Investigating the Use of Language in Islam-related News: Evidence from Selected Non-Western Online Newspapers

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Abstract
The manner in which language is utilized in reporting Islam is disheartening. This is because sensationalized language, especially in the news media, could reinforce negative stereotypes. As such, those who rely on the media to understand Islam are likely to develop negative preconceptions about the religion. This study aims to investigate how the non-western online newspapers use language in news coverage of Islam. Content analysis was used to collect and analyze the data. Using purposive sampling, *Punch and Vanguard* were selected from Nigeria while *The Star and New Straits Times* were selected from Malaysia. A total of 599 Islam-related news articles were collected from the selected newspapers using internet-based search from November 2015 until September 2016. The findings showed that almost half of the overall Islam-related articles conveyed negative tone toward Islam while very few conveyed positive tone. This shows that the language used in news coverage of Islam is inappropriate and sensational. Hence, there is a need to enhance the reporters' knowledge and writing skills through inter-media exchange program, exposure to different religious, social and cultural lives, workshops, seminars, conferences, as well as sensitivity training and retraining on reporting religions.
Keywords: media language, news articles, newspapers, non-western media, sensationalism

1. Introduction

The power of language can never be overemphasized, and therefore how it is used particularly in the written communication matters greatly. Nevertheless, the media are blamed for using biased language to stigmatize, dehumanize Muslims and associate them with sentimentalism, terrorism, and intolerance. The media contents are unjustifiably dominated by expressions creating negative impressions that all violent acts and terrorist attacks are committed by Muslims. Research shows that news content is often associated with misinformation, which can trigger human emotions (Ibrahim, Mustaffa, Kee, & Ahmad, 2011). Despite the requirement for a series of editing processes in newspapers, at times, copies pass through almost unchanged and finally published. News is the primary content of newspapers, and therefore its formation is of great importance. Journalists bear a great responsibility to ensure that religion is depicted fairly and accurately (Pearson et al., 2001).

The media, particularly newspapers, are now paying much attention to news on religion, and the number of editors and writers on religion topics is increasing gradually. However, meeting the quality of standards in reporting the region is of great concern. Allen (2014) states that one of the major factors that contribute to the media's negative portrayal of Islam is their selection of words to describe Muslims. In addition, sensationalized stories on Muslims in the media could intensify tension and distort the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is because, at times, reporters accentuate exotic and sensational news in order to catch the audience's attention. This emphasis on violence, which is reinforced through language, could influence societal action, interaction and attitudes of the social consensus.

News stories can be misleading, exaggerated and then repeated, generating collective anxiety and fear which may contribute, in extreme circumstances, to negative actions such as violence (Wright, 1997). In fact, research shows that the language used in reporting Islam is alarmist, especially those containing emotive, and at times, even abusive expressions (Jacobsen et al., 2012; Allen (2014). There has been an increased interest in the media's portrayal of Islam and Muslims, but there are a limited number of studies on the use of language in reporting Islam. Although some studies have been carried out on how the media report Islam (Ahmad, 2006; Moore et al., 2008; Thompson, 2013; Allen, 2014), this study attempts to add on to this knowledge by solely focusing on how language is used in Islam-related news particularly in online newspapers. This could be useful especially in the field of language and communication.

2. The Use of Language in Islam-related News

The media cannot escape criticism from various researchers in relation to their use of language. The newspaper industry responds to information needs from readers. Nevertheless, the news content is constructed by news writers who may hold on to a certain opinion regarding the topic being reported. Eltantawy (2007) employed discourse analysis to investigate the U.S. newspaper representation of Muslim-Arab women after the 9/11 attacks. Most of the stories analyzed by Eltantawy associated Muslim culture with problems, injustices, and oppression. Muslim culture is indirectly presented as conflicting with itself. An opinionated part of media content could instigate tension by depicting Islam as a religion of violence, either consciously or unconsciously. Most of newspaper headlines depict negative images of Islam and Muslims.

Rupar (2012) notes that the unfortunate instances of media reportage of Islam typically involve negative labeling, designated use of figures, generalizing events, portraying one side of story, using pejorative words, combining truths and opinions, lack of facts, as well as miss-matching of headlines, news content, imageries and sound. Furthermore, Schneider (2011) employed critical discourse analysis, focusing on the influence of the use of language in newspaper articles in relation to Muslims. The study found that there is a strong evidence of framing and construction of moral panics in the articles of newspapers. This shows how the newspapers use framing to manipulate information against Islam and Muslims.

