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Attack**

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## Compositional Elements of Photographic Coverage of the Westgate Mall Terrorist Attack

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Terrorism is a global threat that has prompted extensive research, with mass media playing a crucial role in reporting such events. This study investigated the compositional elements of photographic coverage of the Westgate Mall terrorist attack in Nairobi, Kenya, on September 21, 2013.

**Methodology:** Photographs from the *Daily Nation*, *Standard*, and *New York Times* were analysed. Using qualitative descriptive research and content analysis through MaxQDA software, the study identified patterns and themes in the images, focusing on denotative, stylistic-semiotic, connotative, and ideological representations.

**Findings:** It was found that camera angles, shot proximity, and image sizes were strategically used by photojournalists to convey messages and emotions. Large images on front pages provided visual appeal, while medium and small images added content and facilitated sensationalized storytelling. Shot proximity varied to deliver specific messages, with few close-ups used to avoid evoking sombre emotions or aiding terrorist propaganda.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study contributes to the existing mass media research by highlighting the importance of thoughtful image selection and composition in responsible photojournalism to balance accurate reporting with mitigating potential harm.

**Keywords:** *Accurate Reporting, Camera Angles, Compositional Elements, Connotative Representations, Shot Proximity Visual Appeal*

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## INTRODUCTION

The mass media plays a crucial role in informing the public about terrorist attacks, often sensationalizing the coverage to boost circulation and viewership (Eid, 2013). This symbiotic relationship benefits both the media, by increasing their audience, and terrorists, by gaining publicity (Kampf, 2014). Scholars have raised concerns about this dynamic, emphasizing the intertwined nature of media and terrorism (Gibbs, 1989; Nacos, 2007). Terrorism in Kenya dates back to the 1980s, starting with the bombing of the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi (Momanyi, 2015). Memorable attacks include the 1998 American Embassy bombing, the 2014 Mpeketoni massacre, the 2015 Garissa University assault, and the 2019 DusitD2 complex raid, all of which were extensively covered by the media through vivid photographic reports.

On September 21, 2013, Al-Shabaab-affiliated terrorists attacked the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, killing 67 people and injuring 240 others over an 80-hour siege (Ong'onda, 2016). The attack targeted a diverse crowd, including 18 foreigners, to maximize global media coverage and raise the group's profile. The Kenyan media has been pivotal in reporting terrorism but has faced criticism for its coverage. Concerns include a tendency to emphasize dramatic and violent aspects of terrorism, as highlighted in a 2014 Media Council of Kenya report, and studies indicating that major newspapers like the Daily Nation and The Standard often sensationalize terrorist incidents to attract readership, thereby undermining the depth and context needed for a well-informed public. The mass media, particularly photojournalism, has long been criticized for its role in shaping public perceptions of terrorism through visual reporting, as seen in major events like the 9/11 attacks, the Beslan school siege, and the London Bombings. This study addressed the gap in understanding how visual framing of terrorism, particularly through compositional elements, influences public perception and potentially exacerbates the spread of terror, given that media coverage often remains sensational, despite advancements in communication.

### **Compositional Elements of Photographic Coverage of Violent Events**

The role of the media, both print and electronic, is to inform, educate, and shape public awareness and attitude. The media is supposed to provide fair, balanced, and timely information to the public to allow them to make informed decisions. The media frames news content by selecting, excluding, and emphasizing specific areas of the story. Photographs have different levels of appeal to viewers. Some are interesting and breath-taking, while others are not. What distinguishes the quality of one photograph from the other are its compositional elements. The compositional elements of photographs of an incident in media reporting can entail image sizes.

The use of large images in print media increases the likelihood of the object being viewed favourably by the audience (Cope et al., 2011). Ulloa et al. (2015) affirm that news with large images attracts readers. Hoffman and Wallach (2007) noted that front-page news with large photographs influences readers more than small photographs placed inside the newspaper. Pfefferbaum et al. (2014) observed that large images depicting terror can shape public opinion or cause trauma. Medium images convey essential information while regulating emotional impact (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Bilgen, 2013; Schmid, 2021). Small images, while less graphic, minimize emotional distress (DiGrazia et al., 2013; Abdalla et al., 2021). This study analyses the compositional elements of photographs in media reporting, focusing on the impact of image size on public perception and emotional responses.

