

## **News Discourse of Terror Attacks on Twitter: Comparative Analysis of CNN and Al Jazeera's Coverage of 2015 Islamic State Attacks in Beirut and Paris**

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The period between 2014 and 2016 saw the rise of the radical Islamist terrorist group Islamic State (IS), which committed acts of terrorism in not only Syria and Iraq but also unleashed violence in the rest of the world. Twitter took the lead in being the source of receiving and giving quick updates on terror news. However, a key question that arises is about balanced coverage. Media made enormous efforts to humanize the terror attacks in the West, while what was happening in West Asia (Middle East) was constructed from a partisan political position. The researchers studied the coverage of the Beirut attack and the Paris attack, both of which took place in November 2015. The Twitter handles of Al Jazeera and CNN's Breaking News were used to conduct the study. The data analysis establishes that there was a clear imbalance while covering Islamic State attacks in Paris and Beirut, respectively. The Paris attack received far more coverage from both CNN and Al Jazeera in terms of quantum and nature of issues addressed.

**Keywords:** CNN, Al Jazeera, media bias, terror attacks, social media; digital age, Twitter, terrorism reporting

The period between 2014 and 2016 saw the rise of the radical Islamist terrorist group called the Islamic State (IS). This terror group not only committed acts of terrorism in their stronghold regions of Syria and Iraq but also unleashed violence in the rest of the world. Unlike Al-Qaeda, where IS emerged from, the United States of America was not the only enemy. The group saw the whole world as their enemy. The IS attacked countries across continents through its networked affiliates—be it USA, France, Germany, Yemen, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or Australia, the whole world came under its threat. In an article published by CNN (Lister et al., 2017) since June 2014, the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and its affiliates have carried out more than 140 terror attacks in 29 countries other than Iraq and Syria. In these attacks, at least 2,043 people were dead, and thousands more were injured. The reported attacks were as follows – eight in North America, 18 in Europe, 80 in the Middle East and North Africa, eight in Sub-Sahara, and 27 in Asia and Australia.

While the world was trying to understand this terror organization, the world of journalism had changed and was re-negotiating its ways to report on these attacks where Twitter took the lead in being the source of receiving and giving quick updates on terror news. The transformed ecosystem of news production and dissemination has been studied by several scholars. Valcanis (2011), for example, discusses the concept of media ecology,

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where new media technologies have become a transformative cultural phenomenon. This media ecology, according to the author, is driven by social media and user-generated content, creating participatory cultures of producing and accessing the content. Valcanis (2011) states, "We as humans are now completely transformed as people, as a society, and as networked global village" (p.43). This argument is extended to explain the changing journalistic practices. Lewis and Molyneux (2018) studied the digital transformation of news by studying how social media platforms have created various forms of engagement between journalists and audiences. Weaver and Willnat (2016) studied changes in journalistic practice in the United States due to the rapid rise of social media by surveying with over 1000 journalists who stated their increasing usage of social media for information gathering; and also credited it for creating more accountability towards the public. However, the study indicated the journalists' concerns about sacrificing accuracy for speed. Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) examined how journalists expressed opinions more openly on Twitter by conducting a content analysis of 22,000 tweets. They argued that journalists are normalizing Twitter to fit their existing professional norms and practices; and how this subsequently is reconfiguring journalistic practice. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the discourse around covering terror news changed because of social media platforms and the digital news space. Between 2014 and 2016, the responsibility of news organizations to report news credibly, with no hidden agenda, increased considerably while managing news overflow on social media platforms.