In addition, labels and bias are noticeable in several media reports in which Muslims are labeled as radicals, irrational, intolerant, aggressive, and enemies of the western civilization. The argument lies in the particular ways of reporting the stories, especially how the language is used. At times, mere ignorance could be considered as a factor in this regard, which could raise fear and hatred in the society. According to Kumar (2011), lack of trained writers on religious topics is one of the major factors causing the inappropriate use of language. News about Muslims is mostly distorted by means of language so that readers can recognize the reproduction of their own visions and opinions. Newspapers eventually beguile the tolerances of their readers and institute the belief that Muslims generate the problem.

The language used in reporting Islam is mostly disparaging to Muslims. Moore et al. (2008) found that the language used in reporting Muslims reflects the negative context in which they tend to appear. The most commonly used nouns in relation to British Muslims were terrorism, extremism, Islamism, suicide bombing and militancy, while the most commonly used adjectives were radical, fanatical, fundamentalist, extremist, and militant. Even prior to 9/11 attacks, Muslims were already frustrated with the media's persistent usage of sensationalist terms such as 'Islamic terrorists' and 'Muslim fundamentalists'. The observed 'double standards' in relation to western foreign policy intended for Muslims were perceived to be facilitated through language. Terms such as 'democracy' and 'freedom fighters' hold highly political and subjective meanings, but are infrequently used in circumstances that support the interests of Muslims (Ahmad, 2006).

The media language that results in the negative image of Islam and Muslims is related to 'news value' – the extent to which the messages are made more attractive and different from what is presently prevalent in the society. This is done by highlighting messages of strong 'social weight', or even more common, exaggerating the scale of the phenomenon depicted. For example, in order to render a higher 'news value' to messages so as to catch the audience's attention, reporters are inclined to highlight the differences between Islam and Muslims. Meanwhile, the depiction of Muslims in the media as a personification of evil has been exaggerated mostly by stressing that they incline towards violence and aggressiveness (Pędziwiatr, 2010).

Furthermore, the media portray negative image of Islam and Muslims by the choice of content, especially by revealing the religious affiliation of those who are involved in violent acts, or by categorizing regional and ethnic conflicts as religious. Eltantawy (2007) notes that news values and journalistic style can at times lead to bias. This issue of media bias needs serious attention. Therefore, journalists learn how to select what makes news through professional training, peer pressure and newsroom discipline. In addition, the newspaper editorial practices and writing styles

also significantly shape the type of language and images that form the portrayals of Muslims and Islam as well as the type of information provided (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005).

The preceding review suggests that negative depiction of Islam using language could contribute to moral panics, but this does not mean the newspapers should not report issues involving Muslims. This does not also claim offering special treatment to Muslims or overlooking the problems in some Muslim societies, but issues should be clarified in context and cultural roots acknowledged. The media's failure to accurately report the news means that the complete picture is distorted. This situation does not help to promote the readers' knowledge and understanding; it highlights the problem rather than provides solutions (Allen, 2014).

3. Theoretical Approach

This study is based on Framing theory which considers meaning as existing mainly in the news content (Potter, 2012). It describes the media's possible influence on the public understanding of issues covered considering their frames and prominence (Arthur, 2012). Framing theory has recently taken over from agenda-setting and cultivation theory as the most universally practical approach in the field of communication. The development of Framing theory is attributed to Goffman (1974). This theory considers meaning as existing particularly in the media messages. It focuses on the influence of news viewpoints used by journalists on the audiences. Journalists construct the frame of news stories in the manner they choose certain bits of information and disregard others and in the manner they construct their news stories to focus on certain issues.

The frame refers to the way the news is presented, meaning, it is the opinion from which the news is reported. It is the news angle or the context for the story. A news angle refers to the explanatory and ideological framework from which the media report about certain topic and the conceptualization of stories within a particular framework. The manner in which news events are reported by the media might influence the audience's understanding of the issues. Recipients of media messages develop their attitude based on the manner in which the news story is framed in addition to their own individual frames (Potter, 2012; Freyenberger, 2013). Framing is an inevitable part of human communication. It occurs when the production and dissemination of the media messages come to highlight, emphasize or obscure some aspects of the message over others. This is mostly done through language, particularly how the information is organized and structured. The use of language in framing is not limited to either spoken or written language. It encompasses any coherent symbolic system measured in a linguistic system (Walljet, 2013). Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) describe the various framing devices as follows.

