

Inappropriate Use of Words 'Jihadist' and 'Islamist' in Western Media's Reports on Bombing Attacks

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Abstract

A specific term in Islam's vocabulary, 'Jihad', has been increasingly popular among news readers. Considering huge impacts of news reports, people may expect a lot that mass media can also create news stories that spread values of peace, but do not cultivate seeds of hatred on a certain belief, or persons in society. Not only do the editors and journalists pay attention to the speed of writing, editing and publishing many stories but also consider possible social and even political impacts of their stories on the society. The study is expected to give a significant contribution to media industries as the focus of the study is aimed to give enlightening and right explanation on words, phrases or terms that will be used by media industries in the hope their reports will no longer hurt people, especially Muslims, and/or Muslim organizations as the mass media will hopefully understand the meaning of the terms, words, and phrases which will be used in their stories about any terror incidents, and will eventually give positive impacts to certain groups of people and/or organizations.

Keywords: Western media, jihadist, Islamist, Islamophobia, agenda setting

Introduction

Without proper understanding, the western media use the word 'Jihadist' or even 'Islamist' before the word 'terrorist' or before the phrase 'terrorist groups' that committed such violent acts as bombings, shootings, and criminal attacks in their (the western media's) reports. Such those aggravating words have been labeling Islam as a religion with a dangerous ideology and considering Muslims as frightening people.

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Those words which are related to Islam have driven people's opinion that tend to blame Islam and its believers in general for every terrorist act. This has then deteriorated the image of Islam as a religion of peace, and brought about the so-called Islamophobia in which innocent Muslims who have absolutely nothing to do with terrorism have to bear risks of attacks which were actually perpetrated by villains who do not understand Islam. Topics on how (Western) mass media portrait Islam and stereotype Muslims with terrorism and violence, and the impacts of such news in deconstructing social structure, including Islamophobia, have been discussed in many academic literatures and scientific reports (Tornberg and Tornberg, 2016). Most of the researchers use the September 9, 2011 incident as the time benchmark to analyze the resurgence of media's interest in covering Islam.

Saeed (2007) studies articles published by nine British newspaper containing the word 'Muslims' within 2000-2002. He found that the western media overwhelmingly associate Muslims/Islam with negative connotations in their reports. The researcher attempted to notice that with such coverage, the media construct ethnic minorities as the 'other' and that they are alien outsiders to the 'British way of life'. Saeed examined articles from western media that contain the word 'Muslim' and qualitatively analyzed those reports based on previous researches to highly prove and assert that media have distorted the images of Islam and Muslims in their reports, mainly after the 9/11 incident. The similar conclusion was also found by Yusof et al. (2013) in their investigation on media framing on Islam and terrorism of 109 articles from two international news magazines, namely, *The Economist* from the UK and *TIME* from the US which either directly or indirectly related their stories to Islam after the death of Osama Bin Laden until two months following the incident (the second week of May 2011 issue until the final week of June 2011 issue). They found three negative common frames on Islam that: Islam caused violent, Muslims are terrorists, and leadership in Muslim countries is in catastrophe. Despite the killing of Osama Bin Laden, the authors concluded that biased news stories against Islam can still be found in media, and although only with very little coverage, they have caused a negative perception towards Islam as a whole. According to Powell (2011), major national print and Internet media sources, including *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, and *FOX News* have also framed Islam and Muslims in their reports on terrorism after the 9/11 incident. Powell suggested a model of media coverage on terrorist events showing that media give a label to the victims as heroes and personalized them, while the terrorists were labeled as Muslims and are directly linked to larger terrorist cells. The violence acts are connected to war on America by Islam and therefore, future threats from Islam are enhanced. When the terrorist are not Muslims and are the U.S. citizens, media will describe them as human and the reasons of the violence will be investigated. From the model, the author found that after 9/11 events, the media have been demonizing Muslims while glorifying Christians, as well as creating and sustaining fears of Islam and Muslims to support the U.S. attacks on Muslim-majority countries. Collocating the words Islam/Muslims with connotative terms in media was also examined by Martin and Phelan (2002) in their research on the immediate representation of Islam on US-based television networks, namely, *CNN*, *ABC*, *CBS*, *NBC*, and *Fox*, as well as *CNN's* online messageboard by focusing on the noun phrases for 'Islamic' from September 11 to 16. Using the lexical analysis software *Wordsmith*, the cross-media comparisons are based on analysis of 4.18 million words corpus of the televisions' transcripts and 2,39 million words on *CNN* messageboard. They found that the noun phrase of 'Islamic fundamentalist(s)' is the most popular on TV transcript corpus with 51 frequencies, while 'Islamic terrorist(s)' mostly appear on *CNN's* online messageboard at 174 frequencies.

