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Article:	**Coverage of Islam in the Western Press: Exploring Episodic and Thematic Frames**
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Abstract

This study is primarily a quantitative content analysis that attempts to explore episodic as well as thematic frames related to Islam and Muslims in the Guardian (UK), the Washington Post (USA), the Australian (Australia) and the National Post (Canada). The research aims to find out the extent and nature of the coverage of episodic and thematic frames in the selected newspapers on Islam and Muslims. The study also aims to explore the tone of coverage of the Western political leaders about Islam and Muslims in the selected newspapers. Drawing on framing theory and Said's Orientalism/Occidentalism, this study found out that overall the coverage had more negative frames used for Islam and Muslims. Most of the stories were on Stereotypes/Prejudices/fundamentalism followed by Racism/Religious frame. Western newspapers have racial and stereotypical predispositions towards Islam and its adherents. Furthermore, Islam was framed more often as threatful and intolerant religion. It was also found out that in all the selected newspapers, coverage of the Western politicians was more harsh and negative than positive towards Islam and Muslims.

Keywords: content analysis, framing, episodic frames, thematic frames

Introduction

Islam has been continually represented by international media as a violent religion opposed to the West. The question of "Islam and the West" has been the subject of critical writings and scholarly publications. The terrorist attack of 9/11 has elevated the position of Islam within the media, political and public discourse and Muslims as the most controversial group. Later, incidents like 7/7 London bombings, Bali attacks, Madrid bombings, Mumbai attacks, Brussels shootings, Charlie Hebdo shootings etc. brought discussions on Islam and Muslims under attention and further accelerated the trend. *As a result,* unwelcoming visibility and negative signifiers in the Western media increased by depicting Muslims generally as violent, fanatical, oppressed slaves, extremists and terrorists. The trend introduced new metaphors, illicit labels, negative stereotypes and demonizing language for Islam and Muslims that can collectively referred to as "Islamophobia".

Historical Perspective

Islamophobia is a concept that is often referred to the global spread of prejudice against Muslims (Roose and Turner, 2016, p. 388). It is generally assumed that Islamophobia both as a concept and neologism in the context that we know today, takes its roots from Britain, somewhere around late 1980s or early 1990s as a discrimination against Muslim community residing in the West (Allen, 2006, 2010). Multiple sources and academic literature broadly suggests that it was 1910 when the term appeared first in an article by the French Africanist Maurice Delafosse and later by Alain Quellien in his PhD thesis that provided the first explicit definition of Islamophobes (Bravo Lopez, 2010; Richardson, 2012). The term was coined more than one hundred years ago but did not gain currency in English until late 1980s. Whereas, the term has appeared in the American vocabulary more generally after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Bravo Lopez, 2010). However, the first serious and widespread investigation of the concept was initiated through a report presented by a UK- based think tank Runnymede Trust in 1997 (Bleich 2011, p. 1582) and referred Islamophobia to "unfounded hostility towards Islam, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (the Runnymede Trust, 1997). Since then, the term has turned into a disputed notion among the public sphere (Allen, 2006).

Islamophobia as a phenomenon has a historical facet to it. Anti- Muslim attitudes or the perception of clash of civilizations among Western Christianity and Islam can be traced back to nearly over 1,400 years, since the birth of Islam in the early 600s CE. One of the prime reasons of the enmity between Christianity and Islam was the dread of territorial expansion and military, political and culture domination of Islam right from the beginning of Islam stepping into the European soil. For this reason, monitoring and shaping Islamic views was crucial for the continuance of the Western domination (Sunar, 2017).

Since its emergence, Islam deprived Christianity of its place as the last Abrahamic religion and in this way it has persistently been stated as false religion by the Church. During 8th to 9th centuries Islam constantly aided Church through its attempts to bring political harmony in the Christian feudal world (Pirenne, 2008). In this way it established balance in the disorganized political structure by uniting the Eastern world under its roof. This was the time when Christians started regarding Islam as their rival (Sunar, 2017). As a result, the then united power, the Papacy, advanced crusades against Islam. During this time Islam brought with them their many novelties to the self-enclosed West and became part of the wider world (Sunar, 2017).

This out of proportion Muslim civilizational dominance always remained in the minds of the West. The Church established an obstinate propaganda campaign of defamation and slander against Islam. Consequently, not only were crusades launched but also Muslims portrayed as cold-blooded creatures, beasts, and cannibals in the European eyes (Sunar, 2017) so that to avoid any Islamic coverts and sympathizers (Siraj, 2007).