1. Metaphor: This refers to framing a conceptual idea by comparing it with something else.
2. Stories, myths, or legends: This is a situation whereby the media frame a topic through narrative in a vivid and memorable way.
3. Slogan, jargon, or catchphrase: The media may frame an issue using slogans, jargons, or catchy phrases to make such issue more memorable and relate-able.
4. Artifact: This refers to framing of an issue using intrinsic symbolic values such as visual or cultural phenomenon that holds more meaning than the issue itself.
5. Contrast: This refers to a situation whereby an event is described in terms of what it is not.

6. Spin: This occurs when the media present an issue in such a way as to convey a value judgement (positive or negative) that might not be directly obvious. This could be done to create an inherent bias by definition.

Media content is a combination of textual and visual elements. These visual elements consist of images, photos, and videos. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) also suggest five framing devices: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. News frames are much more than just verbal or textual story topics, and they cannot be reduced or substituted for mere story topics because they do much more organizing and structuring work.

4. Method

This study used content analysis to investigate the use of language in Islam-related news, particularly in selected Nigerian and Malaysian online newspapers. Content analysis focuses on media message characteristics and provides specific media content that can be categorically analyzed to provide useful information. Only Islam-related articles published in the selected newspapers between November 2015 and September 2016 were analyzed. The articles were identified using 'Islam' and 'Muslims' as keywords. Nigerian newspapers (Punch and Vanguard) have 3.00m and 2.43m site visitors while Malaysian newspapers (The Star and New Straits Times) have 3.34m and 1.99m site visitors respectively. A total of 599 news articles focusing on Islam were collected from the selected newspapers using internet-based search from November 2015 until September 2016. The units of content analysis in the present study are news articles – straight news and feature stories from the selected newspapers.

In this study, the tone of articles used in reporting Islam are analyzed. The context and circumstance of coverage were studied from articles tone toward Islam. The articles were analyzed based on headlines and texts. At the preliminary stage of coding the data in the present study, all the selected articles were summarized and a database was generated. In analyzing print news stories, one has to study every single detail from the choice of words to the metaphors, descriptors to the characters the story focuses on. The criteria for categorization of articles tone in this study was based on gestalts of phrases, terms and adjectives used out of quotation, sentence relevance based on coherence, and generalization. The data were coded using multiple code system (List, 2005).

Considering its valence, a news frame might inherently stress positive, negative or neutral aspects of a given issue or person. This study measured valence to specify the overall tone of the news toward Islam. The articles tone was categorized into three: negative tone, neutral tone, and positive tone. Positive and negative tones imply that the article could evoke positive or negative impression while neutral tone suggests that the article neither evoke positive nor negative impression (de Kok, 2006; Hamilton & Lewis, 2014). Articles with negative tone toward Islam were coded as conveying negative tone. Articles with positive tone toward Islam were coded as conveying positive tone, while articles that do not convey clearly positive or negative tone were coded as neutral. Articles tone could influence people's opinion about the issues being reported (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Anuar, 2007; Moore et al., 2008; Freyenberger, 2013). The articles tone of Islam-related news stories determines how people perceive Islam.

5. Findings
Only Islam-related articles published in the selected newspapers between November 2015 and September 2016 were analyzed. The newspapers produced 247 and 352 Islam-related articles from each country within the aforementioned period respectively. The overall 599 articles were analyzed. The aim was to explore the use of language in the selected newspapers. The articles were considered carefully in-context using thorough qualitative analysis. The following table presents the tone of articles used in the selected newspapers.

Table 1. *Articles tone toward Islam in the selected newspapers*

Articles tone	Nigerian newspapers		Malaysian newspapers		Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	%
Conveying negative tone	0.34	33.6	0.34	33.5	33.6
Conveying neutral tone	0.61	61.1	0.58	58.2	59.4
Conveying positive tone	0.05	5.3	0.08	8.2	7.0
Total	1.00	100	1.00	100	100

Table 1 clearly indicates that 33.6% and 33.5% of Islam-related news articles in the selected Nigerian and Malaysian newspapers conveyed negative tones toward Islam respectively. This implies that the newspapers conveyed almost the same amount of negative tone toward Islam in the Islam-related news articles they published. However, 61.1% of the articles in Nigerian newspapers conveyed neutral tone while 58.2% in Malaysian newspapers conveyed neutral tone toward Islam. Only 5.3% and 8.2% of the Islam-related news articles published by Nigerian and Malaysian newspapers conveyed positive tone toward Islam respectively. Of all the Islam-related news articles published by the newspapers, 33.6% conveyed negative tones toward Islam, 59.4% conveyed neutral tone while 7.0% conveyed positive tone. Therefore, overall number of the articles is more of neutral tone than negative or positive.