Angle of view is another critical compositional element of the photographs published by print media. Camera angle is defined as the measurement in degrees of the width of the frame from the point of the lens (MasterClass, 2021). According to Sakota (2023), the particular location where the lens is placed when taking a photograph is the camera angle. Usually, the camera's location in relation to the object to be captured and the subject the project entails has a significant impact on how viewers perceive the subject. Typically, fewer degrees imply a small angle, and this means a tighter frame on the subject. This study will similarly examine how camera angles, as a critical compositional element, influence the perception of photographs in the context of the Westgate terrorist attack. Literature shows that a high angle is characterized by more degree and a wider frame, making the object appear smaller in size and vulnerable (Kindem, 2015). James (2021) and Brick Central (2022) show that high-angle images demean the subjects. Images taken from above or from a high angle may be judged negatively because the reader views them from above (Maathuis, 2010).

In terrorism reporting, high-angle shots may connote weakness, passivity, and insignificance (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Separately, Sutherland (2004) indicates that eye-level shots are used in factual situations to make readers believe the scene is real. The publication of such images conveys the human impact of terrorism and compels the audience to engage with the narratives on a deeper emotional level. Such images offer a natural and relatable point of view because they present scenes from a perspective that mimics how a person would see events in real life (Spence & Navarro, 2011). This study investigated the impact of high-angle and eye-level shots on public perception in the context of the Westgate terrorist attack, exploring how these angles influence the portrayal of vulnerability and realism in terrorism reporting.

Long-angle shots can also be used to cover the entire background. According to Chao and Jiarui (2023), the long shot records an original ecology that is close to real life. Long-angle shots magnify the dimensional scale of the damage across space (Liu, 2018). Separately, the use of medium-angle shots offers a balanced and comprehensive view of the scene by avoiding extreme distortion. As noted by Adams (2023), this compositional strategy helps in the origination of an accurate narrative of the event by capturing a visual perspective that creates a balance between proximity and context. Finally, shots taken from a low angle make the object more superior and positively judged because the audience looks at it from below (Hewitt, 2010; Lannom, 2019). A low-angle shot may depict an object or person as powerful and important (Merkt et al., 2022). The reason is that it fosters a perceptual hierarchy that positions the subject as superior, thereby influencing public perception and reinforcing the narrative of authority within the context of the depicted terror issues (Wetzstein, 2017). The compositional strategy empowers the survivors. This study will similarly analyse the use of long-angle, medium-angle, and low-angle shots in the photographic coverage of the Westgate terrorist attack, focusing on how these angles influence the depiction of damage, narrative accuracy, and perceptions of power and authority.

Photojournalists use shot proximity to frame photographs and convey various elements of a scene. An extreme wide shot establishes the setting and makes the subject appear small and overwhelmed by the surroundings (Cadrage GmbH, 2022; Psaroloco Media Literacy, 2020). A medium-wide shot balances showing the surrounding area and the subject's facial expressions, offering context and emotional insight (Kolodzy, 2013). Medium-close-up shots focus on facial expressions while maintaining some context, thus balancing emotional content and the setting (Lannom, 2020). Close-up shots concentrate on the subject's face to reveal intimate emotions,

often evoking strong reactions from viewers (Adobe, 2023a; Freeman, 2021). This analysis of shot proximity, including extreme wide shots, medium-wide shots, medium-close-up shots, and close-up shots, in the photographic coverage of the Westgate terrorist attack highlights how these compositional strategies convey context, emotion, and the subject's relationship to their surroundings.

