Mediating Mumbai: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Indian, British and American Newsmagazine Coverage of the November 2008 Attacks
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Scholars have argued that terrorism and media exist in symbiotic relation to one another (Chailand & Blin, 2007; Tuman, 2003; Nacos, 2007) and that acts of terror are inherently newsworthy and must be covered (Barnett & Reynolds, 2009). Considering the inevitability of media terrorism coverage, scholarship focuses on how and why attacks are covered not whether they should be. Following the critical media industry studies research model proposed by Haven, Lotz and Tinic (2009), this in-depth case study of the first two weeks of coverage in nine Indian, British and American newsmagazines provides a more detailed snapshot of the editorial products and processes in the wake of the attacks. Three modes of rhetorical critique, Marxist, postcolonial and visual, are employed to systematically probe the newsmagazine content for emergent themes. The findings indicate the newsmagazines gave the attacks prominent placement, localized their significance and globalized the terrorist threat. An exploration of the news producers’ motivations or intents, which are key components of rhetorical analysis, and an understanding of the logistical factors that may have impacted the coverage form the second part of this study. Newsmagazine contributors were interviewed in Delhi, London and New York in an attempt to better understand writers’ and editors’ intents, to illuminate the practical limitations associated with the coverage, to resolve inconsistencies within the texts and to gain an insider perspective from their vantage points. In research interviews, the contributors addressed their goals for the coverage, their reportage and composition strategies and their self-perceived effectiveness. Grounded theory was used to identify the themes that emerged in the interviews regarding the journalistic intent, production logistics and overall evaluation of the coverage. McLuhan (1964) suggested that the medium was the message, and this study shows newsmagazine contributors faced medium-specific issues. For example, the weekly publication cycle of newsmagazines dictates less focus on breaking news or day-after analysis, striving instead for contextualization and analysis and emphasizing the importance of beat reporting and scoops. This study reveals how the Indian, British and American newsmagazines covered the attacks in Mumbai and the editorial processes that fueled that coverage.