It can be seen that the newspapers published almost the same amount of Islam-related articles with negative tones toward Islam. The articles conveyed negative tones toward Islam to a moderate extent since they are more neutral than negative or positive, and more of negative than positive. Meaning that, the news articles contained more than twice as many negative tones toward Islam as positive. Allen (2014) asserts that the tone used in many reports is alarmist, especially those containing emotive, and at times, even abusive expressions. Almost half of the overall Islam-related articles (33.6%) published in the selected newspapers conveyed negative tone toward Islam while very few (7.0%) conveyed positive tone. This shows that the newspapers tend to use negative tone in reporting Islam.

In some instances, the newspapers identify terrorists by their religion with great emphasis. *Punch* newspaper reported on 22nd December 2015 that "A group of Muslim jihadist attackers who stormed a bus in Kenya were prevented from attacking Christian passengers on board" (p. 1). This report has been framed as 'Muslims attacking Christians'. Also, *The Star* newspaper also reported on 4th December 2015 that "California's Muslim community expressed its horror at the mass shooting that killed at least 14 in San Bernardino, after a local Muslim man was widely identified as a suspect" (p. 1). Apart from identifying terrorists by their religion as exemplified, several instances in which negative behaviors are attributed to either Muslims or Islam were found in the

newspapers. For example, *Punch* newspaper reported on August 30, 2016 that "a traditional Islamic wife has sued her domineering husband and his family for making her to kiss her mother-in-law's feet" (p. 1). The question here is why has the woman been identified as Islamic wife and why the husband has been identified as domineering? Perhaps the writer's intention is to reveal the insolence of Muslim's matrimonial life.

In determining article stone, quotations, evidences, and word choice play a crucial role. For example, *The Star's* report on December 4, 2015 "California shooter Syed Rizwan Farook was a devout Muslim" (p. 1) suggests that even pious Muslims involve in violent act by choosing to use the adjective 'devote' and the noun 'Muslim'. Readers interpret news according to their understanding, knowledge and judgment, but the word choice that complements the news is the responsibility of reporters and editors. In this case, the final decision of selecting the suitable words, text, and headlines before being finally published is the editors' duty. Misinterpretation of news content is mostly associated with misinformation, which can trigger human emotions, negative perception, and conflict (Ibrahim et al., 2011). Lacasse and Forster (2012) note that people rely seriously on the media to obtain information and understand issues across the globe, but the media might not disseminate the actual and complete picture of the issues.

Another instance is evident in the news writers' emotion which is reflected in their write ups. This emotion can convey negative or positive tone toward the situation. For example, statements found in *Punch* newspaper on February 25, 2016, which shows that several non-Muslims are jailed for insulting Islam, might indicate the writer's worry about the punishment of non-Muslims for insulting Islam. Another statement in the newspaper on December 8, 2015 was "Trump has been increasingly virulent in his remarks targeting Muslim Americans" (p. 7). This statement might indicate the writer's involvement in the incident by describing Donald Trump as 'virulent', thereby taking side with Muslims. Journalists, especially while reporting violence, often show their involvement in the situation. In this case, readers could be skeptical or develop the same attitude shown by the writer.

Another instance found in the newspapers is exaggeration. There are several exaggerated statements in the newspapers, such as Punch's "Strict Indonesian province canes non-Muslim" (p. 1), which describes Indonesian Muslim community as imposing strict rules on the non-Muslims. Sometimes, additional statements are provided to indicate inherent views or opinion of the writer. For example, in 2016, Nigeria's president registered Nigeria as a member of the Saudi's Islamic Coalition against Terrorism. *Vanguard* newspaper reported the story on March 7, 2016 before confirming the country's membership of the coalition, saying "President Muhammadu Buhari said that Nigeria would join the coalition of Muslim countries against terrorism" (p. 1). The statement continued "On whether or not his decision would go well with Nigerian Christians, who make up about half of the country's population, he denies seeking to change Nigeria's multi-religious nature by his action" (p. 2).