Previously, Kunii (2012) assessed the framing of Pearl Harbor and the 9/11 terrorist attack in the Asahi Shimbun and the New York Times, examining camera angle, picture size, proximity, and placement. Most images were eye-level, offering objective presentation. Proximity differed between 1941 and 2001, with larger pictures in 2001. The New York Times increased picture size in 2001, unlike the Asahi Shimbun. Newton (2013) found that larger photographs in newspapers increase readership, with higher engagement for larger images. Tiemens (1970) and Mandell and Shaw (1973) showed camera angles impact audience perception. Hoffman and Wallach (2007) and Carroll and McCombs (2003) highlighted the influence of story placement and picture size on readership. Reese (2016) noted that captions affect the framing and interpretation of images. The study's focus aligns with the framing and multimodality theories, which indicate that the use elements like visuals, angle of view, shot proximity, and depth of field in reporting news is similar to how textual frames use symbols and rhetorical devices (Rodriguez, 2011; Welch, 2014; Bucher, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The section presents the data collection and analysis procedures used in this study. A systematic process was duly followed to select the images analysed. In this chapter, the research design used in this study is explained. The chapter also provides details of the target population. Additionally, the sampling procedure and sample size of the study are indicated and justified. Finally, the data collection tools and analysis procedures are also discussed.

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research method. The design was appropriate in this case because qualitative methods are effective in interpreting the meaning of non-numerical data to provide insights (Punch, 2013). Moreover, in-depth information was collected to answer the research questions. In this case, a descriptive content analysis as a qualitative approach was utilised. Through a systematic method, written and visual communication messages were interpreted and patterns, themes, or biases identified.

Additionally, semiology method of data analysis was adopted. According to Mingers and Willcocks (2017), semiology is the review of the generation and interpretation of meaning through signs and symbols. In this case, it was possible to answer questions on how the compositional elements of images/photographs created meaning beyond the general view. Therefore, it was possible to understand meanings that could have been missed by other methods. With a semiology approach, it is possible to illustrate how connotative and denotative meanings are connected. Consequently, the compositional elements in visual representation that can trigger hidden meanings were interpreted and presented in words, making semiology a viable method for studying news photography without emotional bias.

### **Sampling and Sample Size**

To examine the compositional elements that were used in the photographs published to portray the terrorist attack at the Westgate Mall, the photographs published on the first three pages of

*the Daily Nation, the Standard and the New York Times* Newspapers were analysed. A total of 50 newspaper pages related to the Westgate terrorist attack were analysed. The selected number of images was a sufficiently large sample size to ensure diverse representation and extensive analysis. Moreover, the selected number of images was manageable for a thorough and detailed examination. Therefore, using purposive sampling, 21 (42%) photographs were drawn from *the Daily Nation*, 19 (38%) from *the Standard* newspaper, and 10 (20%) from *the New York Times* newspaper. The unit of analysis was termed as a figure, where it denoted a single page of *the Daily Nation, the Standard, or the New York Times* newspaper, containing one or more sub-figures. The study strictly focused on the coverage of the first three days of the attack. These days were the 22nd, 23rd, and 24th of September 2013. The first three days were chosen for study due to the intensive coverage that took place then. The selected time frame was critical for examining whether the media toned down the presentation of the situation or focused on making it sensational. The fourth day, often associated with the aftermath and potential resolution, was less relevant for this specific analysis, which aimed to understand the initial impact and framing of the tragedy. Print media was chosen because it covers a wider range of news content in comparison to radio and television. Despite the space constraints of print media, it offers a depth and detail that broadcast media cannot match because it is limited by time. Every inch in print is valuable since it allows for comprehensive storytelling, which sets benchmarks for what is newsworthy. On the other hand, television's dynamic visuals provide immediacy and impact. However, for this study, print media was preferred due to its ability to offer detailed visual framing and in-depth analysis. The static nature of print images, especially newspapers, allows for a focused examination of how photojournalists depict intense emotions, providing a clearer understanding of their framing choices without the influence of motion and sound.