Media coverage plays a significant role in shaping the public perception of terrorism (Brewer, Graf, & Willnat, 2003; Altheide, 2006; Saleem, 2007; Huff & Kertzer, 2018). However, a critical question that arises is about balanced coverage. The Paris attack in November 2015, for example, received extensive media coverage. Facebook went one step ahead by ensuring that French citizens could notify their safety to their loved ones through Facebook. But this was not witnessed in case of Beirut attack that took place roughly 24 hours before Paris was attacked. Unlike, the Paris attack, Facebook did not provide the option of a temporary Lebanese flag as a profile picture to either express condolences or serve as a tool to amplify the voice of the impact of terror (as reported in *The New York Times* and *The Verge* on November 15 and November 17, 2015, respectively). From the lens of the critical reader, one could also argue that the media made enormous efforts to humanize the terror attacks in the West, while what was happening in West Asia (Middle East) was constructed from a political position; for instance when Yemen was attacked by IS in March 2015. To extend this discussion further, a broad question that could, therefore, be problematized is if western and non-western countries, which are hit by terror organizations, receive differential media coverage.

## **Literature Review**

### **Media Frames on Relationship between Religious Identity and Terrorism**

In a 1997 article, Thussu analyzes the role of Western news media in mainstreaming a prejudiced view about the Islamic world with a specific focus on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1996. Thussu argues that the Western media privileged the Western narrative of Israel's attack as 'self-defense' and Lebanon's defense as 'fundamentalist terrorism.' The author makes a strong statement on Israel's demonization of Islam supported completely by western media, which he further argues, has created the image of 'militant Islam' as the enemy of secular, liberal democracy. The article is extremely relevant in the contemporary context. The author concludes with a provocative call to 'boycott' western media.

Alghamdi (2015) conducted a linguistic content analysis of some western media reports on two subsequent terrorist attacks in Norway, where some Islamic organizations were speculated as the perpetrators. Using media discourse analysis, the researcher found that there were explicit and implicit allegations of Muslims being accountable for this attack. The media discourses of the relationship between terrorism and certain religious identity emerge as a critical frame of reference in studies on news reportage of terror attacks.

## Media Reportage of Terror Attacks: The Politics of Imbalanced Attention

Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux (2019) examine the reasons why certain attacks receive more media coverage than others by studying 136 news stories of terror attacks in the US between 2006 and 2015. They found that the religion of the perpetrator of the attack impacts the quantum of media coverage, hence arguing that this may privilege certain religious identities over others. They state, "When something is covered more extensively, it is in the public eye more often. This can connote significance and show public perception" (p. 18).

Kwon, Chadha, and Pellizzaro (2017) quote Norris, Kern, and Just (2003) state that media coverage of terror attacks has increased post the 9/11 attacks in the US. Jetter (2014) discusses and systematically analyzes media attention devoted to terror attacks worldwide between 1998 and 2012. The author focuses on various factors that draw more attention to certain countries hit by terror attacks. The paper presents media responses to specific terror attacks by including inherent characteristics associated with media coverage of an attack. These characteristics are suicide terror attacks, a geographic distance of the countries from America, leftist or rightist ruling government, and trade relations with America. An empirical paper that uses charts, data, and maps to present results, this research refers to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) as the reference to make the analysis.

This discussion can be further extended by discussing two studies. Rosendorff and Sandler (2005) argue that terrorist groups use European targets to gain wider media exposure and greater global attention for their political agenda. Rohner and Frey (2007) discuss and analyze the relationship between terrorist organizations and the media. They state while scholarly attention has been given to this subject, it has been dominated primarily by case-study approach and econometric techniques. They also argue that there is no theoretical research available on this subject despite the availability of anecdotal and statistical work. The authors argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between media and terrorism. One of the most significant insights that emerge from their study is that the lower interest of western media in terror activities in developing countries leads terrorists to commit bloodier attacks as increasing the number of casualties raises the possibility of obtaining desired media coverage. The amount of media attention given to terror attacks varies widely. This varied coverage not only influences potential sympathizers and supporters but also impacts the ability of terrorist groups to design attacks in a way that attracts media attention (Walsh, 2010).

