-escalation, escalation, bias, incitement, etc.)?

4. - To what extent did the "El Heddaf" channel respect the ethics of media work in covering the crisis?
5. - What is the potential impact of this speech on sports fans and local public opinion?
6. - Can the channel's coverage be considered a positive or negative model in managing sports media crises?

2. Methodology and concepts:

2.1. Methodology:

This study adopted a descriptive analytical approach in its analytical method, as it is the most suitable for understanding the nature of sports media discourse and deconstructing its structure within the context of a specific crisis.

The discourse analysis method was also employed as a qualitative research tool that allows for delving into the linguistic and symbolic content of media discourse and exploring the explicit and implicit messages broadcast by the "El Heddaf" channel during its coverage of the crisis surrounding the Union of Harrach and Future of Rouissat match.

Tool:

The qualitative content analysis tool was also used to monitor the rhetorical and linguistic strategies of Al-Heddaf channel, such as: vocabulary selection, methods of description and framing, type of guests, order of events, and the use of images and accompanying music... in addition to analyzing the communicative context in which the speech was produced.

Content analysis is defined as:

A highly flexible research tool, widely used in library and media studies, with diverse research objectives. This tool is applied in qualitative, quantitative, and sometimes mixed research frameworks, and uses a wide range of analytical techniques to extract results and place them in their proper context (Domas White & E. Marsh, 2006, p. 22).

Sample:

The study included an analytical sample consisting of a set of media content (sports bulletins, talk shows, television reports, analyst interventions...). which were broadcast by "El Heddaf" channel during the crisis period between Future of Rouissat and USM El Harrach, such as the programs "On the Record", "VAR El Heddaf", and "Foot 100% ". This sample was selected based on criteria of time, context, and topic.

A sample is defined as:

A predetermined number of observations from a larger population. The methodology used to sample a larger population depends on the type of analysis being used, but may include simple random sampling or systematic sampling. A sample also consists of some proportion or fraction of the total number of elements or units in a specific population. The group of individuals selected from a larger population is called a sample (Radha, p. 72).

Sample representativeness is a key methodological consideration in human research, because the ability to draw accurate conclusions about a population from a sample depends largely on its characteristics (Floyd, T. Woo, Maré, & Kaylin , 2023).

2.2. Concepts:

This study is based on a set of core concepts that form the theoretical and methodological foundation for the analysis, given the nature of the topic related to sports media, discourse, and crises. The following is a presentation of the most important concepts adopted:

Media Discourse:

Media discourse is the set of linguistic and symbolic messages produced by media outlets through their various channels to convey events and influence the recipient (Foucault, 2001).

In the context of this study, media discourse refers to all the media materials (visual, linguistic, symbolic...) broadcast by the "El Heddaf" channel. Related to the crisis of the USM El Harrach vs. MC Rouissat match, whether in the form of reports, analyses, or television discussions.

Sports Media:

Sports media is a specialized branch of media that focuses on covering, reporting, and analyzing sports events and phenomena in various forms (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007).

This refers to the role played by the "El Heddaf" channel as a sports media actor in providing media coverage of sporting events, with a focus on coverage within the context of the crisis.

Discourse Analysis:

Discourse analysis is a scientific approach that focuses on understanding how texts are produced in specific social contexts. It involves studying language, including its explicit and implicit meanings, and linking it to power and ideology (Gee, 2014).

Deconstructing the linguistic and visual content presented by the "El-Heddaf" channel and exploring its implications within the context of the crisis, in terms of language, bias, incitement, or de-escalation.

The Sports Crisis:

A crisis is an unusual situation characterized by tension and instability that affects the image of an institution or entity and often requires special media or administrative intervention. (Coombs, 2014)

The crisis is understood as the event surrounding the match between USM El Harrach and MC Rouissat, and the subsequent media and fan tension and strong reactions within the sports community.

3. Results and Discussion:

3.1. Theoretical approach:

This study relies on two main approaches:

Media Framing Theory:

Media framing theory is one of the most prominent modern communication theories that has contributed to explaining how media messages are constructed and directed, and their impact on the recipient.

The theory originated in the context of the development of media studies influenced by social psychology, particularly through the work of Irving Goffman, and then developed further by researchers such as Entman and Iyengar.

This theory is based on the fundamental assumption that the media does not simply transmit events, but frames them in a specific way by selecting certain angles, focusing on specific aspects, and ignoring others, which influences how the public understands the event or crisis. (Charaudeau, 2005)

Assumptions of the Theory:

Media framing theory focuses on the following assumptions:

- The event is not inherently neutral; rather, it is presented through a linguistic and narrative framework that gives it a specific meaning.

- The journalist or media organization chooses the "frame" from several available possibilities for presenting reality.

Media frames shape interpretations and evaluations of reality and influence the moral judgments formed by the public.

Sometimes how a news story is presented is more important than the story itself, as the framing controls attention and overall impression.

- The media doesn't just tell people "what to think," but "how to think about it", which is the idea that distinguishes framing from agenda-setting theory (Entman, 1993).

