MEDIA FRAMING ON MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN CHRISTCHURCH MOSQUE ATTACK: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *THE PRESS* AND *NEW YORK TIMES* ONLINE NEWS

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ABSTRACT

For decades, and particularly since September 11 attacks, media framing of Muslims as terrorists was persistent. Considerable studies showed that Western media framed Islam and Muslims as the major terrorism posing threat to Western society. Islam is depicted as a monolithic and homogenized religion whereas Muslims are uncivilized and inhuman religious maniacs. News coverage on terrorism, which involved Muslims as the perpetrator, heightened the fear culture for Muslims and Islam, eventuate the rise of "Islamophobia". The media portrayed perpetrators of Muslims as terrorists who clashed the Western civilization and threatened public security as a whole. However, the recent Christchurch mosque attack that happened on 15 March 2019 in New Zealand, killed more than 50 Muslims by a local extremist, turned Muslims into terrorism victims. Despite abundant studies criticising Islamophobic representations of Muslims in Western media, there is scant literature examining the coverage of terrorism act where perpetrators are non-Muslims and victims are Muslims. Therefore, it is interesting to scrutinize how Islam and Muslims were framed in two influential online news sites, *The Press* and *New York Times*, where Muslims appeared to be the victims of the attack. By using framing analysis as the theoretical framework, this study examined the news themes covered in portraying Muslim victims and Islam for the incident. The finding determined how media framing of Muslim victims and Islam in the Christchurch mosque attack transformed the media event into international mourning in a climate of counter-Islamophobia.

Keywords: Terrorism, Islamophobia, Muslim, media framing, online news

INTRODUCTION

Public perceptions of events are greatly affected by the media coverage, depending on how it is framed. Media constructs and shapes the world on how we see it, predominantly in the area where the general public has limited knowledge on it. Certain incidents seizure massive news media attention as they are intrinsically newsworthy. Substantial literature is presented to believe that media construct reality by presenting incidents, particularly terrorism activities, as media events through framing, portrayal, and shaping. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, global media is depicting a mediated image about Muslims and Islam to the world (Kenes, 2015, Khalid; 2016, Schmuck et al., 2018). Extensive Western media coverage about terrorist acts committed by radical Muslims overwhelmingly cast Muslims as irrational, brutal, and uncivilised (Brown, 2006; Ahmed & Matthes, 2016). The connection between Islam and terrorism become prominent across events

where Muslims were mainly framed as religious fanatic whose mind is insusceptible of rationality and intrinsically violent. While the West spawns democracy, Islamic terrorism threatened public security (Yan 2015; Powell, 2018). Media fuels the sentiment of anti-Muslims where Islam and Muslims are a greater problem to the social order and public security since they have international ties with the terror groups (Bail, 2012).

Prejudice against Muslims is extensive in Western society, and religion has been the main focal point of constitutional and decision-making politics in the democratic West (Kille & Wihbey, 2015). This obsession has raised concerns about the exposure to a news report which tied terrorism to Islam, promoted perpetuated stereotypes, prejudice, and racism against Muslims and Islam, eventuate inter-group relations tense between Muslims and non-Muslims, and spur anti-Muslim sentiments in Western society (Khalid, 2016). This extravagant discrimination, hostility, and fear towards Islam have marginalized and excluded Muslims from the civic world of the secular West. As Islam and Muslims were wrongly associated with negative discursive frames of "monolithic", "irrational", "brutal" and "a religious maniac", hefty global media depiction asserting Islam and Muslims as elements of terrorism grasped Western societies to Islamophobia (Kumar, 2010). The irrational fear of Islam and Muslims has been intensified when Muslims labeled as terrorists, evils, and religious extremists were the perpetrator (Powell, 2011).

In most terrorist attacks, before the cause of the act is scrutinized, the perpetrator was first labeled as Muslims or non-Muslims. Once the identity of the perpetrator is confirmed, and it is proven to have Islamic links, the label of "terrorist" was used (Fernandez et al, 2015; Semati, 2010). Most often, as compared to those non-Muslim perpetrators, violent attacks involving Muslim perpetrators were unswervingly labeled "terrorism" (Azeerah, 2018). As Muslims are highly over-represented as the perpetrators in terrorism news, such portrayal has destructive effects on the attitude towards Muslims in general. Recurrent exposure to media representation that focused on the attributes of the "bad" out-group and the "good" in-group contributed to the enhancement of the stereotypical images (Mendelberg, 2001). Putting in the context of terrorism, such repetitive coverage may perpetuate negative attitudes towards Muslims through the frequent association of Islam and terrorism (Saleem, et al. 2017). When such media frames are accepted and become an exigency, this negative depiction of Muslim perpetrators was not only leaving implication to the society and individual whose lives are affected by such coverage but also impacted the political decision making and global relations in the effort of maintaining social order.

