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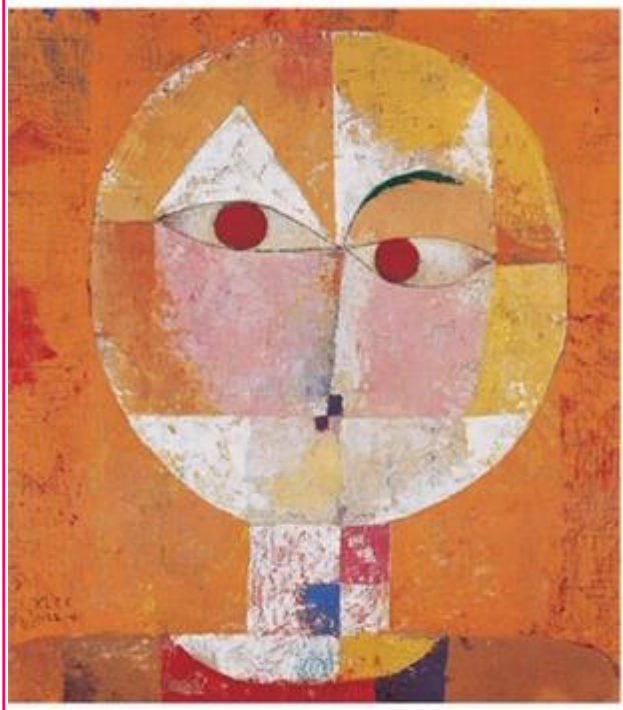

Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas
Maracaibo - Venezuela

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Semantic categories of social actors in MH17 disaster

Sarimah Shamsudin
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
ssarimah.kl@utm.my

Wan Najmiyyah Wan Md Adnan[1,2]
[1]Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

[2]Academy of Language Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA Terengganu
wannajmiyyah@uitm.edu.my

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to identify the semantic categories of social actors in the news discourse of the MH17 disaster. The methodology used for this paper is a corpus analysis in which we identify the most frequent and salient words using corpus analysis software. Results show that social actors in MH17 disaster news articles can be categorized into three main groups: authority and decision-makers, responsible parties and disaster victims. In conclusion, social actors can be represented based on socially grouped together words either to indicate togetherness or sharing similarities.

Keywords: Social, Actors, Media, Representations, Corpus.

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Categorías semánticas de actores sociales en el desastre MH17

Resumen

El objetivo principal de este artículo es identificar las categorías semánticas de los actores sociales en el discurso informativo del desastre MH17. La metodología utilizada para este trabajo es un análisis de corpus en el que identificamos las palabras más frecuentes y destacadas utilizando el software de análisis de corpus. Los resultados muestran que los actores sociales en los artículos de noticias sobre desastres MH17 se pueden clasificar en tres grupos principales: autoridades y tomadores de decisiones, partes responsables y víctimas de desastres. En conclusión, los actores sociales pueden representarse en base a palabras agrupadas socialmente, ya sea para indicar unión o compartir similitudes.

Palabras clave: social, actores, medios, representaciones, corpus.

1. INTRODUCTION

Disaster is usually referred to as any type of human sufferings that are caused by either natural catastrophes like tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, or sufferings that are caused by man-made disasters that produce negative social and economic impacts (HARDING, 2016). The effects of disasters are mostly immediate and affecting either

organization (HEATH, 2010), or existing images of individuals in certain societies (DERYCKER & MOHDDON, 2015).

Malaysia became the center of media attention when a Malaysian Airlines passenger flight MH17 that departed from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was shot down and crashed near Torez, Ukraine in July 2014. All 283 passengers and 15 crews on board were killed. 193 of the passengers were of Dutch nationalities while all the crew members of the airline were Malaysians. The crash happened in an area of an ongoing war between pro-Russian rebels and Ukrainian military. This disaster shocked the world and everyone started pointing fingers at whom to be blamed. Media reporting on the disaster were wide and extensive, especially when Malaysia had recently been involved in another controversial missing plane of flight MH370. With the amounting of attention to such disasters, it sparked many interests in different research fields, especially those related to discourse and media representation studies (SALAHSHOUR, 2016).

