# Agenda Setting and Framing: A Comparative Analysis of the Paris Terror Attacks

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**Keywords:** news reports, agenda-setting, framing, Paris terrorist attack

**Abstract:** This paper takes the 2015 terrorist attack in Paris as an example to analyse the different reports on media from the perspective of news agenda-setting and framing. The three media outlets are the U.S. media CNN, the pan-Arab press media Al Jazeera and the Chinese news agency Xinhua. The study finds that the three media showed a similar attitude in their criticism of the terrorists and sympathy for the victims. However, when it comes to the definition of the identity of the attackers and whether the incident was related to religious issues and refugee issues, those three media shows a significant difference. The purpose of this paper is to show how different media express their different positions and tendencies through agenda-setting and framing.

#### 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that the media has power. It can guide the audience's values and even the overall direction of public opinion as well as the subsequent development of the event. News is an essential way for the audience to get information, especially from their own or international events. In the process of transmission, different news media will have different influences on the audience. This is because different media often want to attract people's attention to different aspects due to their different positions. They use different reporting methods and focuses and present them in a specific way. The result of this is that the audience will have different opinions and tendencies towards the same event under the influence of these media.

In the communication and social sciences, the role of the media in mass communication and the role of the media in reporting are discussed. The media coverage includes conflicts, wars, disasters and other events, especially those of global concern. News media often use agenda setting and framing to influence what the audience thinks. Since Donald Shaw (1972) proposed the theory of agenda-setting in the last century, the discussion on the influence of mass media on the audience has never stopped [1]. Moreover, that theory still applies today, while news framing theory makes agenda-setting theory more concrete and concrete.

The occurrence of international events will make the media of different countries report one after another. Different theories are discussing whether and to what extent the reports on these media are similar, or in what aspects they differ [2]. The purpose of this study is to explore the specific

manifestations of terrorism by different news media and to find out the differences and similarities in the reports of different media through analysing some details by comparison.

Based on the case study of the Paris terrorist attacks that caused a global sensation in 2015, this study analysed the different reporting emphases of CNN, Al Jazeera and Xinhua News Agency on the event as well as the use of the frame. The Paris terrorist attack is a terrorist attack against innocent civilians planned and launched by the Islamic State in recent years, which has a huge impact. The incident has raised global concerns about religion, refugees and terrorism.

Since international terrorism is mainly interpreted and constructed according to the ongoing conflict between the Arab world and the "western world" [3], this paper studies the representative news media from both sides -- Al Jazeera and CNN. At the same time, the Paris terrorist attack is not a simple binary opposition conflict. The conflict is complex on different levels, such as religion, the international situation, international politics, national and international relations. In order to guarantee the diversity of news and objectivity, this study chose the Chinese news agency Xinhua as a neutral media. It is of great research value to study the different political positions, social significance and the impact of different reports on the following international policies and measures.

### 2. Literature Review

The most famous basic assumption of agenda-setting theory is that: mass media may not influence how people think, but it can influence what they think. Mass media often fails to determine people's specific views on an event or opinion. It can effectively influence what facts and opinions people pay attention to and the order in which they are discussed by providing information and arranging the related switchable viewer [1].

Agenda setting, a mass communication theory was put forward by the journalist Walter Lippmann in his book public opinion in 1922 [4]. Lippmann (1922) believed that news media constructed our world view. More than 50 years later, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) conducted further analysis and research on this theory [1]. By analysing that the media agenda has a significant influence on the public agenda, they named this theory as the agenda-setting theory.

Framing news, on the other hand, is more specific than agenda-setting theory. If the agenda-setting determines what the event media chooses to cover, the media framing partly determines how the event is covered. Specific facts are referred to as frames and are emphasised as more important than other facts in the text [5]. People's cognition of the world, especially the world far away from their living area, is mostly constructed by media [4]. Different text choices and image choices establish specific frames and narratives, which can shape the audience's views on news events and even the world they live in [6]. There is no uniform definition of what framing is. Some scholars try to define framings from different perspectives. Semetko and Valkenburg(2000) found that news framings generally include attribution of responsibility, conflict, conflict, economic consequences and morality. They also classify news framings, including human interest frame and morality frame [7].