In addition, the newspapers also use trigger words such as extremist, suicide bomber, and hijab in wrong context. These words themselves portray Islam negatively and profile the negative context of the news. The newspapers also used sensational headlines, creating false hopes and superfluous fears. Sensationalism may discredit good reporting of the story (Ransohoff &

Ransohoff, 2001). Lack of being conflict sensitive might be one of the several reasons why journalists distort the reality and convey negative tone in their news reporting. The kind of stories published by the newspapers, in their negative tone, are likely to accentuate tension and create conflict between media outlets, governments, and the Muslim community. For example, in early 2007 a front-page story of Malaysia's *The Star* created tension that resulted in consequences beyond the news media's control. Based on the news tone and the readers' responses posted on the newspaper's website, the story generated much anxiety and outstretched the readers' emotional feelings. Later, the newspaper apologized and stated that it should have been more sensitive to the emotional feelings of its Muslim readers.

The findings of this study indicated that newspapers in Muslim countries might not employ the same approach in reporting Islam. Inquisitively, the newspapers are likely to incorporate different though arguably consequential approach to reporting Islam (Anuar, 2007; Wariboko, 2015). Hence, it can be argued that the newspaper's tendency to portray the negative image of Islam depends largely on the manner in which the news story is constructed. This is in conformity with the assumption of Framing theory, that when a particular media outlet decides to cover a topic about a particular person or group in a negative way, the society will have negative perceptions of such a person or group, since they are exposed only to the negative aspect in such news reportage (Fourie, 2001).

The newspapers also changed the meaning of several words. For examples, the word 'jihad' should not be synonymous with 'violence' because in Islam, it refers to struggle to move closer to God or to adopt Islam's complete way of life. It is a primarily non-violent, positive and individual act performed by a devoted Muslim (Wariboko, 2015). The headlines in Table 2, which were found in the selected newspapers, are examples of the repetitive use of 'Jihad' in place of terrorism or violence.

Table 2. *Change of word's meaning*

Headline	Newspaper	Date
Turkey nabs French IS jihadists after hair transplant	Punch	Nov. 12, 2015
20 French jihadist cell members to face trial	Punch	Nov. 13, 2015
UK Muslims seek own path in countering Jihadism	Punch	Nov. 15, 2015
Jihadist thriller pulled from cinemas after Paris attacks	Punch	Nov. 17, 2015
Jihadists in Europe stir visa debate in US	Punch	Nov. 20, 2015
Security fears mount as rival jihadists claim Mali hotel attack	Punch	Nov. 24, 2015
Islamic jihadists kill police officers, civilians in Mogadishu attacks	Punch	May 9, 2016

Iranian ex-general killed fighting jihadists in Syria	Punch	Aug.	31, 2016
US designates leading French jihadist as terrorist	Punch	Sept.	17, 2016
'IS' jihadist blows himself up, injuring four police in southern Turkey	Vanguard	Nov.	15, 2015
World leaders at G20 raise alarm over foreign jihadists after Paris attack	Vanguard	Nov.	15, 2015
Obama vows to 'redouble' fight against Islamic State Jihadists	Vanguard	Nov.	15, 2015
Mali jihadist leader calls for more attacks on France	Vanguard	Nov.	17, 2015
Russia gives France puppy to replace police dog killed by jihadists	Vanguard	Nov.	21, 2015
Seven IS jihadists in four hours of terror in Paris	Vanguard	Dec.	15, 2015
Emirati gets death sentence for joining jihadists	Vanguard	Jan.	10, 2016
At least 22 dead in Burkina jihadist attacks	Vanguard	Jan.	16, 2016
IS jihadists will be 'very seriously dented' by end of 2016 – Kerry	Vanguard	Jan.	21, 2016
Leader of Ansaru jihadist, Boko Haram splinter group arrested in Lokoja	Vanguard	Apr. 3, 2016	
Court jails top jihadist recruiter Zerkani for 15 years	Vanguard	Apr.	14, 2016
Rich kids who grew up to be jihadists	Vanguard	Jul. 4, 2016	
Mali defence minister fired after jihadists seize town	Vanguard	Sept.	3, 2016
Mali defence minister fired after jihadists seize town	Vanguard	Sept.	3, 2016
World needs to unite against jihadists: Hillary Clinton	NST	Nov.	15, 2015
Clashes between jihadists, Yemeni forces kill 19	NST	Mar.	13, 2016
Australia stop five from 'taking boat to Indonesia to join jihad'	NST	May	11, 2016
Bangladeshi rich kids who grew up to be jihadists	NST	Jul. 4, 2016	
Foiled Paris plot highlights new role of female jihadists	NST	Sept.	10, 2016

