Understanding Media Coverage on Terrorism and Its Relations with Islamophobia

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Abstract

Terrorism has been a daily issue, or if not, one of the main issues reported in the media be it in the local or foreign media. News coverage on terrorism has escalated since the tragedy of 9/11. There have been many cases where the media particularly, the Western media coverage on terror acts are biased towards Muslims and Islam which created a long-lasting images and stereotypes of this group. Exposure to violent media stereotypes of Muslims has been shown to boost Westerners' encouragement for anti-Muslim policies such as military action abroad and civil limitations at home. Muslims are usually depicted as violent, aggressive, and drawn to terrorism in a variety of media covering newspapers, cable news, television, movies and video games. The media is a predominant component of popular culture, with the potential to set the agenda. As a result, when an agenda is aligned across media outlets, the media has the ability to create association for people, race, culture and religion. This study aimed to explore the roles of media reporting of terrorism in propagating Islamophobia that shapes our news reporting and the adoption of the war journalism theory. In doing so, a qualitative approach with thematic analysis was undertaken by employing conceptual research to study the findings of previous research on the related subject of media, terrorism, and the phenomena of Islamophobia. The finding showed that the media succeeded in instilling fear into the public towards Islam and Muslims through the news reporting on terrorism phenomena.

Keywords: *Media, terrorism, Islamophobia, war and peace journalism, news framing, agenda-setting*

1.0 Introduction

The media is widely regarded as the most influential medium in the world, having influenced the opinions of people from all walks of life. Recently, the influence of the mass media has grown significantly, owing to its ability to bring to light everything that occurs in the world on a daily basis. Due to the extreme speed and precision with which the mass media presents information, news about numerous people's lives is widely disseminated to the general public. The oblique consequence of mass media has a significant impact on public opinion based on how they read press coverage [1]. This confirmed Walter Lippmann's [2] claim in his book "Public Opinion" in 1922. He theorized that the media have the influence to tell the audience not "what to think" but "what to think about". He further explained that the news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind." Therefore, the media plays an important role in shaping the listener's perspective and attitude toward any complication that arises throughout the world, in this case, terrorism and Islamophobia. The audiences acknowledge this as true and expect the media to display a clear image of any type of affair occurring

on both a national and international scale.

In that regard, terrorism have been among many issues reported in the media be it the local or foreign media. especially after the attacks in the United States of America (US) on 11 September 2001 (9/11). Since then, in the US at least, terrorism has largely been equated to the threat posed by Al-Qaeda, an international threat occurred not only by the spectacular and deadly nature of the 9/11 attacks but by the fear that future strikes might be even more deadly and employ weapons of mass destruction. The threat of terrorism continues until today, with the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its affiliated terrorist group around the world, such as the Boko Haram in the Africa, Jamaah Islamiyah in the Malay Archipelago and Abu-Sayyaf group in the Philippine.

Based on the given instances, Islamophobia became more severe. Arabs and Muslims are constantly confused as prone to terrorism and stereotyped as anti-democratic, illogical, hot-tempered, primitive, uneducated, lustful and so on [3]. There have been numerous instances of Muslims being harassed, attacked and even murdered as a result of people's misconceptions about Muslims and Islam, particularly in Western countries. Misconceptions and negative portrayals of Islam and its adherents in the media implants fear in the general public as well as those who are oppressed.

Problem Statement - Although news media has been a component of media studies for decades, it has only lately begun to influence how the media packages its goods during times of national crisis [4, 5]. In general, individuals desire information during times of crisis, especially the threats of terrorism. They resort to news sources to learn what is going on and to assist them predict what could happen. Realizing this, the media used this opportunity to subtly relates terrorism with Islamophobia. Based on this concern, there is a need to analyze the role of media coverage of terrorism-related news and its relations with Islamophobia phenomena. Hence, this study will attempt to add to the existing knowledge and fills the gap on the role of media coverage on terrorism that resort to the propagation of Islamophobia.

Research Question – To unravel the answer to this problem three questions in this study have been posed namely, 1) What is the role of media coverage on terrorism and its relationship with islamophobia? 2) How does media coverage propagate Islamophobia? and 3) How effective is media stereotypes/framing towards terrorism and Islamophobia?