Franks and Shaw (2012) discuss how African wars have been unreported by international media. The paper states how the western media withdrew attention from Africa after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and after the end of the Cold War. The article argues that the international community abandoned Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, DR Congo, Chad, Darfur, Angola, Sierra Leone, and Uganda in their hour of need as these countries faced the world's deadliest wars. It further claims that Africa attracted attention again with the emergence of the 'War on Terror' frame following the 9/11 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. Drakos and Gofas (2006), however, analyze the concept of underreporting bias concerning the news coverage of terrorism. They identify

the reasons – the correlation between the political character of the regime and media freedom and discuss the underreporting bias of terrorist activity in this context using a quantitative framework. They also stress the need to undertake studies that conduct a quantitative assessment of this bias.

Kwon, Chadha, and Pellizzaro (2017) examined the concept of proximity (geographic, social, and temporal) effects on terrorism news framing and studied the differences and similarities in Twitter narratives of media organizations and audiences in the case of Boston marathon bombing of 2013 and Brussels airport bombing of 2016.

Graham (2015) writes about a predictable pattern in which one act of violence overpowers a similar violent act citing the example of attacks in Paris and Beirut, respectively, which further constructs the imbalance in grief, sympathy, and scrutiny of the same. The author laments that attack in a major Western nation captures the concern and attention in a way that atrocities elsewhere don't seem to do. Another study by Ismail and Mishra (2019) discusses the concept of cultural proximity in the amount of media coverage devoted to Paris and Beirut attacks by examining the New York Times. Besides being a very contemporary study on the subject, the authors investigate the concept of cultural proximity to argue the phenomenon of imbalanced coverage and then position 'cosmopolitanism' as a news value alternative to that. They also quote Valcanis (2011) to discuss the interactive and user-oriented features of new media technologies that have become how news and information are produced and accessed.

## Challenging Western Hegemony

Seib (2005) discusses the evolution of Qatar-based global news network Al Jazeera as a counter-hegemonic entity to western news media networks. The author also brings forth a discussion on Al Jazeera's ideological position, which is in contrast to the western news media's ideological position. However, despite its pro-Arab and anti-west stance, the author states, Al Jazeera has not received support from Saudi Arabia because of its critique of 'Saudi officialdom.' But over the years, the author argues, Al Jazeera has gained a strong position as a viable alternative to western news organizations. Seib (2005) also credits the rise of Al Jazeera to the dissemination of news and information about the Iraq war creating a more diverse media-centric world. As the literature under review explores studies related to alternative news media sources, a 2013 research by Marsden that compares the coverage and perception of the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT) between the English language Arab and western news media merit a discussion. This research study analyzes how both the news media construct different interpretative frameworks through which the GWOT is understood. Marsden conducted a thematic analysis of English language articles – 192 from Arab media sources and 200 from western media sources that covered ten years of the conflict. The author concludes that both sets of news media construct distinct discourses of GWOT. While the western media construct it as a war against a global enemy (with a significant focus on it as a public relations activity), the Arab media constructs it as an extension of assertive American power.

Additionally, both view it as the war on terrorism; but the western media appropriates it as a necessary action to protect the homeland, while the Arab media positions it as American hegemony. The research study also points out that all the news articles are dominated by US action, also critiquing its military response, but it is constructed more as a frame of 'naturalized response to global terrorism.' Quoting a 2014 study by Gerhards and Schafer; Ismail and Mishra (2019) state that among the different media outlets studied by them, Al Jazeera stood out as the only one focussing on the discrimination of Muslims.

Another study (Al-Quadah, Ziani, & Al-Rajehi, 2018) discusses the high impact of Al Jazeera as compared to other Arabic news networks in shaping public opinion.

## **Terror News Coverage: The Digital Turn**

The world has transformed significantly since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, and the 9/11 attacks. The methods of news coverage, too, have evolved and transformed. In the past decade, the mainstream media has been joined by a plethora of social media platforms in creating public discussion around terror and terrorism. Social media platforms have become primary communication tools for everyday conversations and even more critical as a means of communication during crises. In the past, editors have been the ultimate decision-makers in terms of how the stories are covered, but now social media is altering that reality. Media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are helping the power gradually shift towards the citizenry. The news content on Facebook and Twitter is reminiscent of the "good old" town hall (Fakude, 2016). In February 2016, technology and media firms, including Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, were called to the White House to help counter-terror groups (Kang & Apuzzo, 2016).