As early as the 20th century, Neuman et al. (1992) proposed the "human impact" framing, a precursor to the human interest frame [8]. This frame brings a human or emotional perspective to the presentation of an event or a problem, and it is a typical framing in the news. As news markets becoming more competitive around the world, journalists are struggling to keep their stories relevant and relevant. One way to do this is to frame the news in terms of human interests. Such frames personalise, dramatise, or "emotionalise" the news in order to capture and retain the attention of the audience. When reporting on international events, especially disasters, terrorist attacks, the audience will feel as if they are in the scene and feel the same as the victims.

The morality frame places events, issues or issues in the context of religious teachings or ethics [7]. Journalists often cite the ethical framing indirectly, but the impact of using it is mostly subtle. For example, stories in which newspapers use the views of interest groups to raise questions about sexually transmitted diseases may contain moral messages. This framing is reflected not in the words of the news report, but the minds of the audience. The analysis of this article will use different news frames to analyse the similarities and differences of the contents reported by the three media. (The news articles analysed in this paper can be found in the appendix.)

# 3. Similarities among the Three Media

All three media outlets have a similar attitude towards the common challenge facing humanity -- terrorism. They criticised the attack, which happened to be on the opposite side of the attacker.

First of all, all three media focused much attention on the attack, expressing the same sympathy for the victims and condemnation and criticism of the terrorist attack. There was a precise characterisation of the attack as a "massacre" and an "inhumane" emphasis on the innocent. They all took the same clear stand on the incident, describing the perpetrators as "the enemy". All three media outlets also used the comments of senior figures and countries on the incident. For example, CNN quoted U.S. President Barack Obama as saying that the Paris terror attacks were an "outrageous attempt to terrorise innocent civilians", while Al Jazeera used the French President's description of the incident to say that the attacks in Paris on Friday night were "an act of war". The Xinhua News Agency has spent much of its time reporting on countries that "condemned" the Paris terror attacks. Furthermore, in terms of information sources, since the terrorist attack is an emergency and has a significant social impact, the three media have quoted a large number of official views, information and data, and official data is more convincing in security incidents as a source [9].

Furthermore, all three media outlets have focused more on the consequences and international reaction to the incident. In describing the emotions of the crowd, none of the three media outlets wrote much about how frightened they were, instead of showing pictures of people snuggling and looking flustered. In contrast to the scenes before and after the terrorist attack, all the three media depicting the scene of how people enjoyed their time of Friday night, and how it comes to a "nightmare" after the attack. All three media highlight the innocence of the victims, and the inhumanity of the attackers. When it comes to the international response and its consequences, all three media focus on religion and refugees. CNN says the United States is actively fighting terrorism to help refugees and that the refugee problem cannot be solved simply by fighting against immigration. Al Jazeera mentioned that foreign policy on Muslims might change after the Paris terror attacks. The Xinhua News Agency looked at the changes in the E.U. and U.S. foreign policy from a macro perspective. All three media outlets have highlighted the link between the Syrian refugee crisis and the Paris terror attacks, which could worsen the Syrian refugee crisis and raise fears of a growing fear of Muslims and Islamophobia in the world.

By contrast, when it came to the attackers, all three media outlets gave only a brief account of their identities and nationalities, not their motives. The process of the attack was not described in detail by the three media in order to reduce the potential risks, for fear of arousing the excitement of militants and other terrorists [10].