Note: NST = New Strait Times

Sometimes, the headlines envisage the newspaper's consciousness in using 'Jihad' in place of 'terrorism'. For example, headline number seven from Table 4.9 reported by *Punch* newspaper on May 9, 2016 states "Islamic jihadists kill police officers, civilians in Mogadishu attacks" (p. 1). In this headline, the word 'Jihadists' is synonymous to 'terrorists' and the terrorism act is Islamic in

nature. The term 'Islamic jihadist' means there are un-Islamic jihadists as well. So, the word 'jihadists' means 'terrorists' and the intended meaning of 'Islamic jihadist' in the headline is 'Islamic terrorist'. However, on September 17, 2016 the same newspaper reported "US designates leading French jihadist as terrorist" (p. 1). This headline indicates that the jihadist becomes a terrorist only after the US designation. Then how is this jihadist different from those used in the previous headline? This creates confusion on why these two words are interchangeably used.

If journalists find it necessary to use such terms, they must make an effort to understand their proper definitions and use them appropriately. Journalists should also explain that words such as 'fundamentalist' and 'extremist' are not unique to Islam (Allen, 2014). Newspapers should mind the use of terms in reporting Islam to avoid negative perception of the religion (Ameli, Marandi, Ahmed, Kara, & Merali, 2007). In this study, differences among the newspapers in using Islam-related terms might be due to differences in the writers' perception or perhaps in-house policy of the newspapers. In the media coverage of any event, some terms may be neutral while others may be controversial ("Terminology Guide", 2007). For example, the term 'terrorist attack' is neutral while 'Islamist terrorist' is certainly controversial. Each media system may perceive a 'terrorism' event in a different way. For some, it may be a perversity; for others it may be killing. The journalists, in their reportage of perpetrators of violence, may reflect their political or ideological interests that are likely to drive the media somewhere (Ammar, 2009).

6. Discussion
Researchers argued that news content could have great influences on the reader's opinion, since audiences rely on interpreted selections from the media and a form of reality constructed from individual experience (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Kempf, 2006; Potter, 2012; Arthur, 2012). The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), which refers to the international military campaign launched by the US government in 2011 after the September 11 attacks, has generated a serious discourse on the degree to which news reporting can fulfill the journalistic criteria of balance, accuracy, and fairness. The media's depiction of the perpetrators of violence reflects their ideological interests that are likely to drive the media elsewhere (Ammar, 2009). Dart and Allen (2000) asserted that there are too few full-time religion reporters to provide the kind of in-depth coverage that religion deserves. Recent studies confirmed the implication of inappropriate and sensationalized language in news reporting (Dart & Allen, 2000; Pearson et al., 2001; Ahmad, 2006).

The findings of this study indicated that that almost half of the articles that referred to Islam and Muslims were negative. The formation of words used in news articles can create a means of manipulation that has the tendency to form anti-Muslim bias and bigotry in the audience's minds (Cissel, 2012). Framing theory suggests that the media tend to present issues in such a way as to convey positive or negative value judgement. This is similar to the western media reporting of Islam revealed in various studies on the western media and Islamophobia. These studies suggest that the overall depiction of Islam in the media indicates that Islam is significantly different from and a threat to the West (Ahmad, 2006; Ameli et al., 2007; Moore, et al., 2008; Asmal, 2008; Thompson, 2013; Hassan et al., 2013; Rane et al., 2014). Considering this situation, newspapers in Muslim-majority nations, such as Nigeria and Malaysia, continue to replicate the western media content. A study by Project for Excellence in Journalism that measured news-gathering as an

instance of general trends revealed that about 83% of the instances merely repackaged or repeated previously published news stories (Fritz, 2010).