### **Data Management, Analysis and Presentation**

A coding process was used to condense data by categorizing photographs into manageable groups. In this case, three coding strategies, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, were used in line with Williams and Moser's (2019) framework. Open coding and selective coding were used. Due to the complex nature of photograph analysis, MaxQDA software was chosen for data coding, as recommended by Elliott (2018). MaxQDA facilitated the development of complex code groups that would have been challenging to manage manually, enabling precise retrieval of data associated with specific codes for comprehensive review and analysis. MaxQDA addresses the limitations of traditional qualitative data analysis methods and is widely used for coding and analysing various forms of unstructured data, such as interviews, audio-visuals, and social media content (MAXQDA, 2020). To facilitate the coding process, a code sheet schema, guided the identification of data-driven codes through the examination and review of sampled photographs. The identified themes were integrated into cohesive and meaningful expressions. To establish the types of frames used in photographs published after the Westgate attack, the first level of visual analysis by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) was adopted. The main aim was to describe the photographs to determine their superficial meaning both to the communicator or photojournalist and the recipient of the messages or the viewer.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The current chapter presents the study's findings, discussion, and interpretation. In this case, the compositional elements of the photographic coverage of the Westgate Mall attack was

assessed. The analysis entailed a review of photographs' compositional elements, in each case, in terms of various sizes, different camera angles, and shot proximity options. The *Daily Nation*, the *Standard*, and the *New York Times* published the images analysed.

### Compositional Elements of the Photographs

The *Daily Nation*, the *Standard*, and the *New York Times* published images with different compositional characteristics during the West Gate Mall attack period. The main attributes were image size, camera angle, and shot proximity, and these differed among the images published by the *Daily Nation*, the *Standard*, and the *New York Times*.

### Image Size

In terms of image size, large, medium, and small-sized images were published by *Daily Nation*, the *Standard*, and the *New York Times*. The differently-sized images exhibited various connotations and denotations. Regarding large images, it was established that the intention of using such photographs in reporting incidents like terror attacks is a deliberate editorial decision aimed at capturing readers' attention, creating a connection with the audience, and influencing public opinion. Table 1 summarises the categorization and characterization of images per compositional elements, particularly size.

**Table 1: Image Categorization by Size**

No.	Newspaper	DN	STD	NYT	Total	Percentage
1	Number of Pictures	21	19	10	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	Percentage	42%	38%	20%	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
No	Type of Frame	DN	STD	NYT	TOTAL	Percentage
1	Large	5	7	4	<b>16</b>	<b>32%</b>
2	Medium	5	7	3	<b>15</b>	<b>30%</b>
3	Small	11	5	3	<b>19</b>	<b>38%</b>
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Therefore, large images help the media in reporting events and shaping societal responses to traumatic events. In this case, a large image, Fig 1: STD/22/P2A, was published by the *Standard* newspaper. The image shows a man running carrying a child. Behind the man are two women.



*Figure 1: STD/22/P2A*

Other newspapers, the *Daily Nation* and the *New York Times* published large images too. The findings agree with existing literature regarding the use of large images in print media. For instance, Cope et al. (2011), indicates that large and vivid imaging increases the chances of the object being viewed more favourably by the audience. Additionally, Ulloa et al. (2015) affirm that news with large images is attractive to readers. Hoffman and Wallach (2007) noted that news on the front page of a newspaper accompanied by large photographs has more influence upon readers compared to the news with small photographs and in the inner part of the newspaper. Consequently, information can be passed easily and recalled for a long time. Although the intention is to attract readers, large images can inadvertently play into terrorists' hands by sensationalizing their actions. Pfefferbaum et al. (2014) note that large images of terror can shape public opinion or cause trauma, potentially leading to PTSD among those exposed to graphic content (Ahern et al., 2004; McLeish & Del Ben, 2008). Newspapers like the *New York Times*, the *Standard*, and the *Daily Nation*, while aiming to inform, may foster fear and anxiety through their use of large images, contributing to terrorists' goals of spreading fear, as noted by Jařab (2020).