#### 4. Differences in the Human-Interest Frame and the Morality Frame

Although all three media outlets agree that the Paris attacks need to be condemned, the differences in their coverage are particularly stark for complex reasons such as national, political, historical and

even cultural. These differences are reflected in different frames used by the media [11]. The difference in this paper will be analysed using the human interest frame and the morality frame, which was put forward by Semetko and Valkenburg in 2000 [7]. The human interest frame pays more attention to the interest of the audience and the use of emotions. The news media tend to use emotional words or emotional pictures under the influence of this frame. Moreover, the morality frame paid more attention to the issue of religion, which was reflected in the fact that different media from different positions used different languages to describe and view a religion.

#### 4.1. Human Interest Frame

It is obvious that Al Jazeera, CNN and Xinhua News Agency used different languages in their coverage of the Paris attacks, and the use of these languages also represents the initial characterisation and labelling of the attacks by different media. In reporting on the perpetrators, Al Jazeera chose the word "attackers" and did not link the attack to terrorism, preferring to define it as a conflict-induced attack. Obviously, on the contrary, CNN described the perpetrators as "terrorists", the Paris directly attack defined as a terrorist attack, while the criminals is a terrorist, the use of this word is effectively raised the memories of 9.11, the 2005 London bombings and other attacks, makes people more empathy and criticism to the attack. CNN's tone was a matter of fact and straight, but when they covered confliction-driven topics, they would become much more emotional and sensationalist [12]. The paper found that in the early days of reporting, the word "attackers" was used when separately stating the Paris attacks, when comes to recalling history to link the attacks to the past, the word "terrorist" will be used. Xinhua News Agency, neither in the Middle East Arab countries standpoint nor western media, use the word "perpetrators", and in the most began to report the incident with the word "massacre" instead of "terrorist attack". It did not easily stand one side position, and also did not qualitative the offenders and the event itself hasty. The Xinhua News Agency began to use the word "terrorists" until the deepening of the research, and the Islamic countries claimed responsibility for the attack in Paris.

On the one hand, as a pan-Arab media, Al Jazeera immediately emphasised the difference between the attackers and ordinary Muslims. It used special reports to describe how the general Muslim community suffered misfortune, emphasising the indiscriminate attacks of the attackers. It shows that ordinary Muslims are just as innocent and persecuted as everyone else. Al Jazeera also highlighted that one of the attackers in the Paris attacks was a native of Paris, in an attempt to stress that the terrorists did not imply Muslims and that the Paris attacks were not all part of the Middle East. On the other hand, CNN, as the mainstream western media, first criticised the incident as an attack on innocent people. The attack of the Islamic state is unrecognised and illegal. Quote from many senior figures (most are high-ranking western figures) to criticise the Paris terrorist attacks and position. Such as the quote U.S. President Obama claimed Paris attacks an "attack on all humanity". French President Francois Hollande was quoted as saying that France would not be defeated and the fight against terrorism would not be eased. It also reported British Prime Minister David Cameron's attitude. Xinhua News Agency, however, involved both sides. Different from the direct criticism and clear stance of CNN, Xinhua News Agency chose to cite the critical and condemning attitude of many countries to report the incident. In reporting on the Middle East and the Muslim, the Xinhua News Agency did not report directly to the Muslim. However, the use is the subtle persuasion, uses the Syrian President spoke in an interview, said what Paris suffered today was what the people of Syria suffered in the past five years, arouse people's compassion also showed how innocent and destroyed Muslim organisations are.

As for the use of visual imagery, Al Jazeera has featured both victims and Muslims responding to the attacks and marching in prayer. Al Jazeera's coverage of the incident reflected the Muslim community's reaction to the incident and their own voices with a relatively large focus and photographs. It uses photos of Muslims gathering to pray together, one of which focuses on the innocent face of a Muslim baby, in order to emphasise the difference between terrorists and ordinary Muslims and reduce the probability of hatred. CNN used both videos and pictures to reconstruct the scene and time of the attack. It also used satellite maps to show the locations of the attacks and their relationships and distances. In choosing the subjects of the images, CNN focused on the victims, including photos of them hugging and crying, victims being carried on stretchers to ambulances, victims gathered to pray under the Eiffel Tower and scenes of chaos after the shooting. CNN even used a video of a presentation of children who lived through the Paris attacks as part of its coverage. It evokes more emotions, makes the audience more empathetic and emotional, and makes them more resentful and resistant to terrorist attacks [13].