News coverage of terrorist acts committed by extremist Islamic fanatics has received immense research attention. News media play a prevailing role in identifying Muslim perpetrator as a threatening character where non-Muslim victims were described as good family members, innocent sufferers and heroes, regardless of their multidimensional perspectives, who were harmed by a Muslim perpetrator (Hughes, 2015; Dixon & William, 2015; Dixon, 2007; Powell, 2018). Muslim perpetrators, most of the time, were depicted as someone who has international ties whereas non-Muslim perpetrators were described as mentally sick loner who is fueled with irrational anger and thus should be excused from being a major threat to the public security as a whole (Powell, 2018).

Despite the affluence of literature criticising Islamophobic representations of Muslims in Western media, there is limited research devoted to the delineation of Muslims as terror victims. In most cases, terror victims are frequently portrayed as non-Muslims. However, the recent Christchurch mosque attack in New Zealand turned Muslims into terror victims. The attack during

Friday prayer on 15 March 2019 killed more than 50 people and injured 49. The 28-year old gunman from Grafton, New South Wales, Australia, Brenton Tarrant, who was depicted by the media as an extremist, live-streamed the first attack on Facebook.

This research is significant in determining if the media framing Muslims as terror victims counter the stereotypical portrayal of Muslims and terrorism. It is very interesting to scrutinise how Islam and Muslims were framed and portrayed in media reporting when they are the victims of the terrorist attack. While attributing a terrorist attack to Muslim perpetrators are much more likely to associate with their religious identities, this study aims to see the reverse in which the victims were explicitly Muslims. Toeing to the line, it is provocative to examine how the framing of the Muslims as "terror victims" transforms the "media event" into international mourning in a climate of counter-Islamophobia. A news content analysis was carried out on the online news of *The Press*, a daily newspaper published in Christchurch, and *New York Times*, a New York-based American newspaper with wide readership and global influence. The content analysis covered the first two weeks of the incident where there was extensive follow-up news. By using framing analysis as the theoretical framework, this study investigated the news themes in the reporting, specifically in portraying Muslim victims and Islam for the event of the Christchurch mosque shooting.

With inspiration from the literature, this study seeks to answer the research questions as follow:

RQ1: What are the news themes covered in *The Press* and *New York Times* in the incident of the Christchurch mosque attack?

RQ2: How did *The Press* and *New York Times* portray Muslims and Islam in the incident of the Christchurch mosque attack?

RQ3: Who were the key spokespersons of Christchurch mosque attack news coverage in *The Press* and *New York Times?*

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Media is crucial in presenting a particular version of a story as reality. Western media are especially prone to labeling Muslim extremists as terrorists that posed a threat to public security, peace, normality, dominant forces, and other religions (Muhammad & Taufiq, 2018; Zulkifri, 2009). Some of the labels are highly outrageous such as "fanatic", "secularism rejection" and "inherently violent". Edward Said (1997) argued that the negative image of all Muslims as terrorists is becoming normal in the Western world in which media plays a crucial role in how we see the rest of the world. It is widely perceived that while the Western world promotes democracy, freedom, and secularism, the Islamic religion was moving the other way round with a strong link with intolerance and ascendancy.

In his study on the framing of Islam after the September 11 incident, Dina Ibrahim (2010) stated objective coverage of Islam is a myth around the world where media consistently perpetuate stereotyped images of Islamic groups despite it is just a partial view of reality. Obscuring of context and background in the media reporting is one of the vital reasons Muslims across the world collectively cringed into the political and social hatred for their religious belief. The representation of Islam, internally and externally, is inconsistent. Muslims in the United States was mostly framed

as victims of violence act due to hate crimes whereas Muslims living out of America were framed as extremist and terrorists who are inherently violent. They were irrational, fanatic with *jihadist* spirit. The faith in Islam is generally covered in the context of violence where Islam is depicted as an angry religion.

What remarkable is, this superficial coverage which lacks a complex narrative on the motivation behind the violent acts has driven Muslims over the world into a nightmare (Sheikh et al, 1995). The misrepresented images of Islam and Muslims in the Western media, with compelling visuals that focus on violence without providing multiple perspectives of view, fueled hysterical fear of Islamic threat, not only in America but in a global context, following the increased frequency and the geographical scope of terrorism acts. This further enhanced the Islamic views on Western hegemony on the distorted and oversimplified depiction of Islam and Muslims (Dina, 2010; Salame, 1993; Lueg, 1995).