Literature Review

One of the determining factors – if not the only one - that revealed the Watergate scandal to the US public was the role of the Washington Post by its two journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. For months, the newspaper put the subject on its front page and successfully made the issue become the public's salient item. Journalism professors Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw considered the case of Watergate as a perfect example of how media function the agenda-setting and believed that mass media have the ability to transfer their news agendas to the public agenda.

The agenda-setting theory discusses current issues which become discourses in the public. The theory emphasizes that the press has power to influence or even create public opinions thanks to the media's agenda setting whose discussions prioritize current issues developing in the public. From the agenda setting, mass media can even frame certain interests to cover hidden agendas and/or misappropriations of certain individuals or groups.

The use of the words 'jihad/jihadist' and 'Islam/Islamist' in western media's news stories which are believed to have been discussed in their agenda settings which conclude dissemination of the stories to the readers who may then make opinions on Islam and Muslims. When the agenda setting frames their stories only on the words 'jihad/jihadists' and 'Islam/Islamist' with wrong connotations and the stories are repeatedly exposed, the readers will likely perceive the terms wrongly and they may show dislikes or hatreds against Islam. The stories could thus lead to discourses in the society and create public opinion on Islam, especially the words 'jihadist' and 'Islamist' which fit what media want to tell people and what they want people to think about and perhaps even what to do about it (Griffin, 2012).

Methods

The study samples several news stories made by three online western mainstream media, namely, www.cnn.com, www.bloomberg.com, and www.reuters.com on three deadly bombing incidents taking place in western countries, which are the ones known as the Boston Marathon bombing in Boston, the U.S on April 15, 2013, the Paris Bombing on November 13, 2015, and the Manchester Concert bombing on May 22, 2017.

In order to see original editorial agenda that decided the use of terms by those western media, the news stories to be observed are those published within a range of 72 hours after the incidents occurred. The study is not aimed at accusing mass media of being the main cause of hatred against Islam and Muslims, but since they have the most accessible and limitless disseminations of such ideas in the global scope (Allen, 2001), most western people who are highly dependent only on mass media to get information, especially that on Islam and Muslims, will be easily influenced by what the media tell them, and eventually they may think, speak and act in accordance with the media's agenda. A research by Triandis (2013) stated that "people often believe that Islam is violent because of what they read in their newspapers".

The three bombing incidents observed in the study have drawn major attentions of world media. They are the bombings at Boston Marathon in the US on April 15, 2013, slaying three people; in Paris, France, on November 13, 2015, killing 137 people, and in Manchester, the UK, on May 22, 2017, claiming 22 lives. In order to see original editorial agenda that decided the use of phrases by those western media, the news stories to be observed are those published within a range of 48 hours after the incidents occurred as showed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The words* used by Western mainstream media in covering Islam in several bombing incidents.

Incident	Words		
	www.cnn.com	www.bloomberg.com	www.reuters.com
Boston Marathon bombing, the US.	Not found	Published: April 19, 2013 "What we do know is that the Tsarnaevs are Muslims; that they've lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years; and that the younger brother, Dzhokhar, became a U.S. citizen last year." ¹	Not found
Paris bombing, France	Published: November 14, 2015 "The threat of ISIS is well-known, with the jihadist group's atrocities in Syria and Iraq being met with condemnation and airstrikes by a U.S.-led coalition that includes France." ²	Published: November 15, 2015 "The attacks in Paris are a wake-up call. A wake-up call to the fact that what we're involved in now is a civilizational conflict with radical Islam," Rubio said in a statement. ³	Published: November 14, 2015 News title: "France in shock after Islamist attacks kill 129." "It was the worst such attack in Europe since the Madrid train bombings of 2004, in which Islamists killed 191 people." ⁴ Published: November 15, 2015 "France had already been on high alert since Islamist gunmen stormed the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket in Paris in January, killing 17 people." ⁵
Manchester Concert bombing, the UK	Published: May 29, 2017 "She said MI5 is looking at 500 plots and has identified 23,000 jihadist extremists, of which 3,000 are on a 'top list.' She said MI5 is currently recruiting 1,900 new staff and its budget 'has gone up significantly.' ⁶	Published: May 24, 2017 "Libya descended into turmoil after the NATO-backed uprising that ousted Qaddafi in 2011, with myriad armed groups -- some of them Islamist -- and two administrations vying for influence." ⁷	Published: May 24, 2017 "The Manchester bombing was the deadliest attack in Britain since July 2005, when four British Muslim suicide bombers killed 52 people in coordinated attacks on London's transport network." ⁸

¹ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-04-19/the-boston-bombers-and-the-decline-of-al-qaeda>

² <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/14/world/paris-attacks/index.html>

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-11-15/who-benefits-most-from-paris-attacks-assad>

⁴ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-idUSKCN0T22IU20151114>

⁵ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-shooting-idUSKCN0T22IU20151115>

⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/29/europe/mi5-internal-inquiry-abedi/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-07-02/trump-aide-says-cnn-tweet-wasnt-threat-against-journalists>

⁸ <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-security-manchester-idUSKBN18K0K5>

Result and Discussion

The religion and ethnicity backgrounds of terror perpetrators nowadays attract more attentions of mass media to report terror attacks. In Powell's model of media coverage of terrorist events in the US (2011), the victims of terror attacks will be portrayed as heroes and personalized, if the perpetrators are identified as Muslims, and then linked them to larger terrorist cells. Furthermore, the crimes are connected to wars on America by Islam and claimed as a future threat from Islam. The hard news examples in Table 1 show that the Western media have set their agendas to frame Islam and Muslims as they immediately emphasize the religion background of the perpetrators as Muslims or Islamists, and make a phrase to name the incidents with those words on their hard news right after the bombings took place. The media have also built a negative image by saying 'radical Islam', meaning that such violent incidents are related to the original teaching of Islam which also leads to represent the crimes as a form of 'jihad' that is committed by 'jihadists'.

Considering the media's power to create public opinion while distributing ideologies (Gitlin, 1980; Hall, 1990 in Ahmed and Matthes, 2016), the media must have a high consideration of involving a certain faith into their reports relating to violence. Although there were a number of claims by certain groups responsible for those attacks and introduced themselves as a Muslims group or a jihadist group, these cannot be a basis for media to build a generic perception about Islam and Muslims or the noble deed of jihad when it comes to terrors because those who commit crimes are just people who have potentials to be bad and good persons. Quoting certain words from religious teachings like 'jihad or jihadist' as reference by media which then collocate those words with such criminal terms as terrorist or terrorism in their stories is a mistake as the words jihad or jihadist have a noble meaning in Islam.

Media may not a direct cause of Islamophobia, yet the negative stereotype about Islam and Muslims in media has fell apart the society into 'the self' vs 'the other' (Abbas, 2001), 'us' vs 'them' (Martin and Phelan, 2002), and 'the West' vs 'the rest' (Saeed, 2007). The social divergences have marginalized Muslims and jeopardized their lives as the number of hate crimes increases along with the growth of negative Islam/Muslim images in media. Ahmed and Matthes (2016) found in Ogan et al.'s (2013) study that Islamophobia significantly increased in the US which is increasingly associated with anti-Muslim media discourses. Powell (2011) revealed a poll in 2002 that 67 percent Muslim Americans said the media grew more biased against Muslims after the 9/11 attacks.

Most people especially in western countries learn about Islam from media (Ahmed and Matthes, 2016; Powell, 2011; Triandis, 2013) and are greatly influenced by them (Smith, 2013), which have been unfair to report about the religion, especially relating to terrorism. A comprehensive understanding about Islam is highly important for people to build a harmonious social life, and for media to return to its duty: serving the public with fair, unbiased, and balanced news report.

Islam is a monotheism religion which also covers a comprehensive system that regulates individual and collective lives, including the relationship between humans to the environment, in the world and also the life hereafter. The comprehensive teachings have changed the dark old Arabic cultures into a high-valued civilization as the enlightenment spreads across the world until present time. The success of Islam to maintain its teachings for centuries is due to the rationality of the concept of 'Rahmatan lil 'alamin', or literally means 'blessing for the whole universe' that is propagated through peaceful way and high consideration of jihad.

Jihad is a specific Islamic term that is mentioned in Al-Qur'an and hadeeths. Jihad has two meanings, namely, literally and Sharie . Jihad in Arabic means a difficulty or exhaustion because of the optimal resistance against the enemy, while jihad according to the Sharie term has the meaning of an optimal effort to combat the disbelievers. The fuqaha expressed it with a more detailed definition, that is an attempt by a Muslim to (physically) fight the infidels who refuse to embrace Islam after getting Islamic preaching (da'wah) as mentioned in Al-Baqarah verses 190-191, as translated as follows:

“Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors.”

“And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah is worse than killing. And do not fight them at al-Masjid al- Haram until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.”

As the verses contain commands, jihad for Muslims is an obligation. However, the command and the later meaning of jihad has a broad explanation as jihad can only be committed under definite circumstances including the command which must be from the Islamic leader who is so called Khalifah who rules the Islamic state of Khilafah Islamiyah under the Sharia Law. In addition, in conducting jihad, Muslims must pay attention to another package of rules, such as the one obliging the Mujahidin not to hurt women, elderly, children, religious leaders, and unarmed people. Likewise, jihad must not damage the environment including animals and plants as well as worship places. The Mujahidin must treat prisoners of war well and must not torture victims. All the rules on jihad are derived from the Islamic teachings which have been practiced by Prophet Muhammad (peace upon him) and after the prophet passed away, his followers continue practicing jihad in the true meaning according to Al Quran and hadeeths. As it is crystal clear that jihad needs great efforts and must concern humanity, thus Islam does not teach suicide bombings including other forms of self-killing which constitute a great sin.