Many of the previous research indicated the significant positive and negative representations of social actors in news discourse, as social actors can be represented based on gender,

or socially grouped together either to indicate togetherness or sharing similarities. Collocation analysis can inform us of the recurring word associations, either positively or negatively. For the purpose of this study, we plan to look into the process of identifying the social actors in MH17 news discourse in affected countries, namely Malaysia and the Netherlands (MACHIN & MAYR, 2012).

2. METHODOLOGY

The two specialized corpora built for this study were based on two different news media, namely The Star from Malaysia and Dutch News from the Netherlands. The online news was chosen based on specific criteria like the accessibility of the news articles, the circulation period, and types of news articles. The corpus used in this study consisted of 2221 news reports (n=2221) from The Star online and Dutch News websites. The news reports were collected over a two-year period from 2014 until 2016 and the total token for the news reports was 883,690 for The Star and 19,716 for Dutch News (MONTGOMERY, 2007).

The average length of words for the articles is 394 words for The Star and 332 words for Dutch News. Table 1 below shows the summary of the corpus selection for the present study (KOLLER, 2009).

Table 1: Corpus Selection for the Present Study

News portal	Articles	Tokens	Average Length/Article
The Star	2161	883,690	394 words
Dutch News	60	19,716	332 words
Total	2221	903,406	

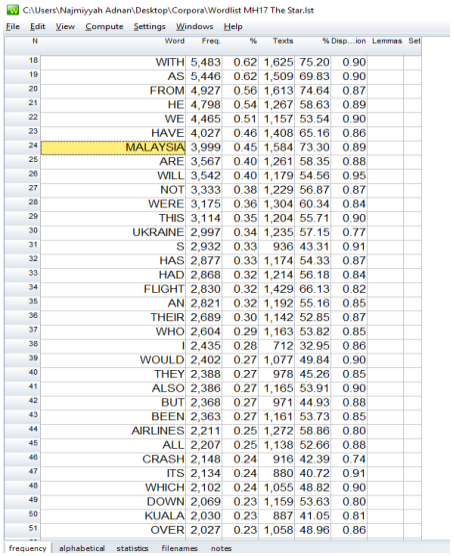
In order to identify the social actors in the news, this study used a three-step process, which is described in Figure 1. Firstly, we run the corpus for frequency analysis and collocation analysis. Frequency analysis is used to identify the most frequent nouns in the news articles, and the collocation analysis is used to identify words that collocate with the nouns. This study also refers to FAIRCLOUGH (2003) for the exclusion and inclusion criteria in identifying the social actors in the corpus. FAIRCLOUGH (2003) identified social actors

in the texts, which are realized as a pronoun or as a noun, realized as a participant in a clause, activated or passivated in a sentence, personal or impersonal, named or classified and specific or generic in nature. Based on these criteria and analysis technique, we identified the top ten most frequent nouns from both news discourse and collocate the analysis to identify related the social actors.

The results were then tabulated using thematic analysis to identify the semantic categories of social actors for MH17 aviation news discourse (LIU & STEVENSON, 2013: MOOSAVINIA & KHARRASI, 2018: NNEBEDUM, 2019).