With the bias image of Islam as a religion of terror, hatred, and anti-civilisation presented in mainstream Western media, a negative frame of reference about Muslims was progressively constructed. Strong attached with the terms radical, fundamentalism and extremism, media-reliant people all around the world developed irrational fear towards Muslims and Islam which was coined as "Islamophobia" (Khalid, 2016; Mirza, 2019). Islamophobia is described as an extensive stereotype with hostility against Muslims and their faith based on the unfounded, contrived fear towards the religion and its followers. It brings hatred, prejudgment, prejudice against Islam and Muslims generally. The fear and mistrust of Muslims as a perceived threat to the civilised world was manifested through discrimination and hostility. Muslims were perceived as extremely rigid, irrational with fanatic religious thought that leads to the terrorism act which is extremely against democracy and modernity. Therefore, it rationalised the necessity to isolate Muslims in the social, political, and economic arena (Mondon & Winter, 2019; Walia, Khan & Islam, 2019).

Powell argued that the media framed Muslim terrorists differently from non-Muslim terrorists, roughly three times as much coverage of Muslim terrorists. This raises reverence and escalates the consequence of "fear of Islam" (Said, 1978; Powell, 2018). Extensive media framing on Muslim terrorism fuels the sentiment of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim. This has given an extremely negative portrayal of Muslims and impacted political decision-making and global relations.

Islamophobia is unjust hostility towards Islam driven by fear, hatred, and mistrust against Muslims and Islam. This anti-Muslim racism and prejudice have been fixed in the Western mind and the public sphere which is manifested through discrimination, hatred against Muslims and their faith. It is directed to "Muslim threat" and therefore rationalising the use of violence towards the Muslim groups. As Muslims and Islam are presented as a menace to the civilised world and the democratic ideology, it influenced the big sections of the global society (Sofia, et al., 2013; Walia, Khan & Islam, 2019; Mondon & Winter, 2019). The dominance of Western media has been a signifier of the negative representation of Muslims and Islam following the terrorism acts which involved Muslims as perpetrators such as the Bali bombing, Oklahoma bombing, Olympic bombing, France terror and so on. With the misconceptions about Islam, Muslims are always labeled as "terrorists" and "radical fundamentalists" with distorted images and portrayals (Jørndrup, 2016; Ahmed & Matthes, 2016).

Sofia et al. (2013) found US-based media mainly portrayed Islam caused violence and Muslims were terrorists where leadership in Muslim countries is in calamity. The issue of fighting

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against terrorism has been tremendously debated where Western media are still prone to labeling Muslims as terrorists, religious extremists, and militants (Zulkifli, 2009). The finding was consistent with Kumar's (2010) argument where five negative frames of representation Muslims were imposed, namely, Islam is monolithic religion, Islam is a uniquely sexist religion, Muslim is irrational, Islam is inherently violent and spawns terrorism which goes contradict with the West ideology of democracy.

The negative portrayal of Muslims proliferates as the perpetrator in terrorism acts. The terrorist groups who are involved in the massacre, especially the Western victims, legitimise Muslims are wild radicals, while the non-Muslims are collectively the victims of terrorism (Azeerah, 2018b; Schmuck et al., 2018). The representation of Muslims has generally provoked public panic around the Muslim terrorist threat. It is argued that terrorism is a war of image where Muslim was the most powerful image of terrorism perpetrator. The tension between Muslim immigrant communities and the local communities was increasing in many of the countries, especially in the West. With an affiliation with their religion, Muslims seem to be in a troubled relationship in the political, economical, and social arena (Jørndrup; 2016; Muhammad & Taufiq, 2018).

In violent plots where Muslims engaged as perpetrators, there was 23 times more likely associate with terrorism as compared to the non-Muslims in the media report. Averagely, violent act that linked to Muslims is 1.5 times higher than white supremacy and right-wing extremist even though white supremacy violent were far more frequent happened (Azeerah, 2018b; Perry & Scrivens, 2015; Monaghan & Molnar, 2016). White supremacy or right-wing violence was consistently getting extensive coverage and air times on media and was sometimes excluded from the domain of terrorism definition (Schmuck et al., 2018; Muhammad & Taufiq, 2018; Azeerah, 2018b).

The cases involved non-Muslim perpetrators were reported as individual cases where they did not even qualify as "terrorism". It focused to explain why the incident happened. Whereas violent acts involved Muslims or individuals connected to Muslim groups as perpetrators were largely labeled by their cultural identities, such as religion and citizenship which was frequently invoked as the presumed cause of ferocity (Azeerah, 2018b; Powell, 2018). Their actions were incomprehensibly and were framed as rejoicing the homicidal and the fruits of the unified jihadist movement. The terror act by Muslim perpetrators was depicted as a conflict between absolute evil and civilisation, collapsed into a monolith, underpinning the political motivations, diversity of actors, and other racialised factors against the Muslim community (Schmuck et al., 2018; Powell, 2011).

