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The Language of Fear: Cybercrime and ‘the Borderless Realm of Cyberspace’ in British News

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Abstract

This paper explores the media representations of cybercrime as a source of social danger and fear. Against the backdrop of Beck’s concept of “risk society” and Cohen’s “moral panic”, it focuses on a dataset of articles on cybercrime from 2011 to 2016 published by two major British tabloids, the Daily Mirror and The Sun, following a Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis approach to journalism. It shows that the process of ‘othering’ in the representations of cybercrime follows, in the corpus identified, certain discourse strategies which are very similar to those employed in the representations of such ‘outgroups’ as immigrants or terrorists. The paper also considers the media narratives on cybercrime analysed as strategic configurations of nationalist discourse: by constantly associating certain countries with cybercrime and by prioritising ‘national’ security in opposition to a ubiquitously dangerous ‘other’, these representations of cybercrime ultimately seem to reinforce the sense of identity and belonging within the institutional and cultural borders of a nation.

Keywords

cybercrime, moral panic, fear society, nationalism, discourse