This study aimed to establish an understanding on the role of the media in propagating news stories on terrorism and its relations with Islamophobia. This study is important because the media coverage on terrorism has cultivated negative perceptions and attitude of the public on Islam and its adherents in general. The higher the volume and prominence of media coverage, the more serious the public will perceive the concerns to be [6, 7]. Muslims are being stereotyped and generalized as a result of the acts of others, most of which is due to the media's representation of Muslims and Islam. The media is exacerbating the word Islamophobia by instilling fear in the population and vilifying individuals who look to be Muslims. Although there has been a wealth of research on Islamophobia and the role of the media, this study seeks to reinforce the basis of the media's role in integrating Islamophobia into society.

Furthermore, this research brings profit to those who are in the field of journalism and mass communication in gathering facts and informing the public about local, state, national, and international affairs. Besides that, the result from this research can be used as reference data in conducting new research or testing the validity of other related findings. This study also intends to shed light on the importance of ethical journalism which may assist individuals who work in fields such as journalism, broadcasting and news reporting. The outcomes of this study may encourage those working in related fields to understand the importance of ethical journalism as it plays a crucial role in propagating a certain phenomenon which in this study focuses on Islamophobia. Media in general has a significant influence to either change or reinforce the audience or individual beliefs. Thus, the study of role of the media in covering and propagating news on terrorism and its effectiveness in promoting Islamophobia are essential to assist academicians, organizations, and individuals to further gain better knowledge on this topic.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 War Journalism

Conflict coverage in the news, including war reporting, is based on the idea of conflict as a news value [8]. As a result, conflict coverage is frequently sensationalized and used solely to maximize circulation and ratings. [9] was the first to suggest peace journalism as a self-aware, practical notion for journalists reporting wars and conflicts. He described peace journalism and war journalism as two opposing frames on conflict reporting.

According to Galtung, war journalism is orientated towards war/violence, propaganda, elites, and victory. Adding to that, war journalism perceived conflict as an arena where participants are grouped into two opposing sides of 'them vs us' in a zero-sum game. It concentrates on the visible effects of war, such as casualties and damage to property. The categories of war journalism based on Galtung's classification are Reactive, Visible effects of war, Elite-oriented, Zero-sum-oriented, Partisan, Differences-oriented and Propaganda. For instance, a study conducted by [10] found that the news media in the United States promotes the idea that Muslims are uniquely misogynistic. This, in turn, may impact public views about Muslims and influence policies involving Muslims both at home and abroad. [11] supported Terman claims that when the mainstream media fails to distinguish between terrorism and Islam, non-Muslims respond negatively toward Muslims. In addition, according to [12], the media played a biased role in recent conflicts by manipulating the results of civilian damage and concealing the facts from the battleground, and so seems to function as a state's weapon in propagating propaganda messages.

On the contrary, peace journalism is a more general, more balanced, and precise way of framing stories, describing conflict analysis and transformation insights. Similar to public journalism and development journalism, peace journalism is grounded in communication philosophy– notably, the dedication to the idea of civic participation, the understanding of social justice as a moral imperative, and the belief that the value and sacredness of the individual are realized only in and through communities. The categories of peace journalism described by Galtung's classification are: Proactive, Invisible effects of war, People-oriented, Agreement-oriented, Win-win-oriented, Multi-party-oriented, and Non-partisan. By taking advocacy, interpretative method, the peace journalist focuses on stories that emphasis peace initiatives; deescalate ethnic and religious differences, prevents conflict, concentrates on the structure of society; and promotes conflict solution, restoration, and conciliation by offering voice to all parties other than the two opposing sides, and creates compassion and understanding.

2.2 Media Stereotypes

Stereotypes are generally viewed as erroneous overgeneralizations made by socially dominant groups about marginalized populations, and they have been extensively distributed to various degrees in the media for many years [13]. The media are important because they help to perpetuate racial myths by building consistent and recurrent links between language (in the form of signals) and context (beliefs) that are congruent with these myths [14]. Many scholars believe that misconceptions about Islam and Muslims have aided the Western world in maintaining dominance and participation in Muslim countries [15]. Islam and Muslims were purposely misrepresented by the international media as extremist terrorists with outdated customs and beliefs, as well as the teachings and message of Islam and associated faiths. Today's media sectors are failing to fulfil their responsibilities and portraying the true picture of events and situations [16].