The religious identities of Muslim perpetrators were exclusively elicited as motivated by "violent *jihadist* extremism" whereas the white supremacy violence was more likely to be framed as localised, sporadic, infrequent, isolated events purported known for their opportunistic (Bronskill, 2018; Bell, 2017). This has brought to the broader context of transnational Islamophobia, underpinned by the anticipation of the Muslim group's obligation for the terror act committed by their co-religion extremists. The intense and incommensurate stereotype on Muslim violence fosters an impression that an attack against Muslims is an acceptable reaction to Muslim-led terrorism (Ahmad, 2004).

The pervasive media representations of Muslim violence threat has fostered the impression about Muslim community, overriding media consumers' own direct experiences with Muslim

groups, endorse the diminution of liberalism to counter-terrorism (Brinson & Stohl, 2012; Woods, 2011; Azeerah, 2018a). While media discussion of fatal incidents caused by non-Muslim violence acts seldom engaged extended debates about policy and changes, the media coverage of violent incidents by Muslim perpetrators constantly raised concern on laws and policies changes, as well as the surveillance practices about the pre-emptive counter-terrorism measures (Mayer, 2014; Clark, 2017; Peritz, 2014; Hall, 2014). In covering the violent incident where Muslims are perpetrators, most of the coverage is attempting to describe them and their background with international ties whereas the non-Muslim perpetrators are commonly labeled as "troubled individuals", "mentally ill loners" who committed isolated violence act. Their action is purely hated crime which was fueled by unreasonable anger, but not as terrorism. Therefore, in some way, their behaviour could be "excused". Whereas the mediated image of terrorism fosters fear of Islam and Muslims (Powell, 2018; Said, 1978).

Powell (2018) also found that there was much less coverage of the violent acts if the perpetrator had no connection with Islam. Although time was spent on investigating the background of the perpetrators before labeling them terrorists or Muslims, it was found that once confirmed there was an Islamic connection, the focus on the religion began and the radical Islamic terrorist label was used. The reason for the violent act will only be further investigated once the perpetrator was confirmed as Muslim or non-Muslim. On the other hand, coverage on victims was constantly embodied with goodness, heroic acts, innocent, good family people who have to fight the evil or mentally sick Muslim terrorists. Although victims are multidimensional, the media put the victims through the lens of family roles and communities where all of them are innocent and good. Their innocent lives were taken by the irrational, full of hatred religious maniac who committed these evil terrorism acts which were usually connected with a larger network of a terrorist group (Powell, 2011).

Powell (2018) found in his study that "terrorism" is identified before the information about the victims is provided, and then it is followed by the label of "Muslims" or "non-Muslims" terrorist. Generally, news audience forms their beliefs about perpetrator based on their knowledge obtained from media reporting which perpetuate negative attitudes towards Muslims as a social group. Overrepresentation of perpetrators who self-identify as Muslims, the terrorism victims were mainly depicted as non-Muslims (Dixon & Williams, 2015). Despite a few exceptions where Muslims were the victims of terrorism such as the Quebec mosque shooting in 2017 where 6 Muslims were killed and 19 injured, those terrorism acts was been attributed as "hate crime" (The Independent, 2017; Powell, 2018).

Numerous studies showed that United States news media gave 449% more coverage on terrorism stories where Muslims are the perpetrators than other attacks. The 2013 Boston Marathon Bombing which involved 3 deaths generated 2.5 times more coverage as compared to the 2016 Dylann Roof Charleston church shooting (Kearns, Betus & Lemieux, 2019). This debate of Islamophobia and terrorism linked to Muslims on social media was also going viral where the hashtag #Islamic terrorism and Islamophobia have been as high as 97.88 times and 97.482 times respectively (Walia, Khan & Islam, 2019, p.9). The repetitive reporting about the inhuman terrorism event linked to Islamic belief brought serious stereotypes against the Muslim perpetrators. Due to the generalisation effect of negative attributes, this increased Islamophobia attitudes against all Muslims in general who were categorised under the same sociocultural group as those perpetrators (Das, et al., 2009; Schmuck, et. al. 2018).