Until first half of the 18th century, Muslim societies were the only regarded models of modernity that introduced the age of Expedition and information sources. However, with the introduction of model of Enlightenment, based on mechanical concept of functional morality, non-Western models were no more in need (Sunar, 2017). Throughout the 19th century, Western domination extended all over the world, including Muslims. However, Muslim societies tried to resist this Western expansion and therefore became the fundamental dread for the West in the post-colonial period (Sayyid, 1997) that led the West to degrade, invalidate and overcome Islam (Sunar, 2017).

Islam has proved its capacity after decolonization by how Islamic societies got freedom one by one, became economically independent and during Arab-Israel War, the oil embargo issue of 1970s, the Iranian Revolution and present-day emerging Muslim nations and growing significance of Islam as a political factor in the Muslim world even terrorized the West (Sunar, 2017). This situation has replaced the West's old Orientalist methods with the new ones named as Islamophobia to contend this fear that is drawn from a deep-rooted enmity and fused with 20th century's racialization ideology to create a new notion (Allen, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The incident of 9/11 has contributed intensely to the viewing of Islamic religion and the Muslims with suspicion. This view was fueled by the unified negative coverage by the Western media creating a swing of predispositions, suspicions, hate crimes, as well as terror against the Muslims. This study aims to explore the most frequently used episodic as well as thematic frames for Islam and Muslims in the Western newspapers. In order to find out difference in coverage among different episodic frames and thematic frames, the research would explore the extent of episodic and thematic frames in the coverage of selected Western Newspapers. Moreover, the study would also ask the nature of the tone used by the Western political leaders for Islam and Muslims. It will be helpful in finding out what tone i.e., positive, negative or neutral one is used more by politicians in the news.

Literature review

Widespread media coverage and the power of framing have transformed Muslims into "mediated beings in ways beyond their control …. in reductive and monolithic ways" (Bowe and Makki, 2016, p. 15). In Edward Said's book 'Covering Islam', the author provided an insight on Muslims' representation and claims that it is Western media that selectively regulate and filter content and decides what to tell Westerners about Islam and depicts Islam as tyrannical, obsolete, anti-intellectual, restrictive, extremist, backward, perilous, and instigator of conflict.

Generally, Muslims are presented to be a challenge for the popular culture and reporting has been constrained to only a few reductive classifications (Sealy, 2017). Among them the most common frames in which Islam and Muslims are fixed are associating Islam with violence and Muslims with terrorists (Yusof et al., 2013). According to Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007, p. 2) the dominant epithets used for Muslims consist of a bearded Muslim extremist, the subjugated or suppressed hijab wearing woman, the deceitful bomber living within so that they can be easily ruined; such labels have been strengthened since 9/11. Post September 11, to justify US 'war on terror', McChesney (2002, p. 43) noted the Western media dominant narrative was to depict a compassionate and autonomous land viciously attacked by ridiculous sinful extremists who dislike U.S freedom. Therefore, U.S. is required to immediately increase its military so that perpetrators can be located and the universal terrorist cancer can be eradicated.

There are several episodic as well as thematic frames that are seen in the Western press. However, according to Reza (2011), the trend has shifted from episodic to thematic frames resulting in considerable reduction in broadcasting stereotypes. This claim was rejected by a great number of scholarships that observed intensification in the framing. For instance, prior to 9/11, the dominant themes used for Muslims were based on orientalist descriptions of a religion and its followers (Poole, 2002; Steuter and Wills, 2009; Powell, 2011). Media played role in setting up Islam verses the West mentality in the form of victim as good verses terrorist as evil (Medina and Lovett 2013), enlightened West verses barbaric East (Moosavi, 2013) and good civilized West verses evil Muslims (Kabir, 2006). After 9/11, Muslims have been tended to depict as violent, intolerant, oppressive, and Islamic values as threatening for Western societies both by media and in political debates (Steuter and Wills, 2009; Powell, 2011) that have conflated Islam with terrorism and supporter of terrorist acts (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003). The key themes that resurfaced as an end result of 9/11 were related to terrorism and the perception of the 'threat within' (Poole, 2002).

Western Politicians impart different tactics in their rhetoric and openly advocate anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments. Muslims are framed under national security and national values agenda (Rane et. al., 2014). Especially, issues related to refugees, asylum seekers, immigration and assimilation are high on the political agenda of even those host-societies where there is modern political landscape (Mols & Jetten, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The present research is theoretically linked with following hypothesis:

Framing Theory

Robert Entman is regarded as the pioneer whose seminal work made framing a persistent notion and an analysis technique in the media studies field. According to him, frames are used to 'define problems', 'make moral judgments' and 'suggest remedies' (Entman, 1993, p. 52). For Van Gorp (2007), frames are "packages" that are employed not only by the news media but also by other social groups. Watson and Hill (2000) defined framing as a method through which the media place reality "into frame" and whatever that is not included on the page of a newspaper is considered "out of frame". News frames are represented through "keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols and visual images emphasized in a news narrative" (Entman, 1993, p. 7) and create an incident or issue in such a way that it leans towards a specific side or policy response (Tankard, 2001). Bantimaroudis and Kampanellou describe that frames as playing an important part in building cultural characteristics by displaying individuals and their societies as having distinct civilizations and ethnicity (2007, p. 82).