The media has evolved into a profit-making enterprise, with international news stories on Islamophobia and Muslims proving to be beneficial for media owners. That is, how the media chooses a particular frame of news stories to influence consumers, particularly in the context of Islamophobia. In comparison to Western cultures, popular media portrays Middle Eastern and Muslim societies as particularly or unusually misogynistic [17, 18] and the media occasionally criticizes Islam for marginalizing women and giving males overwhelming authority [19]. A veiled Muslim lady has long been used as a symbol of the Islamic world's tyranny and patriarchy. This image has pervaded the media,

politics, and the arts and literature.

The problem of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam sentiment has become the most prominent plot devised by foreign media. The United States' news media, as well as its followers in the United Kingdom, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Cable News Network (CNN), and other mainstream print media, influenced the entire world. Extremism and terrorism are frequently associated with Muslims and Islam in the international media [20]. The evocation of negative images and stereotypes connected with Muslims is at the heart of anti-Muslim violence. The slogans that frequently accompany the violence –'Go home?' 'You are not American!'– reflect a strong sense of Arab illegitimacy in the west, as well as a strong desire for vengeance.

2.3 Media and Framing

The media, according to the theoretical underpinnings of framing theory, teaches individuals about what is relevant in the world around them and how to think about the events and people that occupy that environment [21]. The concept of framing is based on the idea that how an issue is portrayed in news articles influences how viewers interpret it [22]. The presentation of operationalizations and empirical data, according to Scheufele [23], demonstrates that the fragmented paradigm to which Entman [2419] alluded persists. Even in the field of media effects, the idea of framing has yet to be fully incorporated into a coherent theoretical paradigm. Framing as a theory of media effects must be viewed as a process model.

The media's decision biases operate within the minds of individual journalists and within the processes of journalistic institutions, embodied in (generally unstated) rules and norms that guide their processing of information and influence the framing of media texts [24]. Gitlin [25] claims that news frames help audiences to govern and understand reality, as well as pick appropriate repertoires of cognition and action. Journalists and editors, on the other hand, utilize framing strategies to organize news discourse. Framing, according to Watson and Hill [26], is the process by which the media "frames" reality. According to these experts, framing is a narrative strategy, therefore anything that isn't on the front page of a newspaper or news magazine is "out of frame."

This demonstrates that the media set the agenda for what topics or events are on the agenda and transmit the prominence of qualities especially connected to prospective items that may become attractive. The word salience suggests that frames make particular parts of news stories more remembered, noticeable, or significant to viewers [27]. According to Powell [28], terrorists who are Muslim are framed differently than those who are not Muslim, contributing to a fear of the "other" that grows with each terrorist occurrence. The worldwide dominance of the US media contributes to this frame's ability to influence global relations with Islamic nations.

2.4 Terrorism

Scholars have defined terrorism in a variety of ways with no standard definition of terrorism exists. According to Silke [29], terrorism is a term used to describe a violated act that is considered violated and violent due to its nature as a violation of the norm and human rights. Terrorism is defined as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or the threat of unlawful violence to instils fear; intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of political, religious, or ideological goals," according to the US Department of Defense (DOD) [30]. Three key elements emerge from this definition: violence, fear, and intimidation. These three elements have the same effect on the victims: they terrorize them. The FBI adds to the many definitions of terrorism by defining it as "the unlawful use of violence and force against property or persons to coerce or intimidate the civilian population, a government, or any party affiliated with political or social objectives" [30].

Furthermore, according to Schmid [31], terrorism is defined and explained as an: (1) anxiety inspiring method of repeated violent action, (2) employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group or state actors, (3) for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, (4) the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. (5) The immediate individual victims of the violence are randomly selected from a target group that serves as a message to authorities. Threat and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization/group), the (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to

manipulate the main target audiences, turning it into a target of fear, a target of demands, or a target of attention depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought."

Schmid's straightforward explanation of terrorism focuses on conveying the terrorist's intent. Terrorists' direct victims are unusually intentionally targeted; they are sometimes physically injured or killed in order to attract attention and send a message to the main target, the authority, which could be the government of the country where the attack occurred, or the culture or values of that country. The story of the event is then analyzed, created, and re-created for all audiences through mass media coverage. Based on the given description of terrorism, the terrorist groups such as the Al-Qaeda and ISIS have contributed to the propagation of Islamophobia by the media. Islamophobia was made worse with the latest situation in Afghanistan, when the Taliban group regained control of more than 80% of Afghanistan territory soon after the withdrawal of the US troop. In this regard, the media will not runout of news materials on terrorism coverage. Thus, the media gains more influence on propagating Islamophobia.