In Desiree Schmuck's et al. study (2018) that examined how news reports of terrorist attacks committed by unidentified perpetrators influence beliefs about the perpetrators and Muslims in general, they found when there is a chance to evaluate unidentified terrorist perpetrators, news consumers tend to automatically attribute the attack to Islamist perpetrator despite the absence of the confirmation that the case is associated with Islam. Similarly, news consumers assume that the perpetrators are Islamists when the terror victims are described as non-Muslims. Schmuck (2018, pg.11-12) argued:

> *"Unless the victims are Muslims, our finding suggests that news consumers exposed to unidentified terrorists will associate what they read and see in Islam…. Even most importantly, the estimated likelihood of the perpetrators being Islamists did not differ in response to perpetrator-unidentified news articles and news articles actually describing the perpetrators as having Islamic religious affiliation…. Muslims are over-represented as perpetrators of terrorist attack but underrepresented as victims".*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framing and Framing Analysis

Media is very powerful in presenting and distributing ideologies through framing (Gitlin, 1980). Robert Entman (1993, p.52) explicated framing as "*selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described*". There are four dimensions of framing which build the perspective of how media present and interpret an event - namely define the problem, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. The process involves emphasizing elements of represented reality and de-emphasizing elements that create a counter-frame.

Frames are "selective" in nature, and thus construct reality in a specific way (Matthes, 2012). A frame is formed when the media makes salient elements in news to be dominant. Through choosing and emphasizing some information and ignoring others, the news frame is shaping and influencing the audience's understanding and interpretation of an event or an issue (Matthes, 2012). Matthes and Kohring (2008) argued that the configuration of different frame elements can be recognized across numerous texts by doing cluster analysis, which could produce better results in terms of reliability and validity.

Framing is very powerful in the text and visual presentation of a media news coverage as it organises a news story writing so that an event is well understood through a particular lens. Framing helps to develop a picture of an event in the mind of the media consumers within political discourse, persistently and meaningfully construct the social world (Goffiman, 1974; Ryan, 1991; Shook, 2000; Reese, 2001). Framing has been used as a tool to set the public agenda and deals with journalism worldviews to make salient points that would direct their readers to a picture of the world desired to be framed by the media (Cissel, 2012: McCombs, 2014). Media do not only determine the agenda of an issue but transfer the salient attribution of a specific object to the audience so that it is more memorable and meaningful to them (Entman, 1993).

Tankard & Severin (2001) stated that a theory that comes into a place in between news coverage and media agenda is "framing'. Framing in the context of terrorism, which was constantly depicted as a problem from Islam, serves to link contrasting facts and events by identifying the perpetrator and attributing blame to construct the perception of in-group and out-group (Norris et al, 2003, p.15). This study used Entman's concept of framing as explicit rationality that chooses and interprets certain aspects of an event to examine the role of media in labeling Muslim as the victims of terror by looking into the news theme covered in *The Press* and *New York Times* in the incident of the Christchurch mosque attack.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative and qualitative content analysis to investigate how did the two online news, *The Press* and *New York Times*, frame Muslims and Islam in their news reporting of the Christchurch mosque attack. In particular, this study focused on the news themes which aimed to portray how Muslims are framed when they are the terror victims. Along the way, it examined how did the framing of *The Press* and *New York Time*s, vary in their news reporting. *The Press* is a popular local daily newspaper in Christchurch, whereas *New York Times*, is a New York-based American newspaper with wide readership and global influence. The study analysed the content by looking into the news themes covered by both news sites.

To understand how the news media interpret the event within the specific journalistic domain, content analysis of selected news items was conducted. The content analysis covered the first two weeks of the incident, from 15 March 2019 and the 13 days that followed, where there was extensive follow-up news. The unit of analysis covered individual news stories - headline and the news lead. News stories selected were checked based on whether the term "Christchurch mosque shooting", "terrorist attack in Christchurch mosque" was mentioned in the headline or news content. Searches were also be conducted using similar words like "Christchurch mosque shooting", "terrorist attack in Christchurch mosque".

A total of 400 and 73 stories respectively from *The Press* and *New York Times* were studied. A coding instrument comprised of 7 questions was employed to analyse the main themes on headlines and news leads. The questions comprise of story date, headline, news lead, key theme, the portrayal of Muslim and Islam in both headline and news lead, and the key spokesperson in the news story. The key spokesperson was analysed by identifying the person who provides the information reported in the news stories.

On the qualitative part, keywords and descriptions of the terms were analysed to investigate the framing of Muslims which leads to the visualisation of the themes from the news reporting. While looking for the theme, meaningful material with ideological messages that are not obviously conveyed literally is sought. Lewis and Reese (2009b, p.86) argued that frames merge from the pattern of power which was later used to address the issue being framed. Indeed, a news frame that could be impactful is "an exercise in power". Framing, which was widely used in a variety of theoretical and methodologies, made a basic assumption that we relate and recognize an event within an existing idea in a filtered and indirect way (Jorndrup, 2016; D'Angelo & Kuypers 2010; Entman, 1993). By selecting the information to be included and the degree to be covered in the news, the media controls the public's interpretation of an event through a different lens.