3. RESULTS

First, to identify the social actors referred to in the local news discourse of the MH17 disaster, we used frequency analysis on both news discourse as can be seen in Figure 2 for The Star and Figure 3 for Dutch News. This frequency analysis is later used to identify the top ten most frequent nouns in both of the news discourse (PARK, BIER & PALENCHAR, 2016: SZABÓ & RÉVÉSZ, 2018).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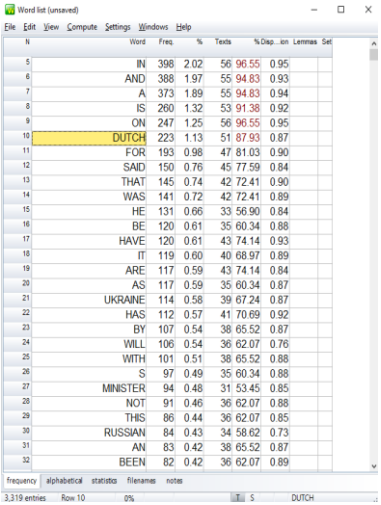
N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	% Disp...ion	Lemmas	Set
18	WITH	5,483	0.62	1,625	75.20	0.90	
19	AS	5,446	0.62	1,509	69.83	0.90	
20	FROM	4,927	0.56	1,613	74.64	0.87	
21	HE	4,798	0.54	1,267	58.63	0.89	
22	WE	4,465	0.51	1,157	53.54	0.90	
23	HAVE	4,027	0.46	1,408	65.16	0.86	
24	MALAYSIA	3,999	0.45	1,584	73.30	0.89	
25	ARE	3,567	0.40	1,261	58.35	0.88	
26	WILL	3,542	0.40	1,179	54.56	0.95	
27	NOT	3,333	0.38	1,229	56.87	0.87	
28	WERE	3,175	0.36	1,304	60.34	0.84	
29	THIS	3,114	0.35	1,204	55.71	0.90	
30	UKRAINE	2,997	0.34	1,235	57.15	0.77	
31	S	2,932	0.33	936	43.31	0.91	
32	HAS	2,877	0.33	1,174	54.33	0.87	
33	HAD	2,868	0.32	1,214	56.18	0.84	
34	FLIGHT	2,830	0.32	1,429	66.13	0.82	
35	AN	2,821	0.32	1,192	55.16	0.85	
36	THEIR	2,689	0.30	1,142	52.85	0.87	
37	WHO	2,604	0.29	1,163	53.82	0.85	
38	I	2,435	0.28	712	32.95	0.86	
39	WOULD	2,402	0.27	1,077	49.84	0.90	
40	THEY	2,388	0.27	978	45.26	0.85	
41	ALSO	2,386	0.27	1,165	53.91	0.90	
42	BUT	2,368	0.27	971	44.93	0.88	
43	BEEN	2,363	0.27	1,161	53.73	0.85	
44	AIRLINES	2,211	0.25	1,272	58.86	0.80	
45	ALL	2,207	0.25	1,138	52.66	0.88	
46	CRASH	2,148	0.24	916	42.39	0.74	
47	ITS	2,134	0.24	880	40.72	0.91	
48	WHICH	2,102	0.24	1,055	48.82	0.90	
49	DOWN	2,069	0.23	1,159	53.63	0.80	
50	KUALA	2,030	0.23	887	41.05	0.81	
51	OVER	2,027	0.23	1,058	48.96	0.86	

frequency alphabetical statistics filenames notes

Figure 2: Frequency Analysis (The Star)


Word list (unsaved)

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N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	% Disp...ion	Lemmas	Set
5	IN	398	2.02	56	96.55	0.95	
6	AND	388	1.97	55	94.83	0.93	
7	A	373	1.89	55	94.83	0.94	
8	IS	260	1.32	53	91.38	0.92	
9	ON	247	1.25	56	96.55	0.95	
10	DUTCH	223	1.13	51	87.93	0.87	
11	FOR	193	0.98	47	81.03	0.90	
12	SAID	150	0.76	45	77.59	0.84	
13	THAT	145	0.74	42	72.41	0.90	
14	WAS	141	0.72	42	72.41	0.89	
15	HE	131	0.66	33	56.90	0.84	
16	BE	120	0.61	35	60.34	0.88	
17	HAVE	120	0.61	43	74.14	0.93	
18	IT	119	0.60	40	68.97	0.89	
19	ARE	117	0.59	43	74.14	0.84	
20	AS	117	0.59	35	60.34	0.87	
21	UKRAINE	114	0.58	39	67.24	0.87	
22	HAS	112	0.57	41	70.69	0.92	
23	BY	107	0.54	38	65.52	0.87	
24	WILL	106	0.54	36	62.07	0.76	
25	WITH	101	0.51	38	65.52	0.88	
26	S	97	0.49	35	60.34	0.88	
27	MINISTER	94	0.48	31	53.45	0.85	
28	NOT	91	0.46	36	62.07	0.88	
29	THIS	86	0.44	36	62.07	0.85	
30	RUSSIAN	84	0.43	34	58.62	0.73	
31	AN	83	0.42	38	65.52	0.87	
32	BEEN	82	0.42	36	62.07	0.89	

frequency alphabetical statistics filenames notes

3,319 entries Row 10 0% T S DUTCH

Figure 3: Frequency Analysis (Dutch News)