Separately, it was found that the use of medium-sized images in newspaper when reporting terror attacks represents an editorial strategy that seeks to balance visual information with the ethical considerations of sensitivity and responsible journalism. The three newspapers, the *New York Times*, the *Standard*, and the *Daily Nation*, published medium-sized photographs. The *Daily Nation* published five (5) such images, the *Standard* nine (9), and the *New York Times* four (4). An example of a medium-sized image is Fig 2: NYT/23/P1A, which was published on the first page of the 23rd September 2013 edition of the New York Times.



Figure 2: NYT/23/P1A

The use of medium-sized images by newspapers demonstrated a balanced and responsible approach to journalism, conveying essential information while mitigating potential emotional consequences for readers (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Framing, which highlights certain aspects of perceived reality (Bilgen, 2013), allowed the newspapers to define the terrorism problem, explain causes, and perform moral evaluations without sensationalism. This approach minimized drama, shock, and fear (Holman et al., 2013), fostering trustworthiness and credibility. Such responsible reporting is crucial for maintaining the media's role as a reliable information source during critical events (Schmid, 2021).



It was also found that small-sized images were used in reporting terror events as a photojournalism strategy aimed at mitigating potential psychological distress, adhering to ethical considerations, and challenging traditional sensationalism. Therefore, the approach fosters a more measured and responsible approach to visual storytelling in the context of sensitive and traumatic events. The three newspapers, the *Daily Nation*, the *Standard*, and the *New York Times*, also published small images. However, such images were not as many as the medium-sized and large photographs. Fig 3: DN/22/P2A shows an example of a small-sized image published on the second page of the *Daily Nation* of September 22, 2013.



*Figure 3: DN/22/P2A*

The *Daily Nation*, *New York Times*, and *Standard* demonstrated responsible journalism by using small images to minimize emotional harm while informing the public about terror incidents (DiGrazia et al., 2013; Abdalla et al., 2021). This approach balanced the need for information with sensitivity, reducing the risk of distress and trauma. Small images, supplemented with detailed text and expert analysis, helped readers understand events without unnecessary panic (Schmid, 2021). By humanizing victims and downplaying perpetrators, the newspapers promoted community solidarity, effectively using images to attract readers and convey messages without excessive graphic content (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2018; Griffin, 2004b; Bendito, 2005).

### **Camera Angle or Angle of View**

Camera angle, or angle of view, is another compositional strategy evident in the images used to report the Westgate Mall terror attack incident because it plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative, influencing perception, and evoking emotional responses. As per the findings, the various camera angle shots used were the high-angle, eye-level angle, low-angle shots, bird's-eye view angle/overhead shot, long-angle shot, medium-angle shot, and ground-level shot.

An example of high-angle image was Fig 4: DN/22/P1, which was published on the first page of the *Daily Nation* on September 22, 2013.



*Figure 4: DN/22/P1*

According to the findings, the use of a high-angle shot enhances the emotional impact of the image, creating a heightened sense of tension, fear, and urgency. It invites viewers to emotionally engage with the subjects' experiences, recognising the universal emotions associated with fear and the instinct to protect loved ones. High-angle photographs significantly influence public perception and emotional response by affecting the framing of events. High-angle shots, where the camera is positioned above the subject, are often seen as demeaning, making the subject appear weak, passive, and insignificant (Maathuis, 2010; James, 2021; Valkenburg et al., 1999). This angle is used to convey emotions associated with terrorism, portraying civilians as vulnerable and soldiers as cornered. However, high-angle images can also depict security officers as powerful and dominant, creating a sense of authority and control over the scene.

Additionally, the photojournalists intentionally used eye-level angle shots to establish a direct and intimate visual connection between the viewer and the subjects. For instance, on the third page of the Daily Nation of September 22, 2013, there was an eye-level image, Fig 5: DN/22/P3C.