The power of wide open accessibility has made mass media an effective disseminator of messages including opinions and ideologies, and therefore, mass media become an influential instrument that could be used both for bad and good purposes (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). In the introduction of Edward W. Said's book *Covering Islam*, which was translated into Indonesian, the publisher said Said concluded that media and experts indeed determine people's point of view about the world. In this context, Said proved that not only do languages describe but also define a political reality. Here we see the relation of Habermas' epistemology above. That what western media and experts stated -- when talking about the Islamic world - - as the 'truth' not the truth in objective perspectives, without prejudice. What they said as 'the truth' was the truth of their own version, which was used unilaterally by certain interests based on their own feelings that Islam was a specter (Said, p. x).

Rather than referring the terrorism or terrorists to Islam, Islamist, Muslim, jihad, jihadist, or other Islam-related terms, alternatively media can identify such crimes and criminals with some backgrounds that are common in public, such as those on nationality, occupation, originality and family backgrounds. It is quite difficult to find fair news reports on terrorism which do not use Islamic terms collocated with word terrorism or terrorist. However, Al Jazeera when reporting about terrorist attacks, it did not use words that cornered Islam. For instance, the Qatar-based online media's reports on Boston bombing attack described the suspected perpetrator, Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev as the brothers who emigrated to the United States a decade ago from Dagestan, a predominantly Muslim region in Russia's

Caucasus. Furthermore, Al Jazeera wrote: "Tamerlan Tsarnaev travelled to Moscow in January 2012 and spent six months in Dagestan, a law enforcement source said. Neighbors in Makhachkala, the region's capital city, said he kept a low profile while visiting there last summer, helping his father renovate an apartment unit. That trip, combined with Russian interest in Tamerlan communicated to US authorities and an FBI interview of him in 2011, have raised questions whether danger signals were missed." The report described the Tsarnaev brothers from their originality background and the last activities they did before the bombing incident. Similar reports on Manchester attack by BBC published on May 29, 2017 described the bomber, Salam Abedi, as a 22-year-old man born in Manchester to Libyan parents who at 16 fought against the Colonel Gaddafi regime with his father during the school holidays. Referring the bombing suspects to their nationality, originality, or birth data and place do not reduce the substance of the news. Their religions, whether or not they are Muslims, should not be so excessively highlighted that people would think the incident occurred only because of the faith.

Meanwhile, on November 14, 2017, a day after the Paris attack, Usatoday published a statement of the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain, Shuja Shafi, saying that, "My thoughts and prayers for the families of those killed and injured and for the people of France, our neighbors. This attack is being claimed by the group calling themselves 'Islamic State'. There is nothing Islamic about such people and their actions are evil, and outside the boundaries set by our faith." The online media also quoted a professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford University in England and President of the European Muslim Network think tank, Tariq Ramadan, stating that absolute and immediate condemnation. They shouted, we are told, 'Allahu Akbar' (God [is] the greatest) to support and justify their inhuman actions. With this they told a lie and a truth. Their lie is related to Islam and its message as not even one of its teachings, ever, can justify their actions. These acts are the result of minds inhabited by the worst, or minds without minds, manipulated or manipulators." Such statements from Islamic leaders and experts on terrorism are significant to encounter negative news on Islam that create deteriorating image about the religion of peace among people.

As mass media influence and affect people's minds and behaviors, there are a number of rules that journalists should pay attentions to, including the one that is formulated by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in the ten elements of journalism. Indeed, media companies have their own agenda according to the interests of the owners or the capitalists, yet it should not neglect its first loyalty to citizens, including Muslims, and its essence of verification to all reports they serve to public. Understanding about Islam and jihad has to be put at the first place by mass media before framing their stories about terrorism. Instead, they should use proportional narratives so that the public would not have symptoms of Islamophobia in which people express and perpetuate feelings of fear, anxiety, hostility, rejection and dread of Islam and/or Muslims. (Abbas, 2001; Richardson, 2012; Runnymede trust, 1997 in Marranci, 2004).

Conclusion

With regards to the above question, mass media are expected to make their stories unbiased and use the principle of presumption of innocence. They should also abide by the ethic code of journalism in order to make their reports on providing true information, knowledge and understanding well perceived, especially in using sensitive words as 'jihad, jihadist and Islamist' by exercising the principle of covering both sides to find the right meaning of those

words. As an effort to help contribute to creating peace among people of different faiths and ethnic groups, their reports are also expected to serve as a means to educate people about a way to see an incident thoroughly and prudently.

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