Fakude (2016) mentions how platforms like Facebook and Twitter are changing journalistic trends and specifically discusses how social media was used to criticize the bias of international television in portraying non-Europeans in debasing ways in case of the Paris and Beirut terror attacks.

Beckett (2016) studied the challenges of reporting on terrorism in the context of changes in the practice of journalism with platforms like Google, Facebook, and Twitter. The author states that the expanding pace of news, new technological advances, and the limits on resources, the challenge of verification, definition, proportionality, and handling propaganda are the significant challenges. The author further argues that reporting on terror is becoming too sensational and oversimplified in the digitally-driven world, where the role of professional journalism continues to get constrained and decreased. The author demonstrates a self-conscious bias towards American and European media. The social media coverage of terror attacks comes with its set of problems. News events are exaggerated by social media, which often hosts the "first draft" of terror coverage. If this is combined with instances of imbalanced reporting, the scenario which arises could be alarming.

In a study by Ali et al. (2018), the authors investigate bias in Twitter coverage between western and Arab media after the Beirut and Paris terror attacks of 2015. The paper studies sympathy and sentiment labels for 2,390 tweets across four languages (English, Arabic, French, and German). The authors build a model to characterize these two attacks, which took place within 24 hours of each other, and their key findings reveal that both the events were inappropriately covered and that the Western media did not sympathize with the attacks in Beirut as much as they did with the Paris attack. However, there are also studies that analyze imbalanced media coverage from the alternative ideological standpoint as well. For instance, during the 2014 Gaza War, Al Jazeera America, in its online articles, referred to only Palestinian citizens and, while reporting on Palestinians death toll, always differentiated between civilians and militants (Saleh, 2017). In the same study, the author also analyzes online articles of CNN and observes that nearly 15 percent of articles of CNN did not clarify whether a civilian or militant died, thus clearly articulating imbalanced media coverage from both sides of the media.

The narrative of terrorism constructed on social media can also be studied from the perspective of how terrorist organizations use it to further their agenda. Bernates (2014) analyzed the Taliban's use of Twitter through an official social media account to chronicle

the war waged by them as a PR strategy to mainstream the Taliban's narrative of war. In this study, 349 tweets from the Taliban's Twitter feed from their official handle were analyzed from 2011 to 2012. The objective of the study was to understand how the Taliban leadership became more aware of influencing Western public opinion. Though such studies are few and far between, they offer another perspective on the analysis of discourses or frames created by terror organizations that certainly require theoretical engagement to develop a deeper comprehension of news and information frames about terrorism.

Apart from the mentioned topics from the past, there have been ambivalent media perspectives on conflicts, unrest, bias, and the like. Qasem and Hussein (2019) highlighted that the stand of the *New York Times* had a unilateral approach to the coverage of Palestine and Kosovo statehood recognition. Arqoub and Ozad (2019) explored the media perspectives in the prism of gatekeeping. The study found that *Yedioth Ahronoth*, the largest newspaper in Israel, was biased during the Gaza War 2014 coverage. Another research revealed that even international media was not free from flaws. The coverage from Al Jazeera English and BBC News on China's domestic politics was different and invited fundamental issues in media framing (Arif & Hayat, 2018). Similarly, Hayat and Wahab (2016) found that the talk shows of CNN and BBC on Middle East and North Africa were framed as political fanatics.

The review of literature sets the context to engage in an analysis of the news coverage of terrorist attacks on social media platforms. It also underlines the presence of imbalanced news coverage or reporting bias in the coverage of terrorism. As the constraints of space and time disappear in the digital space, and as real-time engagement with social media platforms becomes the reality of our society, culture and politics; a scholarly exposition of construction of terror news, with reference to the quantum and nuances of coverage, will help deconstruct concepts of privileging, mainstreaming, suppressing and re-appropriating narratives of terrorism as framed in popular imagination. The research on media coverage of terror attacks is a contemporary area of academic investigation, but the range of literature from the current context is sporadic. Secondly, as the review of the literature demonstrates that despite the transformational expansion of new media technologies and social media in news coverage, scholarly engagement with a holistic perspective is limited. Hence, this study aims to align both the dimensions to address this research gap in scholarship by examining the news coverage of two sequential terror attacks that took place in Beirut and Paris in 2015 in recent political history on Twitter.

## Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to find out if there is an imbalanced media coverage of Islamic State attacks in western countries as compared to non-western countries in the context of news updates on social media platforms. More specifically, this study analyzes how the most followed international news Twitter handles covered IS attacks and whether the countries that were targets of the terror attacks received adequate attention and balanced coverage. News organizations, big or small, utilize Twitter to disseminate news.

"Tweets as media objects are often connected to other objects by hyperlinks. This network of objects is part of the 'material' base of the networked public sphere, and following the links between those objects—surfing the Web—is the central mode of activity to access information," states Ausserhofer (2014). Hence, studying how Twitter handles news has become imperative.

Daniel (2016) discusses the case of the BBC's online coverage of terror attacks in Norway and Mumbai to explain the usage of Twitter as a live blogging platform. Studies on the relationship between coverage of terrorism and Twitter have also been done in alternate contexts. For example, Ceron, Curini, and Lacus (2019) analyzed 26.2 million comments published in the Arabic language on Twitter to one examine the support for ISIS, and two, to explore the relationship between online opinions across countries and the number of foreign fighters joining them. Using sentiment analysis, they found that while social media aided ISIS propaganda, on the one hand, it also increased the vulnerability of ISIS. They argue that moves to censor ISIS propaganda on social media may be counterproductive and instead increase radicalization. This study demonstrates that the public discourse created on open social media platforms can be very critical in understanding diverse, alternative, and counter-hegemonic perspectives on such subjects.

## **Methodology**

Using qualitative content analysis, the researchers studied the coverage of the Beirut attack that took place on 13 November 2015 and the Paris attack, which took place just a day later on 14 November 2015. The Twitter handles of Al Jazeera and CNN's Breaking News were used to conduct the study. The sampling criterion is based on the following rationale. CNN Breaking News Twitter handle (CNN Breaking News) was chosen because it is an international news organization and is the most followed news organization on Twitter with 54,439,263 followers as of March 2018. Al Jazeera News Twitter handle (Al Jazeera News) has been chosen because it gives a non-western point of view. Al Jazeera also is an international news organization based out of Doha, Qatar. Al Jazeera Twitter handle had 1,391,213 followers as of March 2018. Using these two Twitter handles also gives the opportunity to compare news coverage of terror attacks in two countries – one western and the other non-western – from a western news media and a non-western news media perspective.

The time frame for the data corpus used for this study is between 2014 and 2016. It was in these two years that the Islamic State targeted countries outside their stronghold of Iraq and Syria (Lister et al., 2017). A detailed qualitative content analysis of the tweets and the articles embedded within these tweets was conducted. The content analysis decoded the frequency of tweets, the number of retweets, the tone, and content of news coverage in the tweets, and the articles embedded in the tweets; and threads related to these tweets. The unit of analysis is every single tweet and the hyperlinks to the article embedded in those tweets about the Beirut and Paris attacks. With the use of various elements like updates on the details of the attacks; maps and Google Earth; the reaction of the witnesses; and the space given to witnesses; content analysis has helped to critique the coverage given by CNN and Al Jazeera to the western and non-western country in detail.