2.5 Islamophobia

The term Islamophobia appears to have first appeared in print in February 1991 in a US periodical. Islamophobia is defined as "unreasonable dislike or fear of, and prejudice against, Muslims or Islam" by the Cambridge Dictionary. Political activists created the term "Islamophobia" in the late 1990s to draw attention to rhetoric and actions aimed at Islam and Muslims in Western liberal democracies. Since then, non-Muslims' perceptions of Muslims and Islam have been widely distorted [32]. Terrorists, religious fanatics and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims continue to be portrayed in the media. Lack of knowledge and understanding of Muslims and Islam was not the origin of Islamophobia.

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, left a lasting and profound influence on the entire world. This is compounded with The 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT) policy by the United States of America (USA) as their response to the attack [33]. Following events such as the 7/7 explosion, the Muhammad cartoon debate, the Muslim female scarf controversy, and the Paris attacks, there has been a significant increase in the amount of news items about Islam. Muslims, as well as members of other vulnerable groups, witnessed greater animosity after September 11th, according to Allen and Nielsen [34]. Although there were few reports of severe violence, verbal abuse, harassment, and aggressiveness were much more common.

On the Internet, explicit Islamophobic language was found, such as in emails and text messages, as well as more traditional hate crime methods such as abusive phone calls, messages left on cars, and anonymous mail addressed to private residences, mosques, and Islamic cultural centres. Furthermore, according to Allen and Nielsen (2002) [34], while some post–September 11th displays of Islamophobia were "covers" for generalized racism and xenophobia, many were specifically targeted at Muslims. The ultra-right-wing British National Party, for example, teamed up with Sikh and Hindu radicals to form an anti-Muslim coalition in the United Kingdom. As a result of the international media's role in shaping the connection between terrorism and Islamophobia, which resulted in the formation of labels on Islam and terrorism, it has now become a source of concern not only for minority Muslims in Western countries, but also for Muslims on the ground in Muslim countries [35]. As a result, the term "Islamophobia" was coined to instils fear and apprehension in the hearts of many Western countries. Pejorative terms have been used to describe Islamic terrorism, Islamic fanaticism, Muslim extremists, Islamists, and political Islam [36].

2.6 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework assists in the identification of study variables as well as the elucidation of variable connections. When the topics under investigation have a lengthy academic history and contemporary researchers have historically integrated their empirical work in well-established theories, frameworks are generally broader and more thorough [37].
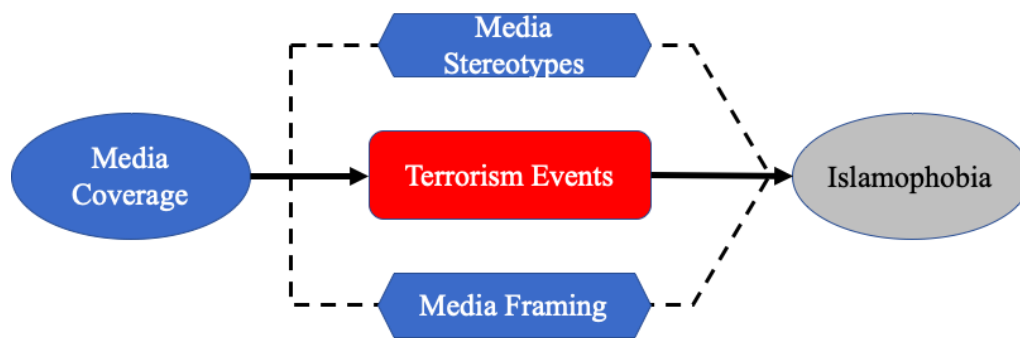
Figure 1:   Conceptual framework illustrating how media coverage on terrorism employed media stereotypes and media framing to propagate Islamophobia

This study uses the above conceptual framework to illustrate media coverage on terrorism propagate Islamophobia. In doing so, the media employed the agenda-setting theory and news framing in their reporting of the terrorism-related events. By employing agenda-setting and news framing, the media have effectively associated the terrorism with Islamophobia onto its news audiences.