For The Star News, we have identified the ten most frequent nouns related to MH17 disaster news discourse. They are the words Malaysia, Ukraine, Flight, Airlines, Victims, Minister, People, Russian, Russia and Malaysian, as tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Most Frequent Nouns in The Star, Malaysia

Frequency	Percentage (%)	Nouns
3999	0.45	MALAYSIA
2997	0.34	UKRAINE
2830	0.32	FLIGHT
2211	0.25	AIRLINES
1926	0.22	VICTIMS
1870	0.21	MINISTER
1787	0.20	PEOPLE
1762	0.20	RUSSIAN
1746	0.20	RUSSIA
1688	0.19	MALAYSIAN

For Dutch News, we have also identified the ten most frequent nouns related to MH17 disaster news. They are the words Dutch, Ukraine Minister, Russian, Netherlands, Rutte, People, Plane, Russia, and Putin. Table 3 shows the number of frequencies and the percentage of nouns in Dutch News.

Table 3: Most Frequent Nouns in Dutch News, The Netherlands

Frequency	Percentage (%)	Nouns
223	1.13	DUTCH
114	0.58	UKRAINE
94	0.48	MINISTER
84	0.43	RUSSIAN
77	0.39	NETHERLANDS
71	0.36	RUTTE
64	0.32	PEOPLE
64	0.32	PLANE
61	0.31	RUSSIA
55	0.28	PUTIN

It was found that the keywords from The Star and Dutch News were quite similar in scope, and both are leaning towards the specific countries and nationalities of the involved participants in the MH17 disaster. The analysis also revealed that since MH17 itself is the flight name, the recurring appearance of related keywords like flight, airlines, and plane is expected (BOTELLA, STUART & GADEA, 2015).

Then, the concordance analysis was done on each of the frequent nouns to identify whether it fits the social actor

criteria enlisted by FAIRCLOUGH (2003) as previously described in the methodology. The concordance lines and concordance cluster list of each word are tabulated based on the number of hits in order to identify the main social actors in the news discourse. Figure 4 shows the example of concordance lines whereas Figure 5 presents the concordance cluster list for the word Malaysia in The Star. Malaysia is the most frequent noun in The Star news articles.

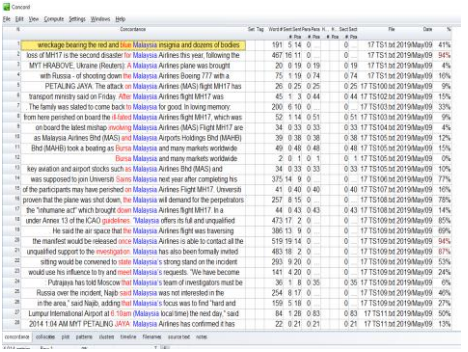
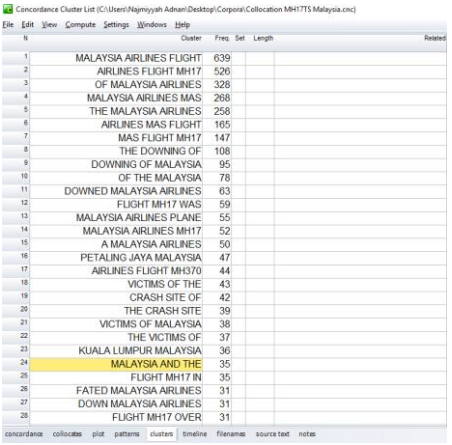


Figure 4: Example of Concordance Lines for the Word Malaysia in The Star


Concordance Cluster List (C:\Users\Najmiyyah Adnan\Desktop\Corpora\Collocation MH17TS Malaysia.cnc)