Ismail and Mishra's (2019) study on the coverage of terror attacks in Paris and Beirut by the New York Times that examined 92 articles using thematic textual analysis serves as a methodological reference for this work. They study the concept of imbalanced coverage between Paris and Beirut by investigating only one publication. The researchers have identified both CNN and Al Jazeera for the current study to compare news framing from westernized and de-westernized perspectives, which adds one more layer to understand the politics of news framing. Using a social media platform like Twitter would not only examine the phenomenon of digitalization of news coverage but also help understand if hegemonic news frames are reinforced or challenged in non-conventional or alternative media contexts represented by the digital and social. The study carried out on the basis of three major parameters: (i) Number of tweets and the details of Beirut Attack

and Paris Attack by Al Jazeera and CNN Twitter handle, (ii) Number of articles hyperlinked to the CNN tweets of Beirut Attack and Paris attack, and (iii) Number of articles hyperlinked to the Al Jazeera tweets of Beirut Attack and Paris attack. Besides, based on the corpus of data coded, the elements of news coverage were analyzed to investigate the content of the hyperlinked articles and the tweets.

## Discussion

### The CNN News Frame

There is a visible contrast in the coverage of Paris and Beirut attacks. The CNN Breaking News Twitter handle gave more coverage and importance to the Paris attack. The Tweeter handle put out three tweets for Beirut and 32 tweets for the Paris attacks. There was only one article embedded in the tweets on the Beirut attack, while for the Paris attack, three detailed and updated articles were embedded in the tweets. CNN used Google Earth and mapped to explain in detail the locations which were attacked in Paris. This was missing in the coverage of the Beirut attack. Though Lebanon does not come under the 3-D coverage of Google Earth as of January 2018, there was also no use of maps either to show any of the locations.

CNN covered the witness accounts extensively in the articles. The accounts were covered both in the form of written text and video coverage. Instagram posts by the witness were also included in the articles. Both Beirut and Paris attacks were given live coverage in the embedded articles. A detailed timeline of the Beirut attacks was, however, missing in CNN's coverage.

On the other hand, this was present in the coverage of the Paris attacks. CNN's article *Paris massacre: At least 128 killed in gunfire and blasts, French officials say* (Bittermann & Jim, 2015) included detailed timeline of where and how the attacks took place, tweets of the then President Hollande, details about the police investigations, condolence messages from world leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin, statements from counter-terrorism officials of France, description of the attackers, Instagram posts of the witnesses and other details. This kind of elaborate coverage was completely missing for the Beirut attack.

*Inside the Bataclan: 'A bloodbath,' witness says* (Joshua & Capelouto, 2015), there is a video by the witness about the Paris attack who talks about how the attack in Bataclan took place. The article also included a map showing which areas of Paris were attacked. In *U.S. officials say no known threat to the homeland in the wake of the Paris attacks* (Theodore Schleifer, 2015), the article comes from Washington and gives an American point of view about the attack. The article includes a statement from the U.S. counter-terrorism official and statement from the FBI spokesperson. This American point of view was absent in the Beirut attack coverage.

In CNN's story of Beirut attack, *Beirut suicide bombings kill 43; suspect claims ISIS sent attackers* (Greg Botelho, 2015), the article included the where and how of the bombings, the number of casualties, details of attacker, the political and religious background of the attack, and past incidents of violence in Beirut. However, there was no detailed update about the attack, no official statements from the leadership in Lebanon and the country's intelligence. The article also did not include a witness account or any Instagram posts.

CNN tweeted out reactions from world leaders like former US President Barack Obama, but this was missing in the case of Beirut attack, probably because none of the leaders said anything about the attack. Within the 24 hours of the attack, there were no opinion pieces that CNN tweeted out during the Paris and Beirut attacks.



There is also a contrast in the language used in the articles which were tweeted. For example, for the article *Paris massacre: At least 128 killed in gunfire and blasts, French officials say* (cited earlier in the text), there are undertones of sympathy and concern. Such frames were missing in the article tweeted by CNN for the Beirut attack. For the article, *Beirut suicide bombings kill 43; suspect claims ISIS sent attackers*; the article is written in a traditional reportage form with no tones of human interest and sympathy.

In all, CNN was prompt in tweeting updates about the Paris attack. There were a total of 32 tweets on the Paris attack as compared to the three tweets that went out for the Beirut attack. The tweets during the Paris attacks were more frequent, with at least two tweets going out every hour from twenty-four hours of the attack. There was no frequent tweet on Beirut from CNN's handle. Even after 24 hours of the attack, the CNN Twitter handle kept posting if there was any major update on the Paris attack, but this was not done in the case of the Beirut attack. One of the major insights that emerge here is that since the Paris attack took place within twenty-four hours of the Beirut attack, there was a shift in which of the two countries would get priority in news coverage.