3.0 Methodology

Research methodology is a methodical way to address a research issue that involves researching several techniques that will be used in the conduct of research [38]. This study employs a qualitative approach by analyzing previous literature to collect data that can be analyzed in a thematic way to understand how the media coverage on terrorism creates fear among the public which then leads to a rise in Islamophobia. Qualitative research is an interpretive technique that seeks to acquire insight into the unique meanings and behaviors experienced in a given social phenomenon via the subjective experiences of the participants [39]. This is supported by Goundar [38], that qualitative research aims to get the meaning, feeling, and describe a situation. Thematic analysis is suitable for a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives. It can analyze a wide range of data (interviews, media scripts, focus groups) and work with large or small data sets [40]. Thus, the combination of qualitative research and thematic analysis through evaluating prior research, provides support in constructing a research framework in this study. Therefore, this study was conducted by analyzing the findings of previous research on media, terrorism, Islamophobia.

4.0 Findings

Six main themes based on Galtung's classification of war journalism are used to understand how the media coverage on terrorism creates fear among the public which then leads to a rise in Islamophobia. The themes are Reactive, Visible effects of war, Elite-oriented, Partisan and Differences-oriented, Zero-sum-oriented and Propaganda.

4.1   Reactive

Terrorism is undoubtedly received significant news coverage all over the world, especially the Western media practitioners. The substantial influence of the media propagating Islamophobia through the terrorism-related activities towards Muslims is overwhelming. The media was successful in instilling fear in the public by using media stereotypes and framing terrorism and Islamophobia in a negative light with little or without proper initiatives to counter the issue of Islamophobia, such as peace talks or multi-religious roundtable discussion to better understand and to shed light on the issue of Islamophobia. Thus, in the absence of such initiative, this media practice associates terrorism with Islam, instilling fear of the "other" and assisting terrorists in achieving their goal of instilling fear.

4.2 Visible effects of war

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 is an example of *Visible effects of war*. The war journalism reports violent actions for example casualties, damage of property, arrests, shootings, etc. In this regard, the aftermath of the attack has had a significant impact on how the media reports on terrorism. This became evident when the news coverage of terrorism in the United States media shifted from a minor concern to a "War on Terror" that was primarily directed at Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, among others [41]. Another direct effect of the War on Terror for example has become the idea for the development of electronic war game industries. The digital war games spread false preconceptions about Muslims, bolstering patriarchal militarism and Islamophobia. [42], for example, investigated digital war games and discovered that they contribute to the stereotyping and othering of Muslims, as well as revealing certain obstacles to Islamophobia in the digital games industry. Thus, the occurrences of war and the role of media in portraying Muslims in the negative light, stereotypes of Muslims in digital games also exist.

4.3 Elite-oriented

The elite and leaders are frequently cited as sources of facts and information in war journalism publications. Elite newspapers are likely to generate higher quality content because they have tremendous resources to hire specialized and freelance reporters to cover the war and assign reporters overseas. International news necessitates a significant financial investment derived from news organizations. Circulation size has been identified to predict financial investment in daily newspaper news departments as well as increased coverage of international news. Therefore, in the context of terrorism news coverage, the media in the United States internalized the government's focus, resulting in acts of terrorism being framed within the Islamophobia context and the "War on Terror". A theme that was developed and repeated in the media contributed to the amplification of islamophobia and the creation of a political climate supportive of the Iraq invasion.

4.4 Partisan-oriented and Differences-oriented

According to Galtung, war journalism reports focus on one side and ignore the perspectives of others. The media biased reports only the western or the non-Muslim perspective of their misunderstanding of Islam while omitting the true teaching of Islam from the Muslim perspective. Adding to that, the media highlights news regarding areas of dissimilarity that exacerbate conflict. Thus, the War on Terror initiated by the United States marked the beginning of the US versus Islam campaign, which stoked hostility between the East and the West and perpetuated a climate of fear of terrorism, which has been repeatedly linked to Muslims to the present day.