Edward W. Said's Orientalism/Occidentalism

The notion of orientalism put forward by Edward Said in 1978 has been broadly stated. The orientalist perception views the Muslim world not only as hostile to the Western part of the world but also as monolithic and inert that, unlike West, cannot make progress and development. Said's (1997) *Covering Islam* is his influential work on orientalism in media coverage claiming orientalism as the dominant approach adopted by Western media reporting of Islam and Muslim world. Said (1997) contends that when media outlets use Islam as a brand to explain events and issues regarding which Islam is an outer aspect, then most negative and irresponsible images emerge. On the other hand, Occidentalism which is the opposite of orientalism refers to Islamic world interpretation of the West as negative, antithesis and stereotypical (Joffe, 2007). It is considered as a recent phenomenon emerged when combined forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria faced defeat by Israel in 1967. The phenomenon developed as a reaction to the West's support for Israel and for pro-Western authoritarian administrations that reigned several Muslim nations (Joffe, 2007).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study was based on analyzing following research questions and hypotheses:

R.Q1: What is the extent of episodic and thematic frames in the coverage of selected Western Newspapers?

H.1:   The coverage of episodic and thematic frames about Islam and the Muslim would be negative than positive in the selected newspapers.

R.Q2: What tone was used by the Western political leaders in the coverage of selected newspapers?

H.2:   Tone of Western political leaders will be negative than positive towards Islam and Muslims in all the selected newspapers.

Research Method

This study is primarily a quantitative content analysis, investigating different and most frequently used frames on Islam and Muslims by *The Guardian* (UK), *The Washington Post* (USA), *The Australian* (Australia) and *National Post* (Canada) from January 2015 to December 2016.

All news stories on Islam or Muslims published in all the four newspapers in this time period were the population comprising of 1723 news stories. However, firstly, all the duplicate and irrelevant news stories were identified and discarded after an initial sift from the list of total numbers of stories obtained. For generating this list, electronic database Lexis-Nexis was used by entering keyword "hlead (Islam or Muslims)". Next, for the purpose of sample selection, systematic sampling method was employed in *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post* and *The Australian* by using every third skip interval. However, after assessing the initial list of news stories in *National Post*, it was found out that number of stories were almost equal to what was required for sample. Therefore, without using any sampling technique, whole list was selected as sample. Altogether, 324 (26.3%) stories from *The Guardian*, 368 (29.9%) from *The Washington Post*, 293 (23.8%) from *The Australian* and 245 (19.9%) news stories from *National Post* were selected to create a sample of 1230.

Variables chosen for the study are Episodic Frames, Thematic Frames, Tone of Western Political Leaders, Story Type, Source of News and Length of the Story. The episodic frames of the study are: Terrorist Events and Muslims Involvement, Crime Events, Immigration Policy, Racism/Religious Discrimination, Physical Abuse, Muslim Religiosity, Muslim Domestic Politics, International Relations/ World Politics, Stereotypes/Prejudices/Fundamentalism, Islamic Laws and Legal Aspects, Orientalism or Occidentalism, Muslim Relationship with other Communities and Others. The tone used by the western political leaders in the selected western press towards Islam and Muslims will be coded as positive, negative or neutral by following the dominant frame method on the basis of careful qualitative judgment for identification of the keywords and terms used. Furthermore, the thematic frames of the study are: Islam is Threatful, Islam is Peaceful, Islam is Tolerant, Islam is Intolerant, Westerners (Non-Muslims) are Tolerant, Westerners (Non-Muslims) are Intolerant, Muslims are Uncouth, Muslims are Couth, Islam is War-Oriented, Islam is Peace-Oriented, Islam is a Foe, Islam is a Friend, Use of Demonizing Language and Use of Good Language.

Coding Unit, Unit of Analysis and Contextual Unit

For most of the episodic frames, the headline and lead was the recording unit and the whole story was the contextual unit for coding the episodic frame. For thematic frames, each paragraph of the story was the recording and the contextual unit. Similarly, for tone, the coding unit was paragraph. However, each paragraph was initially coded into three categories as positive, neutral or negative. Next, on the basis of number of positive, neutral and negative paragraphs, each story was coded for dominant tone. For example, if majority of the paragraphs were based on positive tones, the story was coded as positive. The whole story

was the context unit for all the variables. Means if the coding decision could not be made based on the headline, lead or a single paragraph, then as much of the story as required was read until the coding decision can possibly be made.