CNN, within 24 hours of both the attacks, didn't tweet any opinion pieces. The three articles during the Paris attack and one during Beirut attack were tweeted multiple times within twenty-four hours of the attack.

## The Al Jazeera News Frame

The contrast in news coverage can also be seen in the way Al Jazeera covered both the attacks. Al Jazeera posted seven tweets during the Beirut attack and 38 tweets during the Paris attack. There were three articles hyperlinked and embedded with the tweets on Beirut and ten with the tweets on Paris. During the Paris attack, maps were used to show the distance between the location of attacks from one another in Paris concerning the time when the attacks took place. Such detailed coverage gave an overall picture of the scenario. However, there was no map in the articles tweeted out or tweets that showed the location and time of the Beirut attack.

Al Jazeera gave extensive coverage to the Paris attacks in terms of tweets and articles tweeted out. In *Fear and confusion in Paris after deadly attacks* (Al Jazeera News), there are details about where and how the attacks took place, reactions from world leaders including Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, former British Prime Minister David Camron, the US President Barack Obama, witness account, video of the then French President Francois Hollande's message to the country, background information about the attack and other information.

Al Jazeera also tweeted a live blog (Event), which gave regular updates, reactions from the world, photos and pictures of the video, and any other details about the Paris attack. This blog also included prompt updates and tweets from agencies like Reuters. This blog was absent in the coverage of the Beirut attack.

In *Paris attack 'unlikely to affect Syria policy'* (Mandhai, 2015), the reporter Shafik Mandhai interviews Remi Piet, an Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Qatar University about the possible aftermath of the Paris attacks and discusses what France's action would be against Syria, a stronghold of Islamic State. The article again included the map which gave information about how many people were killed and injured in which areas of Paris during the attack.

Al Jazeera tweeted *World leaders rally around France after attacks*, which only focused on how the heads of states and prime ministers reacted to the Paris attack. The article had a video showing official statements of Barack Obama, Angela Merkel, Justin Trudeau, and President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The video also showed how important buildings

and monuments of the world were lit up in the colors of the French national flag. This, too, was missing in the Beirut attack.

In *Hollande calls Paris attacks an 'act of war'* which was tweeted, the article focused on the hard facts of the attack like the killings, the state of emergency, what the French police were doing, and other related details. The article also mentioned the statement of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Al Jazeera tweeted pictures of famous monuments lit up in the French colors. The tweet included a photo article *Standing in solidarity with the Blue, White, and Red*, which had pictures of the monuments and buildings and other messages for the Paris attack. This form of representation was missing during the Beirut attack coverage of Al Jazeera.

There were articles about both Paris and Beirut attack after 24 hours of the attack. These articles included opinion pieces for both attacks.

For the Beirut attack, Al Jazeera tweeted *Deadly suicide attack rocks southern Beirut* that included a video report explaining how and where the attack took place, witness account, and the scene of the attack. The article also gives a political background of Lebanon. There is no mention of how the Lebanon leadership responded to the attack or what actions are being taken. Even *Day of mourning in Lebanon after deadly Beirut bombings*, which was tweeted again, gave witness accounts, the political background of Lebanon, and the attack scene. The article also provided information about the attacker. But there was again no mention of the further steps. The article mainly focused on the connection between Hezbollah and the Islamic State.

In another article tweeted by Al Jazeera, *How exposed is Lebanon to the Syrian war*, there is a video embedded which discusses how Lebanon is connected to the Syrian war. The discussion included analysts and experts in the given field.

Al Jazeera, within the 24 hours of the attack, didn't carry any solidarity messages or images from around the world. There were no frequent updates tweeted out. There was also the absence of an American point of view in the tweets and articles and maps.

