Cohesion in Media Discourse and Its Role in Shaping Public Perception during Crisis Communication

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التماسك في الخطاب الإعلامي ودوره في تشكيل الإدراك العام في التواصل أثناء الأزمات

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Abstract:

The study investigates the role played by cohesive devices in media discourse, focusing on the way cohesion shapes public perception in crisis communication. The study follows Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion together with Fairclough's (1995) model for Critical Discours Analysis. It analyzes an article tackling the recent American fire in Los Angeles. The analysis examines how cohesive devices such as reference, conjunction, substitution, etc. are used to produce a coherent text and control the reader's perception in the crisis. The study investigates how these linguistic means tie the text together to affect emotive and cognitive responses. The study comes out with a highlight to the importance of cohesive tools in probing clarity, and modeling the public's reaction to the disaster. The study proves that cohesion is not save a textual feature of discourse but an essential element in shaping reporting media in crises and influencing public perception.

Key words: Cohesion, Critical Discourse Analysis, Crisis Communication, Media Discourse

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الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور روابط التماسك في الخطاب الإعلامي، مع التركيز على كيفية تشكيل التماسك للإدراك العام أثناء التواصل في الأزمات. باستخدام نموذج هاليدي وحسن (١٩٧٦) للتماسك ونموذج فيركلاف (١٩٩٥) لتحليل الخطاب النقدي، تحلل الدراسة مقالاً يغطي حريق اميركا الأخير في لوس أنجلوس. تبحث الدراسة دور الروابط التماسكية مثل الإشارة، والربط، والاستبدال، وغيرها لإنشاء التماسك في النص وتوجيه فهم القارئ للأزمة. من خلال تحديد أنماط التماسك، تستكشف الدراسة كيفية استخدام هذه الأدوات اللغوية في هيكلة السرد، وتأثير الاستجابات العاطفية والمعرفية. تبرز النتائج أهمية استراتيجيات التماسك في الحفاظ على الوضوح، وتشكيل رد فعل العامة تجاه الكوارث. إذ تظهر هذه الدراسة أن التماسك ليس مجرد عنصر هيكلي في الخطاب، بل هو عنصر حيوي في تشكيل التغطية الإعلامية للأزمات وتأثيرها على الإدراك العام.

كلمات مفتاحية التماسك، تحليل الخطاب النقدي، التواصل في الأزمات، الخطاب الإعلامي

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1.**Introduction** In times of crisis, the different modes of media play a leading role in supporting the public with information which helps guide their understanding and their behaviors and emotive responses towards the situation. Coombs (2007: 25) describes crisis communication as an important factor for directing public perception and affecting their responding in time of emergencies. Crises whether be natural (a wildfire for example) or human-made (a political crisis) or of whatever source, in all of which the way of structuring information and how it is delivered all affect its perception and the audience reaction upon them (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003: 133)One indispensible tool in achieving such an action in communication is cohesion, which implies the linguistic devices that connect entities within a text to get assure that the message flows both logically and coherently. Cohesion, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4), refers to the structural and lexical relationships within a text so as to create unity and logic. In crisis communication, however, cohesive

strategies help linking ideas, creating a smooth movement, and reinforcing significance, in addition to shaping the audience's sensual and cognitive comebacks to the crisis (van Dijk, 2008: 120).The study aims at exploring the way cohesion helps comprehension and how it plays an essential role in outlining the crisis, influencing the public's understanding, and promoting social responses, throughout investigating the use of cohesive strategies in media discourse. The study highlights an article from the BBC in which the disaster of Los Angeles fire as a recent crisis event is tackled, providing an example of how cohesion works in real-world media discourse.In an attempt for a better analysis of the way cohesive strategies function in discourse and direct the audience's perception to the event, a BBC article is selected as a main data. Throughout the adopting of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework of cohesion, and Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough (1995) the study tries to examine the function of cohesive devices in maintaining coherence of the discourse related to crisis communication and its role in shaping ideologies of the audience towards crises. It aims at highlighting the significance of cohesion in modeling both textual reliability of crisis communication and its influential and ideological effect.