Findings

The final sample comprised 1230 stories, with 324 (26.3%) being from the *Guardian*, 368 (29.9%) from the *Washington Post*, 293 (23.8%) from the *Australian* and 245 (19.9%) from the *National Post* (Chi-square=26.167; p. = .000) (See Table 1). The overall mean length of the stories was 917.6593 words (larger than one column length of the newspapers).

A large number of sample 714 (58.0 percent) consisted of news stories, followed by columns (211 or 17.2 percent), editorials (97 7.9 percent) and remaining 208 (16.9 percent) stories fell into the opinion's category (Chi-square=743.951, p. =.000). Most of the stories (1085 or 88.2 percent) were contributed by private source and the remaining 144 (or 11.7 percent) stories were reported by official source. Hence number of stories by private source was significantly larger than the number of stories by official source (Chi-square=1691.859, p=.000) (See Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of Sample

Variables	N	(%)
No. of stories[1]	**1230**	**(100.0)**
Newspapers		
Guardian	324	(26.3)
The Washington Post	368	(29.9)
The Australian	293	(23.8)
The National (Financial) Post	245	(19.9)
Episodic Frames[2]		
Terrorist Events and Muslims Involvement	56	(4.6)
Crime Events	35	(2.8)
Immigration Policy	81	(6.6)
Racism/Religious Discrimination	271	(22.0)
Physical abuse	60	(4.9)
Muslim Religiosity	48	(3.9)
Muslim Domestic Politics	86	(7.0)
International Relations/World Politics	112	(9.1)
Stereotypes/Prejudices/Fundamentalism	328	(26.7)
Islamic Laws and Legal Aspects	7	(0.6)
Orientalism or Occidentalism	28	(2.3)
Muslim Relationship with Other Communities	100	(8.1)
Others	18	(1.5)
Thematic Frames		
Islam is Threatful	564	(45.9)
Islam is Peaceful	163	(13.3)
Islam is Tolerant	425	(34.6)
Islam is Intolerant	609	(49.5)
Westerners are Tolerant	789	(64.1)
Westerners are Intolerant	852	(69.3)
Muslims are Uncouth	202	(16.4)
Muslims are Couth	236	(19.2)
Islam is War-Oriented	47	(3.8)
Islam is Peace-Oriented	20	(1.6)
Islam is a Foe	266	(21.6)
Islam is a Friend	149	(12.1)

Use of Demonizing Language	86 (7.0)	
Use of Good Language		16 (1.3)
Story Type[3]		
News	714 (58.0)	
Columns	211 (17.2)	
Editorials	97 (7.9)	
Opinions		208 (16.9)
Source of News[4]		
Official	144 (11.7)	
Private		1085 (88.2)
Mean Length of the Story[5]	**917.6593**	
Guardian 908.4938		
Washington Post	942.5652	
Australian	942.6758	
National Post		862.4539

[1]chi-square=26.167; p. = .000   [2]chi-square=1189.776; p. = .000   [3]chi-square=743.951; p. = .000   [4]chi-square=1691.859; p. = .000   [5]F=2.790; p. = .039

Note 1.Figure within parenthesis indicates the percentage of the coverage. 2. Figure without the parenthesis indicates the count of coverage.

It was found out from the results that different episodic and thematic frames were given different amount of coverage. The details are provided in the form of answering following research question and hypothesis.

R.Q1: What is the extent of episodic and thematic frames in the coverage of selected Western Newspapers?

The final sample comprising of 1230 stories, with 324 (26.3%) being from the *Guardian*, 368 (29.9%) from the *Washington Post*, 293 (23.8%) from the *Australian* and 245 (19.9%) from the *National Post,* revealed that all the four selected newspapers have given extensive coverage to Islam and Muslims. (Chi-square=26.167; p. = .000) (See Table 4.1).

H1:   The coverage of episodic and thematic frames about Islam and the Muslim would be negative than positive in the selected newspapers.

Difference by Episodic Frames

Most of the stories (328 or 26.7 percent) were on Stereotypes/Prejudices/Fundamentalism, followed by Racism/Religious Discrimination (271 or 22.0 percent). International Relations/World Politics received 112 (9.1 percent), Muslim Relations with Other Communities received 100 (8.1percent), Muslim Domestic Politics received 86 (7.0 percent) and Immigration Policy received 81 (6.6 percent) of the stories. Physical Abuse, Terrorist Events and Muslims Involvements, Muslim Religiosity, Crime Events, Orientalism or Occidentalism, Islamic Laws and Legal Aspects and Others topics received the remaining 20.5 percent of coverage (Chi-square=1189.776; p. = .000)   (See Table 4.1).