## Conclusion

The data analysis establishes that there was a clear imbalance while covering Islamic State attacks in Paris and Beirut, respectively. This imbalance is also present in the ways the Twitter handles of both CNN and Al Jazeera covered the attacks. The Paris attack received far more coverage from both CNN and Al Jazeera in terms of quality and quantity. Al Jazeera, though based out of West Asia (Middle East), did not give adequate coverage to the Beirut attack. Its coverage of the Paris attack was more extensive and in-depth than CNN. Al Jazeera included more articles and opinion pieces about the attack. Its tweets were linked to Al Jazeera's live blog. Al Jazeera also had two articles dedicated to the reactions of the world leaders and how the world is responding to the attacks. This was missing in CNN's coverage of the Paris attack.

Compared to CNN, Al Jazeera also did better work in covering Beirut attacks. It tweeted two additional articles. These articles carried the opinion of experts and analysts. There was a video coverage in each of these articles, giving details about the political scenario and background of the attack.

There is a direct reference to agenda-setting by both CNN and Al Jazeera. Through the number of tweets and constant updates, CNN and Al Jazeera were not telling the public what to think but were certainly successful in telling them what to think about. They bombarded the viewers and readers with information regarding Paris, thus, suggesting that the terror attack in Paris was much more significant than the terror attack in Beirut.

To understand this clearly, Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw describe agenda-setting as, "In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflection, what candidates are saying during the campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues-that it, the media may set the "agenda of the campaign" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

So, by tweeting about Paris and updating the audience better about Paris than about Beirut, CNN and Al Jazeera had set the agenda that Paris was more important. This can also be seen through the number of likes and retweets that the coverage of these attacks received on the two twitter handles. The highest number of retweets any Beirut attack tweet received on CNN was 348 and 149 on Al Jazeera. The highest number of retweets any Paris attack tweet received on CNN was 4,472 and 307 on Al Jazeera. The audience response also shows that the Paris attacks were perceived as more critical than the Beirut attacks.

CNN is based out of the United States of America. The US has stronger ties, both economically and culturally, with France than with Lebanon. Familiarity, in this case, also becomes one of the reasons why Paris mattered more to the CNN coverage. Paris to the world and America is much more familiar than Beirut. An average American would travel to Paris than to Beirut for vacation or leisure. This familiarity also gives a reason as to why Americans and the western world will be more interested in reading and watching about Paris than Beirut. This finding aligns with the argument on cultural proximity (Ismail & Mishra, 2019) discussed in the review of the literature.

The construction of France in popular media narratives is also of stability and culture. However, the popular perception of Lebanon is related to images of civil war and violence. Hence, bombing in Beirut is perceived as a normal, regular occurrence somewhere accentuated by media narratives on the country. This is, however, not true. Beirut in 2015 was much more peaceful than Paris. The Charlie Hebdo attack had taken place in early 2015, and several young French boys and girls were leaving their homes to join the Islamic State in Syria. The Beirut suicide bombings in 2015 were the deadliest ones since 1990 when the civil war had ended.

In consonance with the review of literature, this study establishes the presence of imbalanced news coverage or reporting bias in the coverage of terrorism between western and non-western contexts. This research study compares only two terrorist attacks and not all the attacks which took place between 2014 and 2016 in addition to understanding the public perception. The scope of the research could, therefore, be extended in future studies.

The interrelationship between media and terrorism gets strongly positioned in this research study as a function of a combination of factors. These factors include greater global attention to the western world; privileging and mainstreaming news of terror attacks in the western world to create more humanized narratives; and construction of non-western contexts in prejudiced frames that position acts of terror as a regular occurrence thus delineating it from a humanized narrative. The representations that are considered as an objective pass through filters of mediated reality (Adoni & Mane, 1984) to get reconstructed in specific frames. They are thus sites of competing worldviews and contested realities – an attribute of social media networks that vacillate between being tools for mobilization and participation by individuals to being instruments of hegemonic ideological reinforcement by dominant institutions, news networks, and their social media handles, as in this case.

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