2.**Theoretical Framework** The current study is a shed of light within Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework of cohesion as a key approach in understanding the way textual elements work together to construct coherence in communication, and fairclough's (1995) model for critical analysis. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976: 4), cohesion refers to the grammatical and lexical ties binding a text to present a unified whole. Their framework highlights several cohesive devices, such as: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and finally lexical cohesion. These devices are essential in modeling a text, causing its logical fluency, and delivering a perceptive message to the receiver.Cohesion is described by Mohammed (2014:2) is a sort of relationship between different elements in a piece of discourse, where the interpretation of one element is dependent on that of another. This helps characterizing the unity of texts where meaning is associated with what is said to its contextual environment. Oleiwi & Salih (2019: 5) describes Cohesion's main function in any text as for linking, it provides syntactic and lexical relations within the text resulting in text unity. This function is syntactical, it imposes certain organizational patterns upon the text Cohesive strategies, as mentioned above are variant, below is an account of them within the framework of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) :

Reference: is a cohesive tie that involves the use of words like pronouns or demonstratives to refer to something mentioned earlier in the given discourse, Halliday & Hasan (1976: 35) . It is defined by Yule (2007: 130) as an act by which a participant uses language to enable others to identify something. References as mentioned by Ogum & Destiny(2016: 30) are forms of sentence constructions referring or rely upon something else either within or outside the sentence in their interpretation. It is used to refer to things especially in written texts in order to create cohesion. It is accomplished in many types in English, like **personal pronouns**, (she , you, my); **demonstratives** (this, that); **comparative** (another, similar); and the **definite article** the.

Substitution and Ellipsis: both substitution and ellipsis makes it possible for parts of the discourse to be omitted or interchanged, to reduce redundancy without violating coherence (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, 47). They maintain that ellipsis and substitution are not lexical elments, but rather grammatical cohesion. Cohesion in substitution is obvious . Ellipsis, as noted by McCarthy (1991), occurs when the absented constituents are assumed to be understandable from the context by the participant.Substitution is divided into nominal, verbal, and clausal by Halliday & Hasan, (1976). They show that the nominal substitution includes words such as (one, ones, and same). One(s) is used to function as the head of a nominal group, beside it can replace the head of a nominal group, and same presupposes a whole nominal group. The verbal substitute in English is the verb do, it acts as the head of a verbal group too. Thomas (1979: 43) asserts that ellipsis is concerned with the absence of linguistic items from the sentences. Ellipsis and substitution are dependent on the participants' ability to recover the missing information from the context to avoid repetition (Buitkiene, 2005).

Conjunction: which refers to the usage of conjunctions to bind clauses and ideas, to establish relationships as contrast or cause and effect (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 9). They are resources for making transition in the text. Conjunctive relations, as Mohammed (2014: 76) asserts postulate the way in which what comes to follow in a given text is linked to what has gone before, based on their meanings. Halliday and Hasan (1976:239) assume a structure of four categories to in order to distinguish between the various types of conjunctive elements. These types are additive (and), causal (so), temporal (then), and adversative (yet).

Lexical Cohesion: Halliday & Hasan (1976: 278) maintain that this type includes the process of repeating key terms and the use of synonyms or collocations, this operation can sustain thematic consistency throughout the text. Lexical cohesion can result from chains of related words all participate in the stability of the meaning.

Halliday and Hasan's Cohesion Theory provides the linguistic tools to analyze how cohesion is achieved within a text, using various cohesive devices. The work within CDA framework adds a social dimension, allowing to work around the principal ideologies and power structures which all reveal how media discourse affects public opinion. The discourse of media contributes in the enhancing of how cohesive ties work within different media texts to construct discourse.The study, in addition to Halliday and Hasan's model, employs a Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA). CDA is a theoretical and methodological field of analyzing the relationship between language and cases like power in society. One of the key figures in CDA is Norman Fairclough, above all his work in Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language (1995). The study presents a framework for understanding how discourse creates and is created by social power structures.Critical Discourse Analysis CDA is a framework concerned with the supposed relationship between language, power, and society. Fairclough (1995: 2) examines, through CDA how discourse reproduces social inequalities together with power structures. In crisis communication, CDA is adopted to expose how media discourse utilizes cohesive devices to frame events and to highlight ideologies and public's responses. As proposed by Fairclough (1995: 83), CDA perceives discourse as a sort of social practice that affects and is affected by society, it highlights how language reproduces ideologies and power dynamics that are embedded in media analysis.Fairclough (1995) asserts that language is deeply rooted in power relations and social contexts. He maintains that discourse plays an essential role in reproducing and challenging social inequalities. The relationship between both language and power is dynamic in which language constructs power (Fairclough, 1995:5).Fairclough (1995: 73) argues that the model proposes a three-dimensional framework for analysis, these are text, the linguistic constituents such as words; discourse practice that include processes of production and distribution of texts and; social practice or the social and ideological contexts in which discourse arises. The framework presents an integrative analysis of texts and how they in social structures Fairclough adds that discourse is ideological, it carries values, beliefs, and assumptions that work for particular interests (Fairclough, 1995: 87, 93). Such ideologies can highlight power relations and social hierarchies. CDA, furthermore, aims to expose the hidden ideologies by critically investigate language use. Besides, he assures that texts in general are related to other texts and that meaning is modeled by these connections. Discourse is part of a larger network that influences its interpretation. This is the intertextuality of discourse which reveals how different forms of communication interact.The study, furthermore, integrates media discourse theory and how it investigates media depictions of crises and its influence to public opinion. van Dijk (2008: 120) elaborates that media discourse plays a key role in shaping public perception by constructing mental representations of events. These representations are directed by used language and the cohesive constructions that link the ideas together, shaping the significance of the interpretations of the crisis by audience.