Difference by Thematic Frames

A large number of the stories had 'Westerners are Intolerant' frame (852 or 69.3 percent), followed by 'Westerners are Tolerant' (789 or 64.1 percent) and 'Islam is Intolerant' (609 or 49.5) frames. 'Islam is Threatful' frame had 564 (45.9 percent) whereas 'Islam is Tolerant' had 425 (34.6 percent) frequency (See Table 4.1).

The results revealed that coverage of episodic and thematic frames is more negative than positive about Islam and the Muslim in the selected newspapers. Hence hypothesis 1 was supported.

Tone Used by Western Political Leaders in the Selected Newspapers
R.Q2: What tone was used by the Western political leaders in the coverage of selected newspapers?

Most of the stories had negative (260 or 61.8%) tone, followed by positive (108 or 25.7%). Altogether, 53 (12.6%) stories were neutral (Chi Square=15.618; p. = .016).

Table 2: Tone Used by Western Political Leaders in the Selected Newspapers

Tones of Western Political Leaders	Guardian N (%)	Washington Post N (%)	Australian N (%)	National Post N (%)	Total N (%)
Positive	32 (7.6)	29 (6.9)	24 (5.7)	23 (5.5)	108 (25.7)
Neutral	14 (3.3)	6 (1.4)	14 (3.3)	19 (4.5)	53 (12.6)
Negative	95 (22.6)*	66 (15.7)	54 (12.8)	45 (10.7)	260 (61.8)
Total	133 (31.6)	109 (25.9)	97 (23.0)	82 (19.5)	421 (100.0)

*Chi Square=15.618; p. = .016

Note. 7. Figure within parenthesis indicates the percentage of the coverage. 8. Figure without the parenthesis indicates the count of coverage.

H. 2: Tone of Western political leaders will be negative than positive towards Islam and Muslims in all the selected newspapers.

As evident from the table that most of the stories had negative (260 or 61.8%) tone as compared to positive (108 or 25.7%) tone. (Chi Square=15.618; p. = .016). Hypothesis 2 was supported (See Table 5).

Discussion of the Results

Findings exposed that different episodic and thematic frames were given different amount of coverage. Most frequently appearing episodic frame was Stereotypes/Prejudices/Fundamentalism, followed by Racism/Religious Discrimination frame. The results clearly show that Islam and Muslims are mostly covered stereotypically. The results are in line with the results of the studies conducted by Manning (2003), Poole (2000), Nacos and Torres-Reyna (2007) whom analysis revealed that Muslims are depicted as static, monolithic, incapable to change and integrate and Islam is perceived as distinctively retrograde and resists modernism and have terribly patriarchal system and suppressive of females.

It was found out that most frequently occurring thematic frame in the four selected newspapers was 'Westerners are intolerant'. It reveals that Western media depict Westerners as superior and Islam and Muslims as inferior, they are intolerant and they mostly adopt biased stance towards Islam and Muslims. Similar to Said's (1978) observations that expose Muslim immigrants are displayed as passive postcolonial subjects that are in need of the rules, norms, and codes established by culturally superior Europeans. Moreover, findings seem to mirror with the analysis of Medina and Lovett (2013), Moosavi (2013) and Kabir

(2006) who also explored the existence of the frame of West as superior and East as inferior in all aspects.

When the tone of the Western politicians was analyzed, it was found out that all of the selected newspapers covered negative tone of the Western politicians towards Islam and Muslims. In other words, Western political tone has remained generally harsh and negative than positive towards Islam and Muslims throughout the sample selected. Western media content is mostly devoted to political rhetoric on the issues like terrorism, refuge and integration of Muslims as one of the threats to Western safety and their principles because these issues are top priority in their political agenda (Rane et. al., 2014; Mols & Jetten, 2014). Kundnani (2014) also support that racialized political discourse is adopted by right wing politicians, in which Muslims are explicitly vilified.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the coverage had mostly negative episodic as well as thematic frames used for Islam and Muslims. Western newspapers have racial and stereotypical predispositions towards Islam and its adherents, and perceive Muslims as conservative and restrictive to West and their values. Similarly, all of the selected newspapers covered negative tone of the Western politicians towards Islam and Muslims. It can be said that tone of Western political leaders mostly remains intolerant and negative than positive towards Islam and Muslims.

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