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N	Cluster	Freq.	Set	Length	Related
1	MALAYSIA AIRLINES FLIGHT	639			
2	AIRLINES FLIGHT MH17	526			
3	OF MALAYSIA AIRLINES	328			
4	MALAYSIA AIRLINES MAS	268			
5	THE MALAYSIA AIRLINES	258			
6	AIRLINES MAS FLIGHT	165			
7	MAS FLIGHT MH17	147			
8	THE DOWNING OF	108			
9	DOWNING OF MALAYSIA	95			
10	OF THE MALAYSIA	78			
11	DOWNED MALAYSIA AIRLINES	63			
12	FLIGHT MH17 WAS	59			
13	MALAYSIA AIRLINES PLANE	55			
14	MALAYSIA AIRLINES MH17	52			
15	A MALAYSIA AIRLINES	50			
16	PETALING JAYA MALAYSIA	47			
17	AIRLINES FLIGHT MH370	44			
18	VICTIMS OF THE	43			
19	CRASH SITE OF	42			
20	THE CRASH SITE	39			
21	VICTIMS OF MALAYSIA	38			
22	THE VICTIMS OF	37			
23	KUALA LUMPUR MALAYSIA	36			
24	MALAYSIA AND THE	35			
25	FLIGHT MH17 IN	35			
26	FATED MALAYSIA AIRLINES	31			
27	DOWN MALAYSIA AIRLINES	31			
28	FLIGHT MH17 OVER	31			

concordance collocates plot patterns clusters timeline filenames source text notes

Figure 5: Example of Concordance Cluster List for the Word Malaysia in The Star

Based on the concordance analysis, we identified the words that collocate with the identified nouns. It is important to highlight that even though we have identified the ten most frequent nouns using frequency analysis, it was also clear that not all ten frequent nouns can be social actors. FAIRCLOUGH (2003) indicated that while social actors are usually participants in clauses, not all participants are social actors. Physical objects, for one, are not considered as social actors.

Table 4 shows the list of main social actors referred to in MH17 disaster news discourse in The Star based on the

most frequent nouns. The noun Malaysia, for example, refers to the social actor Malaysia as a government, Malaysia Airlines and victims of Malaysia Airlines. While the noun Ukraine is highly associated with the location of the crash, it is also collocating with Ukraine as a government. The noun Flight collocates with Malaysia Airlines flight and victim of flight while Airlines similarly collocates with Malaysia Airlines and victims of Malaysia Airlines. The noun Victims collocates with remains of victims and families of victims.

Table 4: List of Main Social Actors referred to in MH17 Disaster News Discourse (The Star)

The Star	Social Actors	Hits	Per 1,000	Dispersion
MALAYSIA	• Malaysia (government) • Malaysia Airlines Victims of Malaysia Airlines	4014 1493 38	5.73 3.07 2.92	0.854 0.726 0.523
UKRAINE	Ukraine (government)	3012	5.71	0.914
FLIGHT	• Malaysia Airlines flight The victims	634 32	2.71 2.77	0.704 0.729

	of flight			
AIRLINES	• Malaysia Airlines Victims of Malaysia Airlines	1493 38	3.07 2.92	0.726 0.523
VICTIMS	• Remains of victims Families of the victims	16 59	2.34 2.35	0.673 0.803
MINISTER	• Prime Minister • Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib • Transport Minister • Deputy Prime Minister Minister Mark Rutte	895 292 260 96 107	3.00 2.21 3.01 1.91 2.10	0.887 0.801 0.745 0.801 0.884
PEOPLE	People on board	222	2.18	0/887
RUSSIAN	• Pro-Russian Separatists • Pro-Russian Rebels Russian President Vladimir Putin	206 133 141	2.25 2.05 1.73	0.937 0.870 0.774

RUSSIA	• Russia (government) Pro Russia Separatists	1751 20	6.59 2.13	0.947 0.698
MALAYSIAN	• Malaysian Airlines • The Malaysian government • Malaysian victim Malaysian Armed Forces	132 75 16 23	2.49 1.61 4.16 2.40	0.785 0.843 0.789 0.921

The word Minister refers to Prime Minister, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib, Transport Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Mark Rutte. The word People collocates with people on board while the word Russian collocates with Pro Russian Separatist, Pro Russian Rebels and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Similarly, the word Russia refers to Russia as a government and also collocates with pro-Russia separatists. Last but not least, the word Malaysian collocates with social actors Malaysian Airlines, the Malaysian government, Malaysian victim and Malaysian Armed Forces.