*Figure 5: DN/22/P3C*

The use of an eye-level angle in photographing the Westgate Shopping Mall terrorist attack makes events appear realistic and relatable. This agrees with the literature that an eye-level angle presents scenes as one would see them in real life (Spence & Navarro, 2011). This perspective creates a sense of immersion, allowing readers to empathize with the victims and understand the gravity of the situation. Eye-level shots, viewed from a neutral perspective, are trusted more than those from lowered or raised angles (Baranowski & Hecht, 2017). Although eye-level shots can convey emotion and facial detail effectively, they may also cause distress, especially for those directly impacted by the attack.

Low-angle shots were also used by the three newspapers in framing the images. The deliberate compositional choice is a technical decision for communicating power dynamics and dominance. Fig 6: DN/22/P2C is an example of the low-angle shot image published by the *Daily Nation*.



Figure 6: DN/22/P2C

The use of low-angle shots by the three newspapers in reporting the terror events during the attack on the Westgate Shopping Mall facilitated the depiction of dominance and power. In this case, the subject is shown to have authority (Covey et al., 2012). Therefore, since most of the images taken from a low-angle point of view had soldiers and rescuers as the subjects, the approach emphasised authority. The images showing victims had a connotation of empowerment, courage, and resilience to adversity. The low-angle shots are appropriate for making subjects appear bigger and mightier. The photojournalists have managed to portray the images through this angle to make them closer, taller, and wider. Therefore, the subjects portrayed through the low-angle shots appear dominant, powerful, and strong.

It was also found that photojournalists used a bird-eye view shot in framing the Westgate Mall attack. One such image was Fig 7: NYT/23/P1C, published on the first page of the September 23, 2013 edition of the *New York Times*.



NYT/23/P1

*Figure 7: NYT/23/P1C*

Images taken from a bird's-eye-view angle connote insignificance and helplessness. Therefore, the use of a bird's-eye view image by the *New York Times* was a way of showing how the shooting spree caught some victims off-guard and rendered them desperate (Mamer & Rosenberg, 2013). However, the bird's-eye photographs provide a full display of the scene, which makes the reader understand the situation and perceive the events objectively (Goddu, 2020). Therefore, the framing shows how helpless the victims are to emphasise the grave impacts of terrorism (Aldredge, 2022). At the same time, the use of a bird's-eye shot offers the viewer or reader an opportunity to have a full picture of the scene, including surroundings, to formulate an impartial interpretation of the occurrences.

It was also found that in the case of the Westgate Mall terrorist attack, some of the images published by the newspapers were long shots. Such shots help identify the subject in relation to their background. For instance, Fig 8: DN/24/P1B, which was published by the newspaper's edition of 24/9/2013, page 1, shows the subjects and the background, meaning it was a long shot.



*Figure 8: DN/24/P1B*

The use of long-angle shot images by the *Daily Nation*, *Standard*, and *New York Times* is regarded as responsible reporting. Long shots capture a realistic view of events (Chao & Jiarui, 2023), making readers feel they are witnessing the Westgate Mall attack firsthand. This approach fosters audience closeness and participation but also emphasizes the threat, empowering perpetrators, and inducing fear and anxiety. By highlighting architectural features from a lower vantage point, the images unintentionally amplify the terrorists' dominance and

control. This visual portrayal can evoke a sense of vulnerability and helplessness among readers, enhancing the perceived threat of terrorism (Liu, 2018).

Findings also indicated that medium-angle shots were used to frame the Westgate Mall attack. The compositional element offers a balanced and comprehensive view of the scene by avoiding extreme distortion. As noted by Adams (2023), this compositional strategy helps in the origination of an accurate narrative of the event by capturing a visual perspective that creates a balance between proximity and context. For instance, Fig 9: DN/22/P3 is a medium-angle shot showing rescuers looking up.