4.5 Zero-sum-oriented

Coverage highlighting the victory of a party and defeat of another party are referred to as zero-sum-oriented. In the context of media coverage of terrorism, the surviving remnant of the al-Qaeda terrorist group and the emergence of ISIS in Syria and Iraq in 2014 with the establishment of the so-called Islamic caliphate demonstrated a series of victories of the terrorist group that amplified islamophobia. Not only that, according to France24New [43], the latest situation in Afghanistan, with the Taliban group regaining control of more than 80% of Afghanistan territory soon after the withdrawal of the US troop give media more materials for their news coverage of terrorism that further continue and solidify the propagation of Islamophobia.

4.6 Propaganda

War journalism employs propaganda in its news reporting. Its practice involves victimizing and incendiary language-oriented. The media utilized media stereotyping and media framing by using Islamophobic languages such as Islamic terrorism, Islamic fanaticism, Muslim extremists, Islamists,

and political Islam etc. In this context, not only is the media stereotyping and framing Islam with terrorism, but the framing is solidified when Western leaders spoke their minds on the 9/11 aftermath with remarkable candor on Islamophobia. This trend of media framing continues to the present day; consider the October 2020 attack in France, with the news headline, "Macron speaks of 'existential' fight against terrorism after the incident of a teacher beheaded in France." In fact, some non-Western countries appear to be following suit. For example, the Indian news media reported in 2020 on the allegation that Indian Intelligence foiled plans by a Malaysia-based Rohingya terror group linked to Zakir Naik to carry out a terror attack in India.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

This study's primary purpose was to examine whether the media coverage on terrorism promotes Islamophobia and how the media propagate Islamophobia in their coverage of the terrorism phenomena. Following a thematic analysis of the data reviewed from the selected previous literature, six main themes emerged. First, the media reactive response on Islamophobia by continuously reporting on terrorism has resulted in the propagation of Islamophobia in the media becoming a normal journalism practice. This is based on the news reporting of terrorism-related issues such as during the time of al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsular and Afghanistan, followed by the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and compounded with the latest situation in Afghanistan Taliban group, the media are continuously producing and repeating news story on terrorism to its audiences.

Second, the visible effects of war demonstrated by the internalization of the War on Terror policy in U.S media during the former Bush administration's national security policy, which was launched in response to the September 11th attacks, and marked a new beginning of rebranded "Islamophobia," resulted in the stereotypes and framing of Islamophobia have become even more effective. Therefore, the media's significant role in spreading Islamophobia in their news reporting on terrorism has been confirmed.

Third, elite-oriented war journalism has resulted in the internalization of the War on Terror policy in U.S media during the former Bush administration's national security policy which was launched in response to the September 11th attacks. Subsequently, that leads us to the fourth theme of war journalism - partisan-oriented and differences-oriented. The biased and imbalanced reports between the western or the non-Muslim perspective and the true teaching of Islam from the Muslim perspective, as well as the media focus of areas of dissimilarity had sparked the beginning of the US versus Islam campaign, which amplified hostility between the East and the West. Therefore, marked a new beginning of rebranded "Islamophobia," which caused the stereotypes and framing of Islamophobia to become even more effective. Therefore, the media's significant role in spreading Islamophobia in their news reporting on terrorism has been confirmed.

Fifth, the media coverage on terrorism, such as the emergence of ISIS in Syria and Iraq in 2014 with the establishment of the Islamic caliphate demonstrated victories of the terrorist indicates a failure of the US-led War on Terror. Vice versa, the losses of ISIS territories in Syria that brought to its defeat in 2018 by the U.S War on Terror operations has confirmed Galtung's War Journalism *"zero-sum-oriented"* theme. Thus, has amplified islamophobia.

Sixth, the employment of propaganda revealed how Al-Qaeda fighters and other terrorist groups alike were portrayed in the U.S-led War on Terror, as well as how the media framed Muslims as terrorists, resulting in the propagation of Islamophobia in the country. thus, indicating terrorism has unquestionably received widespread media attention around the world. Since the conflict has revolved around the West's opposition to Islam, the media, which is generally considered to be pro-Western, has tended to demonized and victimize Muslims in their reporting by using Islamophobic language.

In conclusion, the media profoundly play a significant role in propagating Islamophobia in their news coverage of the terrorism phenomena. The media propagated Islamophobia in their news report on terrorism by employing media stereotypes and media framing on Muslims. Thus, undoubtedly the media reporting on terrorism has effectively framed and associating terrorism with Islamophobia towards its audiences.

6.0 References

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