For Dutch news, the list of social actors referred to in its news discourse came from the nouns Dutch, Ukraine, Minister, Russian, Netherlands, Rutte, People, Plane, Russia and Putin Table 5 shows the list of social actors referred to in Dutch News.

Table 5: List of Main Social Actors Referred to in MH 17 Disaster News Discourse (Dutch News)

Dutch News	**Social Actors**	**Hits**	**Per 1,000**	**Dispersion**
DUTCH	• Dutch Prime Minister • Dutch Foreign Minister • Dutch government • Dutch Frans Timmermans • Dutch victims	14 17 11 11 28	2.48 4.28 3.39 2.57 3.31	0.699 0.320 0.638 0.434 0.838
UKRAINE	• Ukraine (government)	114	9.92	0.860
MINISTER	• Dutch Prime Minister • Minister Mark Rutte	43 22	4.73 2.47	0.855 0.764

RUSSIAN	• Pro-Russian rebels • Russian President Vladimir Putin • Pro-Russian Separatists	13 7 5	4.54 1.68 3.02	0.769 0.663 0.579
NETHERLANDS	• The Netherlands (government)	77	5.60	0.868
RUTTE	• Mark Rutte	71	7.04	0.888
PEOPLE	• People on board	7	3.36	0.600
PLANE	• People onboard the plane	3	4.09	0.512
RUSSIA	• Russia (government)	61	8.26	0.839
PUTIN	• Vladimir Putin	55	7.19	0.885

For Dutch News, we identified the related social actors based on the identified nouns. The noun Dutch refers to Dutch Prime Minister, Dutch Foreign Minister, Dutch Government, Dutch Frans Timmermans and Dutch victims. The noun Ukraine, while referring to a location, it also refers to Ukraine

as a government. The word Minister refers to Dutch Prime Minister and Minister Mark Rutte. Russian refers to Pro Russian rebels, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Pro Russian Separatists.

Authority and Decision Makers category refers to the social actors who have been associated with the local authority and decision-makers in the issue of MH17. It is shown the comparison of social actors in both news in the semantic group of Authority and Decision Makers. Interestingly, the most popular social actor referred to as Prime Minister and Datuk Seri Najib, which refers to the Prime Minister of Malaysia during the MH17 incident, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. It is shown the examples of Authority and Decision Makers as Actors. The example taken is from the word Minister. The use of the word Minister clearly indicates the reference to authoritarian figures as social actors.

The second identified the semantic category of social actors is Responsible Parties. It shows the social actors stated in both news discourse from Malaysia and the Netherlands. The Star refers Pro Russian Separatists, Pro Russian Rebels, and President Vladimir Putin as parties responsible for the disaster. Interestingly, Dutch News also refer responsible

parties being Pro Russian Separatists, Pro Russian Rebels, President Vladimir Putin, and Russia.

The third and last semantic category of social actors refers to Disaster Victims. The Star refers to Disaster Victims as social actors from phrases like Malaysia Airlines, Victims of Malaysia Airlines, remains of victims, families of the victims, Malaysian victims, victims of flight and people on board. Interestingly, Dutch News use Dutch victims as the main social actors in the news discourse, but still acknowledging people on board the plane as the social actors.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can sum up that social actors can be represented based on socially grouped together words either to indicate togetherness or sharing similarities. The use of the corpus approach is also proven important as it can contribute to the analysis of content, semantics or lexical level of discourse.

One of the main highlights from this study's findings is that there are tendencies of frequent usage of emotive words when describing the social actors. Given that disasters and tragedies are often closely connected to high emotional engagement, hence future research could also explore the relationship between language of attitude and essence of emotions when describing social actors in aviation disaster news discourse of affected countries. It is our hope that this study would open up to further explorations on aviation disaster news discourse, especially in countries directly affected in the disaster.

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