Figure 9: DN/22/P3

As per the findings, the use of medium-angle shots in reporting Westgate Shopping Mall's terror attack incident provided a comprehensive view of the scene without the extreme distortion that shaped the narrative of the event. The photograph influenced public perception and triggered moderate emotional responses (Grabbe et al., 2016). These images are regarded as emotional equalizers, balancing objects and surroundings (Lawrence, 2023), and depicted the incident's complexity. Medium-angle shots tell a story (Owens, 2017), offering a balanced representation. However, MAS images can elicit strong emotional responses due to their proximity, which, while not overwhelming with graphic details, is clear enough to evoke emotions. This framing facilitates readers' engagement and connection with victims and witnesses, fostering a deeper understanding of the events while maintaining emotional resonance.

Finally, in terms of angle of view, a ground-level shot was used to frame the Westgate Mall attack. One such image was published by the *Daily Nation* on September 24th, 2013 on page 1. The photograph was framed from an extremely low-camera angle, to the extent that the image appears somewhat distorted proportionally. The low camera angle features the police officer as extremely huge and masculine compared to the car behind, which he is taking cover.



Figure 10: DN/24/P1D

The ground-level shots used by the three newspapers to report the 2013 Westgate shopping mall attack conveyed immediacy and urgency, making readers feel as though they were on the scene (Lannom, 2019). This framing provided a balanced view without distortion, enhancing emotional engagement by depicting the situation authentically. The images effectively captured the gravity of the events and humanized the experiences of those involved. However, depicting soldiers in combat mode with ground-level shots highlighted their resilience and superiority, emphasizing strength and commitment (Schummer et al., 2007). Thus, while the approach fostered a strong connection with the audience, it also intensified the emotional impact.

### Shot Proximity

Another next compositional element considered for this study was shot proximity. The shot types used in framing the Westgate Mall attack include an extremely-wide shot, medium-wide shot, medium-close-up shot, and close-up. In this case, few photographs met the extreme wide-shot requirements. For instance, Fig 11: STD/24/P1B, was published by the *Standard*. The image depicts security personnel lying on the floor in combat. The image covers an extensive area of the mall. The purpose of taking this extreme wide shot was to display as much background as possible to let the reader form a mental picture of what was happening and what it took to rescue people.



Figure 11: STD/24/P1B

The findings indicate that the use of an extremely long shot in photojournalism was appropriate in framing the Westgate Mall attack. The reason is that the compositional element often makes the subject appear small and overwhelmed by the surroundings, emphasizing isolation and location (Psaroloco Media Literacy, 2020). While critics argue that such shots may highlight the vulnerability of victims and rescuers, these images offer a comprehensive view of the scene and its context, capturing a wide area to portray the event's scale (Thurlow & Thurlow, 2013). In the reporting of the Westgate Shopping Mall terror attacks, the use of extreme wide or long shots effectively helped readers understand the full scope of the incident.

Wide shots were also used in framing the Westgate Mall terror attack. Wide shot photographs capture subjects without filling the entire frame, leaving space around them to clearly show the background. For instance, the images published on pages 1 and 2 of the New York Times 22/09/2013, particularly, Fig 12: NYT/23/P1C, were wide shots.



Figure 12: NYT/23/P1C

The wide shot perspective reveals the subject's relationship to its environment. Different angles, like aerial or obtuse, were used to depict the subjects and their surroundings, helping readers understand the physical context and the impact of the event (DiZazzo, 2012). These

images effectively conveyed the scale of the disaster, allowing readers to grasp the magnitude of the terror attack and its challenges it posed to the rescuers and victims.

Additionally, medium-wide shot, which are usually long enough to show the surrounding area and, and at the same time, close enough to show some aspects of the subject's facial expression depicting emotions, were utilized in framing the Westgate Mall attack. A medium-wide shot of rescuers in combat mode was published by the *New York Times* (Fig 13: NYT/23/P2). Since the compositional strategy of a medium-wide shot entails the depiction of the subjects' faces, it can be seen that the rescuers are under tension.