ANALYSIS

There was a total of 473 news items being analysed in this study - 400 news items from *The Press* and 73 items from the *New York Times.* The researcher found 20 news themes commonly covered in both online news sites. Although the headline and the lead shared similar news themes, the coverage of these news themes differed in terms of weight.

Table 1: News Themes and Key Spokespersons in *The Press* and *New York Times* for the coverage of Christchurch Mosque Shooting

News Theme	The Press				New York Times			
	Headline		Lead		Headline		Lead	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Anti-Terrorism/Anti-Extremism/Anti-Racism/Anti-Hatred	14	3.50	18	4.50	10	13.70	14	19.18
Condemnation on New Zealand Authority	14	3.50	13	3.25	2	2.74	2	2.74
Condemnation on Perpetrator	14	3.50	14	3.50	3	4.11	4	5.48
Compliment to New Zealand Authority	13	3.25	13	3.25	2	2.74	2	2.74
Condemnation on Social Media	15	3.75	14	3.50	5	6.85	3	4.11
Condemnation on Firearm Company	1	0.25	1	0.25	2	2.74	2	2.74
Crisis Management / Firearm Law Change / Security Issues	48	12.00	47	11.75	11	15.07	11	15.07
Victims' Family Grieving	12	3.00	12	3.00	1	1.37	1	1.37
Humanity Act	12	3.00	13	3.25	1	1.37	1	1.37
Public's Panic	26	6.50	32	8.00	3	4.11	4	5.48
Heroic Action	3	0.75	2	0.50	3	4.11	3	4.11
Police's Response	1	0.25	2	0.50	0	0.00	0	0.00
Islam as a Religion of Faith and Love	12	3.00	10	2.50	2	2.74	1	1.37
Urge for Religious Sensitivity	1	0.25	1	0.25	1	1.37	1	1.37
Story of Perpetrator	12	3.00	12	3.00	3	4.11	2	2.74
Support for Muslim Victims	105	26.25	108	27.00	9	12.33	9	12.33
Support for Perpetrator	6	1.50	3	0.75	1	1.37	1	1.37
Unity of the Country (New Zealand)	14	3.50	14	3.50	3	4.11	3	4.11
Vulnerable Muslim Victims	44	11.00	43	10.75	5	6.85	5	6.85
Straight Reporting	32	8.25	18	7.00	6	8.22	4	5.48
TOTAL	**400**	**100**	**400**	**100**	**73**	**100**	**73**	**100**
Key spokesperson	The Press				New York Times			
	N		%		N		%	
Journalists (Straight Reporting)	88		22.00		8		10.96	
New Zealand Authority	70		17.50		24		32.88	
Authorities other than New Zealand	11		2.75		5		6.85	
General Public (Muslim)	13		3.25		1		1.37	
General Public (Non-Muslim)	55		13.75		6		8.22	
Muslim Victims' family	25		6.25		7		9.59	
Islamic Religious Body	22		5.50		2		2.74	
Non-Islamic Religious Body	5		1.25		0		0.00	
Survivors	19		4.75		3		4.11	
Athletes	15		3.75		6		8.22	
NGO/NPO	15		3.75		1		1.37	

Professionals	14	3.50	0	0.00
Education Institution	12	3.00	1	1.37
Celebrities (Muslim)	6	1.50	0	0.00
Celebrities (Non-Muslim)	9	2.25	0	0.00
Medical Staff	9	2.25	0	0.00
Witness	5	1.25	1	1.37
Perpetrator's Family / Acquaintances	3	0.75	5	6.85
Firearm Company	3	0.75	3	4.11
Internet Provider Company	1	0.25	0	0.00
TOTAL	**400**	**100**	**73**	**100**

The 20 news themes included public's support for Muslim victims, firearm law change, country security and crisis management strategies taken by the New Zealand government, stories of Muslims as vulnerable victims, anti-hatred/anti-extremism/anti-racism/anti-terrorism, condemnation on the perpetrator, condemnation on New Zealand authority, compliments to New Zealand authority, condemnation on social media, condemnation on firearm company, victims' family grieving, humanity act, general public's panic, heroic action, police's response, Islam as a religion of love and faith, story of the perpetrator, urge for religious sensitivity, support for the perpetrator, unity of the country (New Zealand), and straight reporting on the incident.