Methodology The current study is employing a qualitative approach by the use of discourse analysis as a basic methodology. Discourse analysis allows for the examination of linguistic structures (cohesive strategies) in the selected text (BBC article) and the role they play in creating the discourse of the crisis, and how they influence the audience perception. The study would be conducted under the framework of Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion which highlights both of the lexical and grammatical ties within the selected text; and Fairclough's (1995) model that highlights the ideological effects and power dynamics of discourse on audience during crises.The significance behind adopting an eclectic model is to integrate the strengths of both theories to offer a rather sound holistic perception of the way language can work in creating and modeling public perception during crises.The main data for the current study consists of an article published in the BBC covering the recent fires in Los Angeles. The article was selected due to its relevance to the domain of the study, as a mainstream media opening and its role in reflecting significant public discourse on the hole event. The text is investigated for its use of cohesive devices and how these devices outline the discourse, and enhance the audience perception and their interpretation of the crisis.

3.**Data Analysis** The study investigates an article titled "What's the latest on Los Angeles wildfires and how did they start?" as a main data for analysis to probe cohesion and its role in modeling public perception during a crisis. The article is published in the BBC News formal Website by James FitzGerald **on 9th** of Jan. 2025.

I. **Cohesive Analysis** The framework applies the principles of cohesion as drawn by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Generally speaking, the article makes broad use of different cohesive strategies that are probed to prove what the study hypothesizes.

1.Reference Reference in its different types is highly used to create cohesion and show relationships between the elements:Anaphoric & Cataphoric: Anaphoric reference is clearly noted in the article. For instance, after

introducing terms like the fire or the blaze, where the text refers back to them by the use of pronouns such as it, they, and this, in an attempt to create cohesion in the text. For example: The fires are already among the most destructive in LA's history when measured by the number of buildings destroyed. Rebuilding work will cost 'tens of billions' of dollars, US President Joe Biden has said. The fires, is referred to again as Rebuilding work, directing the focus on the crisis. In another sentence like Nearby, the largest fire is in the Palisades area, and has burnt through more than 23,000 acres, the reference to the largest fire is linked back to the previous fires, to maintain the flow of the context. Cataphoric reference, on the other hand, is less frequent, it appears, for instance, when the article mention the cause of the fire or the investigation, which lead the readers forward in the text with a deeper clarification to come.

2.Substitution & Ellipsis: Substitution is less frequent in the data under investigation but it does occur. For example, the phrase the fires might be substituted with the blaze or simply it subsequently. The matter that keeps the text from being overly repetitive without violation. Ellipsis is applied to avoid redundancy, for instance, when the text talks about the fires being 14% contained, there is no need occurs to reiterate the fire every time since reference is obvious in the context.

3.Conjunction: Conjunctions are used numerously to link ideas together, revealing how different elements are related to each other. Conjunctions are used to show additions, contrasts, and logical connections between sequential events. The article uses conjunctions like and, also, and furthermore in context of adding information. For example: Firefighters made progress over the weekend in containing the Palisades and Eaton fires but warn that the return of high winds – forecast until Wednesday – could see these two spread again, or fuel new ones.But is used to contrast the progress with the threat of further spread. The fires are already among the most destructive in LA's history when measured by the number of buildings destroyed. Rebuilding work will cost 'tens of billions' of dollars, US President Joe Biden has said. And, furthermore, adds to the statement, intensifying the measure of the fires by introducing a financial impact to them. The conjunctions but, however, and also yet all are used as adversative conjunctions to show contrast and opposition. For example: Firefighters made progress... but warn that the return of high winds... could see these two spread again.All these strategies reveal the evolving nature of the crisis, directing the reader's perception of the situation as forceful and theoretically uncontrollable. The article, besides, probes reasons behind actions or events by utilizing causal conjunctions to help readers perceive cause and effect and the links between them. An example of this relation is:The fires could turn out to be the costliest in US history, with damage projected at up to $150bn, according to a preliminary estimate by AccuWeather.where with is used to indicate a causal relationship, to suggest the measure of the damage as a direct result of the fires.