While articles conveying neutral tone in this study were the most dominant in all the newspapers, positive tone was insignificant. Meanwhile, more than one-third of the overall articles conveyed negative tone toward Islam. This confirms that the media in developing nations are also guilty of negative portrayal of Islam. In news reporting, articles tone should be given much concern. Media reportage of Muslims and Islam-related issues is mostly opinionated through framing, and the way language is used has a great influence in the society. McQuail (2000) describes mass media as an organized means of communicating openly and at a distance to several audiences in a short space of time. Technology has developed the level of language to a common language by making it possible for any language to be understood by anyone, regardless of the person's mother tongue.

Framing theory suggests that the media may present issues in such a way as to create an inherent bias by description. Therefore, the media are blamed for using biased language to stigmatize and dehumanize Muslims (Asmal, 2008; Haque, 2012). It was found that the use of language in Islam-related news constitute either conscious or unconscious bias. According to Ammar (2009), the public should be conscious of the inherent biases in various media organizations. In the contemporary media environment, news consumers have the opportunity to follow news on several forms of media and compare the reportage of the same incidents. This might include sensationalist headlines such as *The Star's* "France dissolves Muslim groups linked to radical Paris mosque" on 13, January 2016. Newspapers commonly do more than report of the events. Ameli et al. (2007) also argued that "only when language shifts away from dominant narratives appealing to the majority – innately marginalizing minorities – can there be communication on an open and equal basis".

According to Framing theory, an issue can be framed through language to make it more memorable and relate-able. Based on the assumption of Framing theory, using negative expressions words on a daily basis may create negative perception of Islam and may influence the people's perception of reality regarding the religion. Some studies (Allen, 2001; Haque, 2012) also demonstrated that inappropriate use of terms is prevalent in newspaper reports. This surreptitiously orchestrated media content has been perpetually disseminated for decades. There has been a tendency among journalists over the decades, especially Malaysian journalists, to resort to self-censorship. The act of self-censorship gives certain flexibility for reporters and editors to choose, write and edit news stories before being published. While the selection of news permits particular forms of press freedom, the question of ethical objectivity arises, particularly by journalists and editors in their choice of words during the process of news writing and editing (Ibrahim et al., 2011).

News coverage has taken on a different angle. In recent times, Islam has received global attention especially subsequent to the 9/11 incident, the Afghanistan war in 2002, the Iraq war in 2003, the Danish cartoon row and the London bombings in 2005, Israel-Palestine conflict, Paris attacks, and recently the Mosque shootings in New Zealand (Haque, 2012). During this period, we have witnessed an increase in the use of terms by journalists all over the world in their struggle to make "sense" of what occurs either locally, nationally or globally. The most disturbing issue is

that journalists use various terms regardless of whether they are objective or accurate (Ibrahim et al., 2011).

In most cases, when the so-called Islamic State claims an attack, people will be bombarded with a series of reports in the media, using terms such as 'Islamic terrorism'. However, in the event that Muslims are massacred, such as in the case of Burmese government's killing of Muslims (Independent Newspaper, 2017), hardly you see or hear the media use 'terrorism' to describe such unjust government, considering the definition of the term. El-Najjar (2004) argued that the term should be used to describe individuals, groups, and governments that are involved in terrorizing the civilian populations (state terrorism). The media never use the term to describe the governments that target the civilian population by killing them.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the use of language in Islam-related news, particularly in selected Nigerian and Malaysian newspapers. It is proven that not only newspapers in Muslim-minority nations portray negative image of Islam through the use of language. It is unfortunate that the news reporting of Islam has been called to questions in relation to article tone, which could result in acrimony and antagonism. Objective, fair, and balanced reporting has been sacrificed in favor of personal or group interest. The study provided insights into how newspapers in Muslim-majority nations such as Nigeria and Malaysia use language in Islam-related news. The findings have also provided additional understanding of the current situation of Muslims in the print media.

The negative tone of articles published in the selected newspapers could be a potent means of generating prejudices in the audience mindsets. Generally, newspapers can help to mitigate the negative perception of Islam if they stick to journalism ethics, focus on public enlightenment on religious issues, and if other forms of media contribute in the process. There is a need to enhance the reporters' knowledge and writing skills through inter-media exchange program, exposure to different religious, social and cultural lives, workshops, seminars, conferences, as well as sensitivity training and retraining on reporting religions. This can be achieved through collective effort of journalists, editors, corporate ownership of the media.

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