For the headline, T*he Press* highly reported on the news themes of the public showed support for the Muslim victims (26.25%, N = 105), firearm law change, country security, and crisis management strategies taken by the New Zealand authority (12%, N=48), stories on Muslims as vulnerable victims (44%, N=11) and public's panic (6.5%, N=26). These were followed by other news themes which carried almost the same percentage, namely anti-hatred/anti-extremism/anti-racism/anti-terrorism (3.5%, N=14), condemnation on the perpetrator (3.5%, N=14), condemnation on social media (3.75%, N=15), condemnation on New Zealand authority (3.5%, N=14), compliments to New Zealand authority (3.5%, N=13), victims' family grieving (3%, N=12), humanity act (3%, N=12), the story of the perpetrator (3%, N=12), unity of the country (New Zealand) (3.5%, N=14) and Islam as a religion of love and faith (3%, N=12). Small percentage went to the news themes of supporting perpetrator (1.5%, N=6), heroic action (0.75%, N=3), condemnation on firearm company (0.25%, N=1), police's response (0.25%, N=1) and urge for religious sensitivity (0.25%, N=1). The remaining stories were straight news reporting that covered what happened on the incident and the number of injuries. (8.25%, N=33). The percentage of news themes covered in *The Press* was quite similar between the headline and the lead.

The number of news covered in the *New York Times* was very much lesser than the coverage in *The Press*. Among 73 news headlines, 15.07% (N=11) of the news themes revolved firearm law change/security issues/crisis management strategies taken by New Zealand authority, anti-terrorism/anti-extremism/anti-racism/anti-hatred (13.70%, N=10), public's support for Muslim victims (12.33%, N=9), Muslim as vulnerable victims (6.58%, N=5) and condemnation on social media (6.85%, N=5). Some news themes carried the same coverage percentage (4.11%, N=3), which were public panic, heroic action, condemnation of the perpetrator, the story of the perpetrator, unity of the country (New Zealand). A small percentage of news items covered the themes of condemnation on New Zealand authority (2.74%, N=2), compliments to New Zealand authority (2.74%, N=2), condemnation on firearm company (2.74%, N=2), Islam as a religion of love and faith (2.74%, N=2), victims' family grieving (1.37%, N=1), humanity act (1.37%, N=1),

support for the perpetrator (1.37%, N=1) and urge for religious sensitivity (1.37%, N=1). Straight reporting covered 8.22% (N=6) of the entire 73 news items. No significant difference in news themes between *New York Times* headlines and news leads in the reporting of the Christchurch mosque shooting. The highest percentage of news themes covered under news lead is anti-terrorism/anti-extremism /anti-racism/anti-hatred (19.18%, N=14).

Most of the news sources in *The Press* were journalists (22%, N=88). Other key spokespersons include New Zealand authority (17.5%, N=70), non-Muslim general public (13.5%, N=55), victim's family (6.25%, N=25), Islamic religious body (5.5%, N=22), Muslim survivors (4.75%, N=19), athletes (3.75%, N=15), non-profit organisation (NPO)/non-government organisation (NGO) (3.75%, N=15), professionals (3.5%, N=14), Muslim general public (3.25%, N=13), education institution (3%, N=12), authorities other than New Zealand (2.75%, N=11), non-Muslim celebrities (2.25%, N=9), medical staff (2.25%, N=9), Muslim celebrities (1.5%, N=6), witnesses (1.25%, N=5), non-Islam religious body (1.25%, N=5), perpetrator's family & acquaintances (0.75%, N=3), firearm companies (0.75%, N=3), and Internet provider company 0.25% (N=1).

As for the key spokesperson in *New York Times*, most of the story sources are New Zealand authority (32.88%, N=24), journalists (10.96%, N=8), victims' family members (9.59%, N=7), the non-Muslim general public (8.22%, N=6), athletes (8.22%, N=6), perpetrator's family & acquaintances (6.85%, N=5), authorities other than New Zealand (6.85%, N=5), Muslim survivor (4.11%, N=3), firearm companies (4.11%, N=3), Islamic religious body (2.74%, N=2). A small number of coverage (1.37%, N=1) goes on the spokespersons like the Muslim general public, NGO/NPO, education institution and witnesses.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In *The Press*, Muslims were depicted as vulnerable, kind, faithful, and never seek revenge even though they were innocent terror victims. The victims' families grieved over the loss of kind fathers, obedient sons, helpful friends, and friendly neighbours. The terrorism act was widely condemned. Spirit of anti-hatred, anti-extremism, anti-racism was extensively reported. The general public was portrayed as giving unwavering support to the Muslim victims, regardless of their religious background. New Zealand authority was depicted as a humanised and concerned government who immediately called for firearm law change to curb the terrorism acts in the country. The New Zealand government, especially the Prime Minister, was painted a positive image, for her leadership in crisis management and in restoring people's confidence towards the security of the country.