Criticisms of the Theory:

Despite its analytical and explanatory value, media framing theory has not escaped criticism.

The most prominent of these criticisms are:

- The ambiguous nature of the concept of "frame," as it is used with multiple meanings such as: bias, manipulation, angle, which creates confusion in its application.

- Lack of a unified measurement model, as qualitative and quantitative analysis tools differ among researchers.

- Ignoring the role of the active audience, as the theory implicitly assumes that the audience passively receives framing without resistance or self-analysis.

- Overemphasis on the text at the expense of other social and cultural factors that influence reception.

- Intersection with other theories such as agenda-setting theory and cultivation theory, creating conceptual overlap (Iyengar, 1991).

Applying the Theory to the Study Subject: In light of this theory, the language of sports media discourse on the "El Heddaf" channel during its coverage of the Harrah and Rouissat match crisis can be analyzed by:

1- Dominant Frame:

The channel adopted a framework that focused on the victim and the perpetrator, promoting the Harrach team as the victim of "arbitrary injustice," while portraying the future of Rouissat as the direct cause of the crisis.

2- Subframes Used:

- Sports Excitement Frame: Using phrases like "refereeing farce", "unprecedented events", "sports disaster".

- Framework of Public Violence: Intensively showcasing scenes of rioting and public confrontations.

- Moral Condemnation Framework: Through analysts' comments that included harsh value judgments against certain parties at the expense of others.

3- Neglecting Spare Frame:

- The coverage of the real causes of the crisis, such as weak organization or security framework, was missing.

- Ignoring the legal and administrative aspects, and the absence of neutral analyses from specialists.

4- The Impact of Framing on the Audience:

"El Heddaf's" coverage, according to framing theory, contributed to directing public opinion towards holding one party responsible for the crisis, which could lead to strained relations between the teams' fans or between the clubs and the Algerian Football Federation.

Applying framing theory to the media coverage of "El-Heddaf" channel reveals that the way the crisis was presented was more impactful than the details of the event itself. The choice of vocabulary, the repetition of violent scenes, and the analyses of the guests all contribute to forming a framework that guides the recipient's understanding in a non-neutral way.

Discourse Analysis Theory:

Discourse theory is one of the most prominent interdisciplinary theories that has contributed to the analysis of communication, political, social, and cultural phenomena by focusing on language as a tool for power and meaning. According to Norman Fairclough, discourse refers to the totality of texts and linguistic actions produced within a specific social context, which reflect and reproduce patterns of power and ideology.

The theory arose within the context of the development of modern linguistics, particularly with Foucault, who argued that discourse not only reflects reality but also produces and defines it. Then came "Verkauf", "Van Dijk" and "Laclau" to develop the theory and apply it to media and politics.

Basic Assumptions of the Theory:

This theory is based on a set of basic assumptions, the most prominent of which are:

- a. Language is not neutral; rather, it is used to construct social reality and establish dominant meanings.

- b. Every speech contains an ideological stance, whether explicit or implicit.

- c. Discourse reproduces power and social relations.

- d. Discourse analysis is not limited to texts; it also includes context, actors, and social structures.

- e. The audience receives the speech within their existing cognitive and value structures, and may reinterpret or resist it (Fairclough, 1995).

Despite the great explanatory value of discourse theory, it has faced some criticism, including:

- f. The highly interpretive nature, as discourse analysis is often interpretive and subjective, which reduces objectivity.

- g. The absence of standardized analysis criteria, as there are no clear standard tools, which opens the door to varying interpretations.

h. Overemphasis on the linguistic dimension in some applications leads to the neglect of economic and institutional dimensions.

i. Difficulty in generalizing the results, as the discourse is often analyzed within local and specific contexts.

j. Confusing description and criticism, where some analysts blend analysis with ideological critical bias (Charaudeau, 2005).

Fourth: Applying the Theory to the Study Subject:

Discourse theory can be applied to the study topic by analyzing the structure and content of the media language used by "El-Heddaf" channel during its coverage of the crisis.

3.2. Discussion:

The analytical aspect of this study aims to deconstruct the structure of the media discourse presented by the "El Heddaf" channel during its coverage of the crisis accompanying the match between union of El Harrach and Future of El Rouissat, relying on linguistic and communicative discourse analysis tools, following systematic scientific steps.

First: The Sample and Studied Materials

A selection of reports, television segments, and filmed coverage broadcast by "El Heddaf" channel, such as the programs "Ala Makshouf", "VAR El Heddaf", and "Foot 100%," during the crisis period, in addition to statements from journalists and sports analysts within live and recorded programs, were chosen.

Secondly: Levels of analysis:

1- Linguistic analysis:

The focus in this section was on:

- The terms used: semantically charged words such as "assault", "scandal", "chaos", and "punishment".
- Grammatical structure: The use of declarative sentences versus imperative sentences, and the style of rhetorical questioning.
- Pronouns: The use of the collective pronoun "we" versus "they", which reflects bias or the formation of the us/them dichotomy.
- Linguistic connotations: Analyzing how emotional or rational styles are employed to shape public opinion.