4.Lexical Cohesion The article manipulates **repetition** in a diversity of repeated terms like fires, blaze, damage, firefighters, and containment, to create a clear thematic connection throughout the article. This regularity maintains focus on the main thematic issue: **the wildfires in Los Angeles**.

Synonymy is also obvious in words like fire, blaze, and even wildfires which are all used interchangeably, providing synonymous lexical variation without violating the flow of the text. Words like damage and destruction are used to clearly highlight the severity of the crisis, connecting the event to its long-term consequences.

Collocation as a lexical cohesive tie is present in combinations like firefighters made progress; Santa Ana winds; building destroyed; and costliest in US history. such collocations help strengthen the link between interrelated concepts and reinforcing the main ideas.Coherence over Cohesion Cohesion in the data analyzed contributes to coherence, where the latter refers to the logical arrangement of ideas. The cohesive devices guide the recipient perception of the details of the crisis, from the very beginning and containment efforts to the wider impacts and the possibility of climate change.The article constructs an understanding of the crisis via cohesion that moves from facts like (number of deaths, areas affected) to wider implications (economic damage, political responses). The use of such strategies direct the recipient perception to the crisis, highlighting main themes.Additionally, the cohesive strategies manipulated help reveal the degree of the complexity of the situation. The way the fires are connected to political accountability, as an example, (California officials) and environmental factors (climate change) all build a rather complex perception of the crisis. This strategy of layered cohesion causes the article to describe an event and then inspire the recipient to think about its causes and consequences.

II. **Critical Analysis**Critical analysis according to Fairclough's (1995) framework, determines a focus on the way discourse structures and language use throughout the article that reflect principal ideologies, power

relations, and social practices during the crisis. Fairclough's framework highlights social context of communication and the ways how language reflects and constructs power dynamics and ideological situations.Discursive Practices and Power Relations The framework put forward by Fairclough implies that discourse is a medium of communication as well as a means by which power relations can be endorsed and social structures are practiced. Media discourse can outline the way the public understand an event in the context of a crisis, besides it show whom they hold accountable. The power theme of politic is obvious in the article, as references are made to main political figures like President Joe Biden, Governor Gavin Newsom, and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass. Those are involved in the discourse of the crisis due to their roles in response and responsibility., Biden's statement, for example, on the economic price tens of billions of dollars and Governor Newsom's request for an investigation are noteworthy since they shape the public perception and duty towards how the crisis management. The reference to political figures shows how the state's response is interacted with public discourse, with certain individuals regarded as being in charge of the crisis.Political accountability id obviously highlighted in reference to disputes, such as Mayor Bass's absence and some issues about fire hydrant water pressure. Such utilization results in strengthening the fact that there is a public expectation of leadership during crises LA Mayor Karen Bass… has faced intense questions about the region's preparedness and the water issues, as an instance, situates her as someone under inquiry, implying that leadership is a main aspect in crisis management.Another reference to commercial power in the context of Southern California Edison. This is obvious in the indication of legal cases filed against the company for carelessness regarding its overhead wires binds commercial responsibility to the crisis, and situating commercial elements as being responsible for the fire's origin.

1.Ideology and Representation Fairclough maintains that language constructs ideological perceptions that create people view towards the world, especially in crises. In the article under investigation, the ideologies include the depiction of all of the firefighters' efforts, the government's reaction, the corporate sector's responsibility, and finally the role of change in climate.Firefighters are depicted positively in the text, the matter that reveals their efforts in enclosing the fires: Firefighters made progress over the weekend in containing the Palisades and Eaton fires. This representation shapes a sense of heroism or professionalism, situating them as essential to the public's view of the crisis and how it is being managed. Their actions are presented as a sense of hope, influencing the public's understanding of the importance of emergency services.The role of climate change in intensifying the crisis is also highlighted: US government research is unequivocal in linking climate change to larger and more severe wildfires in the western US. This posture is ideological, it shapes the fires as a consequence of wider environmental changes. This goes with the discourse of environmentalist which highlight the importance of regarding climate change as a main cause of the severity of such crises.The governmental preparation framed in the article underscores the general tensions surrounding public services and their willingness in handling crises. The critique of fire crews' tubes running dry and the questioning of Mayor Bass's leadership refers to an ideological worry about the government's role in guarding citizens. This may denote that poor authority or insufficient incomes are to blame for some of the crisis's overwhelming effects.Furthermore, economic consequences are tackled in the article, with the damage projected to reach $150 billion. The article lines up with the economic discourse by providing such figures that construct natural disasters in terms of financial losses. This implicitly criticizes the preparation for the disaster and response to it also. Such themes help evoke an ideological belief in market forces, situating such disasters as financially heavy, calling for practices to diminish future risk.