*Figure 13: NYT/23/P2*

The publication of medium-wide-shot images by the Standard, Daily Nation, and New York Times in reporting the Westgate Shopping Mall attack offered a balanced view of the event, combining proximity and ethical considerations (Kolodzy, 2013). These images allowed readers to perceive the scene's context and impact, revealing the effects on the immediate vicinity and humanizing both rescuers and victims (DiZazzo, 2012). While the images might evoke shock and sorrow, they fostered emotional engagement and empathy, allowing readers to connect with the individuals involved. However, such images also risk breaching the privacy and dignity of those portrayed.

The findings also indicate that medium close-up shots were used to reveal the subject's full appearance to the audience. A full shot is also used when the photographer wants to feature multiple characters in a single scene. The audience can view the subject's countenance more clearly without necessarily getting too close. Figure 14: DN/22/P2B is one such image that was published by the *Daily Nation* on September 22, 2013 on page 2. The image features a male adult of Asian descent severely wounded by the assault within the Westgate Mall premises.





Figure 14: DN/22/P2B

Although there may be ethical concerns about the numerous medium-close-up shots published by the three newspapers when reporting the Westgate shopping mall terror attack incident, it can be asserted that the images portrayed individuality and emotional intensity appropriately. Medium-close-up images in the reporting of the terror attack at the Westgate Mall align with the principles of responsible photographic coverage. The compositional choice creates a balance between showing the individuals' facial expressions and emotions. Such a portrayal is vital in conveying the human impact of the incident. Therefore, the approach enables photojournalists to create a narrative focus on specific individuals within the larger story, fostering a connection between the audience and the personal experiences of those affected by the tragedy.

Finally, close-up shots, which refer to the type of shots that focus on the subject's face to reveal emotions, were used in farming the Westgate Mall attack. One image, Fig 15: STD/24/P3, published by the *Standard*, met the characteristics of a close-up. The image shows a man crying while being consoled by two women. Probably, the man had lost a close relative through the terrorist attack.



STD 24 P3

Figure 15: STD/24/P3

As much as the proponents of freedom of the press may support the publication of close-up images during the reporting of the Westgate Shopping Mall terror attack, it should be noted that such photographs portray trauma and promote sensationalism. According to Freeman (2021), a close-up picture is intimate because it causes negative emotions. The reason is that the images show clear details of the subjects, hence allowing the reader to capture numerous

details about the subjects' feelings and expressions (Ness, 2020). Consequently, the readers may be traumatized by the intensity of the negative impacts of the incident. For instance, seeing the survivor, the affected person, or responders struggling in pain or crying creates strong emotions. In such cases, the readers may sympathise with the affected people (Hardin & Kiernan, 2022). Therefore, focus on one interesting subject and portray every important detail to tell a story.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study established that media's coverage of terrorist attacks uses various compositional elements to frame reporting of news such as terror attacks. The analysis of images from the *Standard*, *Daily Nation*, and *New York Times* during the Westgate Mall terror attack revealed that camera angle, shot proximity, and image size are crucial in framing the event. The choice of high, middle/eye-level, or low angles influenced viewers' perceptions and emotions. Eye-level shots fostered trust, low-angle images highlighted subjects' superiority, and medium-sized images evoked emotions. Large images were prominent on front pages, while medium and small images provided additional content and context. Shot proximity varied, with extremely wide and medium-close-up shots used to convey scene details and emotional impact. Close-ups were limited to avoid exacerbating trauma and fear. The research concluded that the photojournalist preferred these compositional elements because of their ability to feature the victims' facial expressions and surroundings and to shape perceptions and elicit empathy from viewers. The study recommends that photojournalists should be mindful of how their visuals will be interpreted by viewers, taking into account both the subject and audience. It is crucial to provide context for each photograph, including details like the photojournalist's name, location, and time of capture. Additionally, newspapers should consider including a short list in an appendix detailing each photograph's compositional techniques, such as camera type, focal length, aperture, and depth of field.

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**Characterization:** Using MaxQDA (qualitative data analysis software), the "heroic rescuers" frame was identified. This frame features plain-clothed men or women who are armed and engaged in rescue operations, armed non-uniformed individuals evacuating survivors, and those actively engaging terrorists in combat.