As for *New York Times* coverage, the number of news items reported on the Christchurch mosque shooting was much lesser than *The Press* perhaps due to the event's geographical distance, and therefore carry lesser news values to the US-based media consumers. The majority of the reporting pictured the spirit of anti-terrorism, anti-extremism, anti-racism, and anti-hatred where Muslims were widely portrayed as vulnerable who need people's support. They were also described as kind, helpful and peace-loving immigrants who love New Zealand as their home country. They were delineated as people who carry love and faith who could easily forgive the perpetrator.

In the Christchurch mosque shooting, Muslims were portrayed as the victims where the religious identity was not the central point. The identity of Muslims made no difference with other non-Muslim victims in receiving humanity support. Spirit was high going against anti-hatred, anti-extremism, and anti-terrorism among the general public. Voices against terrorism, extremism, or racism have been widely covered. Various parties, such as social media, and even firearm companies, were blamed for various reasons.

DISCUSSION

Victims of terrorist acts were always been portrayed in a positive light (Azeerah, 2018b; Dina, 2010; Schmuck, 2018). In the incident of the Christchurch mosque attack where Muslim victims, regardless of their cultural and religious background, were depicted as innocent, kind, friendly, faithful, forgiving, and peaceful people who possessed all good qualities of human beings. Muslim victims were also described as vulnerable, just like any other non-Muslim terror victims. Religion identity was not the central focal point of the coverage. However, the humanity act devoted to Muslim victims reflected Muslims have been portrayed not only as victims but also as the minority group that needs to be "protected" in a country like New Zealand. The difference between "they" (Muslim minority) and "us" (local non-Muslim) was still very much religion-based.

This was very different in the reporting where non-Muslims were terror victims while Muslims were the perpetrators (Schmuck, 2018; Azeerah, 2018b; Khalid, 2016). Due to their co-religion members' terrorism acts, the majority of the Muslim community remained quiet despite being discriminated. Muslim perpetrators were extensively highlighted as "irrational", "inhumane", "anti-civilisation" and "monolithic" in the Western media while the general Muslim's humanity act was silenced by the media.

In line with the previous studies (Powell, 2011; Jørndrup, 2016; Schmuck, 2018; Powell, 2018; Azeerah, 2018b), almost no context of the killing was provided in the Christchurch mosque shooting where Muslims were the victims. The perpetrator's motive was understated in the news when it came to the event that the perpetrator's identity was not associated with Islam. He was labeled as a mentally sick loner who was fueled with anger for the immigrants. He was merely portrayed as a racist in which his violent act posed as singular occurrence, and was attributed as "hate crime" rather than "terrorism".

When the non-Muslim perpetrator was first identified, he was depicted as neither linked to white supremacy nor a terrorist. His cultural identity is excluded from the limelight. Instead, he was described as a racist with a psychological problem under the influence of social media. Blamed was shifted to social media such as Facebook for infusing him with firearm information and even amplified his aggressiveness to the world through live streaming on Facebook.

The massive reporting on the incident had triggered panic among the local communities. The media coverage raised intense concern on the law and policy changes, as well as the preventive counter-terrorism surveillance practices in New Zealand. The general public was getting panic over the terrorism act and asking for firearm law change in the country in which the killing of the Muslim victims seemed to be a good reason for a change in legislation.

As a limitation, this study mainly focused on the news themes in the event where the Muslims are the terror victims from the perspectives of local and Western media. It did not

examine the news theme from the lenses of the Muslim world. Thus, for future study, it will be interesting to scrutinize how does the non-Western media, especially the media from Islamic countries, portray the image of Muslims as victims of terrorism. It is also vital to examine how does media frame the reaction of the Muslim community towards events where Muslims are the terror victims while the perpetrator is non-Muslim.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, media framing of Muslims as terror victims makes no significant difference from the framing of non-Muslim victims. Religious identity is not the central point of highlight. When the perpetrators are non-Muslim, their motives were being downplayed. In the context of Muslims as terror victims, counter Islamophobia seemed to be an irrelevant concept which failed in neutralising the image of Muslims as irrational religious maniacs. In fact, other identities such as peace-loving immigrant, good father, loyal friend, kind and helpful neighbour were given a foreground. When Muslims turned to be the victims of violent acts, they tend to respond precariously in avoidance of fostering an impression that attacks on Muslims are well accepted in response to their co-religion members' terrorism acts. This goes consistent with what Schmuck et al. (2018, p.12) claimed in their study *"Muslims are overrepresented as perpetrators of terrorist attack, but underrepresented as victims"*.

As such, the media framing of Muslim victims and Islam in the Christchurch mosque attack could neither perpetuate the portrayal of Muslim and terrorism nor transform the media event into international mourning in a climate of counter-Islamophobia.

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