2- Communication analysis:

The nature of the coverage was analyzed according to the following communication models:

- Shannon-Weaver model: to identify the sender, the message, the medium, the receiver, and the noise.
- Lasswell's model: answering the question: Who says? What? For which audience? By what means? And with what impact?
- The news frame: How was the crisis framed as a dramatic event? Was the event exaggerated or downplayed?
- Strategies for meaning-making: such as framing, narrativization, and repetition.

Third: Media content analysis:

- Tone of the discourse: The channel's tendency towards escalation in some segments was noted, with a focus on the confrontational aspect between the two teams.
- Diversity of sources: The lack of balance in presenting viewpoints, as more space was given to the statements of the officials of Union de Larbaâ compared to those of the representatives of Mustaqbal El-Mohammedia.
- Images and scenes: The channel relied on scenes of player tension, police intervention, and clashes that occurred between the players of Union of Larbaâ and some staff at the Rouissat stadium, which contributed to framing the event as a "sports violence crisis".
- Partiality and Objectivity: Several reports seemed to exhibit a level of undisclosed bias by implicitly siding with one party over the other via this table.

The element	Description	Observations
Report title	"Chaos in Rouissat... Who bears responsibility?"	A framing title suggesting the presence of a guilty party.
Tone of the speech	Escalation/Disparagement	Using phrases like: "farce," "refereeing disaster"
Sources of discourse	USM El Harrach officials, players, analysts close to the club, El Heddaf TV journalists	Almost complete absence of the opinion of the officials of Mustaqbal Al-Rouissat.
The displayed images	Fights, fan protests, police intervention	Selective choice that visually amplifies the event
Linguistic analysis	Use of exclusionary pronouns "They are the reason..."	Promotion of an image of an aggressor and a victim
Communicative analysis	Sending the message directly to the public without vocal diversity	The discourse is more directed than merely conveying information.
Crisis framework	Negative framing (chaos, violence, refereeing crisis)	Absence of a constructive framework (calls for calm or dialogue except in very few cases)
The potential impact	Forming a negative opinion of Rouissat, fueling polarization, racism, and hate speech against the residents of the south, specifically the state of Ouargla	Unprofessional discourse at a critical stage

Analytical Table No. 1: Prepared by the researcher

4. General results and Recommendations:

The study reached the following results:

- The discourse was not entirely neutral, but rather leaned towards provocation by selecting escalating vocabulary.
- The lack of diversity in media sources has led to a single perspective.
- Media coverage contributed to shaping a negative perception of the sports security situation.
- Linguistic analysis revealed that the channel focused on highlighting the responsibility of the arbitration and the organizational circumstances.
- From a communication perspective, approaches aimed at de-escalation or objective treatment that could reduce the intensity of tension between the concerned parties were absent.
- The role of the journalist as a key player in shaping opinion, rather than just reporting events, has become prominent.
- The language used in the speech tended towards incitement, employing strong vocabulary and assigning blame to a specific party for what happened.
- The lack of balance in coverage contributed to creating a biased mental image for the recipient, which contradicts the ethics of professional sports journalism.

Recommendations:

The study concluded with a number of recommendations, the most prominent of which are:

- The necessity for Algerian sports channels, especially "El Heddaf" channel, to adhere to standards of balance and neutrality in covering crises.
- Training sports journalists on how to handle crises with high professionalism, especially in terms of selecting language and vocabulary.
- Adopting clear standards for selecting the terminology used and avoiding emotional language or phrases that contribute to fueling conflict or polarization between teams and fans.
- Prepare a special code of ethics for Algerian sports media that defines how to cover sports conflicts and problems professionally and calmly.
- Giving fair space to the other opinion and avoiding highlighting one side over the other.

- Encouraging media outlets to play a constructive mediating role between sports teams, management, and fans by proposing realistic solutions and hosting diverse voices in their coverage.
- Developing media content aimed at educating the public about the importance of sportsmanship and respecting others, which reduces aggressive behavior both on and off the field.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of this study, which was investigated to analyze sports media discourse in times of crisis using the example of El Heddaf TV's coverage of the USM El Harrach vs. MST Rouissat match, it was found that sports media not only broadcasts events, but also directly contributes to shaping public perceptions, guiding public opinion, and sometimes exacerbating or calming situations. Linguistic and communication analysis revealed that the discourse often lacked objectivity and tended toward the use of emotional language and biased framing, which contributed to increasing public polarization.

The study also revealed weaknesses in the use of professional media mechanisms in managing sports crises, reflecting the need for a radical review of coverage methods and the training of specialized media personnel.

Based on these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of developing the performance of sports media by establishing a professional culture that adheres to the principles of neutrality and works to calm public opinion rather than escalate it. It also calls for greater cooperation between the media and sports institutions and for the encouragement of scientific research that contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between media and sports in crisis contexts. Thus, this study has opened a space for discussion about the role of the media in the sports field, hoping to contribute to building a more balanced and responsible media discourse in the future.

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