2.Intertextuality The theory of intertextuality which refers to the way texts are drawn upon and how they refer to other texts influences how they construct meaning. Intertextuality in the article is obvious in several ways:
The article generally is based on official reports, such as the declarations from President Biden and Governor Newsom, in addition to different studies of climate change and their relation with wildfires. The references to external influential sources position the article within a greater public discourse on climate change, crisis and their management, and even political responsibility, while constructing a discourse that meets official viewpoints.Mentioning of previous fires and especially the city's fire preparation puts the article with a larger political historical context of fire management in California. such references help strengthen the idea that the crisis is part of a longer-term configuration influenced by environmental conditions and political conclusions.
Another instance of intertextuality is the legal cases filed against Southern California Edison, binding the crisis to commercial responsibility, revealing that the crisis is a natural disaster beside being legal and political conflict that can moderate policy in the future.

3.Discursive Strategies Fairclough highlights the use of discursive strategies which construct the reader's perception of social reality. Several strategies in the article can be perceived:The use of words like containment and similar technical terms like red flag warning, and Santa Ana winds puts the article within the discourse of disaster and its management. This shows how the media can present itself as a commanding voice on such issue, highlighting the apparent expertise of journalists and officials.The article utilizes modality in order to point certainty or uncertainty. the article, for example, uses phrases like the fires could turn out to be the costliest in US history, which delivers the public uncertainty towards the financial impact. This modality helps the readers accepting the possibility of outcomes extreme, which leaves room for interpretation. Modality in crisis can construct the way the audience perceive the potential resolution of the crisis.

4.Social Practices Media discourse is suggested in Fairclough's model as being tied to social practices, these include the roles individuals and institutions play in a crisis. In the current text, all of social practices of media reporting, government response, and even public responsibility are obvious:The article manipulates objective reporting throughout the use of quotes from main figures (e.g., President Biden, Governor Newsom). The way quotes of these figures are depicted help reinforce how the public perceive their usefulness and involvement in the crisis.The text besides highlights the social practice of blame designation. The critique of fire preparedness, the allusion to corporate negligence and the mention of political leaders' absences, all are means in which the article shapes responsibility for the crisis, putting different groups as responsible in front of the public.

III. **Integrated Analysis** Incorporating both Halliday and Hasan's (1976) model of cohesion and Fairclough's (1995) approach to critical discourse analysis in a comprehensive framework provides a basis for analyzing media discourse, particularly in crisis reporting. The text ties together both cohesive devices and ideological analysis, providing a rather sound understanding of the way media design public perception during crisis.

 By focusing on how different cohesive devices construct a coherent discourse, for example, combined with Fairclough's analysis of ideological settings and power relations, one can critically examine how the media may: shifts blame (pointing out government failings, corporate negligence), (Constructs responsibility (highlighting the heroism of firefighters, political leaders), Frames the crisis within wider social, political, and environmental contexts (climate change, economic impact).

Conclusion The study has investigated the main role of cohesion in media discourse, within the context of crisis communication, by analyzing a BBC article on the great fires of Los Angeles. The study has revealed how various cohesive devices participate in the textual coherence of the article. The devices utilized in the main data managed to structure the information in a way that facilitates the reader comprehension.Additionally, the study has revealed that cohesion in general media discourse is a sound tool for linguistic clarity and a mechanism for media texts to construct meaning, and to influence audience responses, beside framing the public's ideological perception of an event. The cohesive devices analyzed all contribute to the overall structure, shaping the fire as a significant disaster and presenting the services of emergency as active agents of assisting. such framing has an impact on how audience perceive the event, and their ideological responses to the crisis.The addition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has contributed to the ideological and power dimensions of media coverage. The study has investigated the way media discourse both reflect social ideologies, and shape public perception to crises. This helps underscore the significance of language as a vital tool for power in crisis communication.

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