By comparison, both of them have pictures of children, and the presence of children in news reports will make the audience more emotional [7]. However, the differences are more prominent. Because of their different histories, beliefs and positions, the two media choose different subjects of reports and emotional guidance from different directions.

# 4.2. Morality Frame

In their coverage of the Paris terrorist attacks, three media outlets have variously linked the incident to religion and refugee issues. The moral framework places events, issues, or issues in the context of religious doctrine or ethics. Because of the professional standard of objectivity, journalists often refer to the ethical framework indirectly [7].

In reporting the identity of the perpetrators, CNN used only a handful of languages to describe the nationalities of the terrorists, while referring to them as Muslims. In the coverage of religious issues, CNN, as a western mainstream media, has particular prejudice and stereotype towards Muslims. CNN described the perpetrators in terms of religious identity rather than citizenship (for example, the Paris attacks were planned and carried out by Muslims, most of whom resemble European Muslims) and stressed that at least one of them had arrived in Europe with Syrian refugees. This statement is aimed at the entire Muslim community and stirs up Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims around the world.

Instead, Al Jazeera, a pan-Arab network based in Muslim areas, focused the identity of the attackers on nationality, in an attempt to lessen the impact of religion. Al Jazeera tried to play down the impact of religion, saying there was "no religious terrorism" and stressing that one of the attackers was a native of Paris, in an attempt to emphasise that the incident was not religious. Al Jazeera clearly distinguishes between terrorists and Muslims in general. "Many Muslims protested deadly attacks" to show the goodwill of the general Muslim community and "the greatest victims of Muslim terror are Muslims" to show people that ordinary Muslims are victims as much as ordinary people. Terrorists are categorised explicitly as "the other" and the average Muslim group as "us". Besides, Al Jazeera blamed the west, suggesting they were all responsible for the Islamic State and the west and criticised French President Francois Hollande for turning a blind eye to his Allies who support Syrian rebels.

The Xinhua News Agency, on the other hand, has refrained from giving people family identities or emphasising religion. In reporting on a demonstration and a moment of silence in a predominantly Muslim area, Xinhua News Agency used the word 'people' or 'demonstrators' or the vague word'

people. 'in interviews with protesters, Xinhua News Agency said the woman was Moroccan and emphasised international rather than religious beliefs.

In its extended coverage of the incident, CNN also reviewed the shooting at the headquarters of Charlie Hebdo in France just a few months ago. The French newspaper Charlie Hebdo is known for its strong anti-religious and repeated abusive posts about the founder of Islam. Members of a terrorist group planned the attack. Before the attacks in Paris, the Charlie Hebdo attacks were the worst in France for 40 years. The aim is to evoke memories of 9.11 and the recent religious attacks.

Al Jazeera also reported on a similar attack on non-white victims in Beirut that did not get much attention in the western media. The attack, which took place in the Lebanese capital Beirut in 2015, was planned and carried out by the Islamic state on religious grounds. Al Jazeera argued that western media coverage was biased and unfair, focusing on the loss of white lives and that the Beirut attacks of the same nature did not receive as much coverage as the Paris attacks. Al Jazeera also used emotional and robust language to describe the plight of French Muslims (for example "Muslim residents fear reprisals"; "they are called fascists").

The United States has maintained its hard-line stance on refugees in its coverage of their relationship to foreign policy and terrorist attacks. CNN took the government's position. Although it mentioned that "anti-immigration movement is not a solution, we must actively fight terrorism and help refugees", it did not give a policy that benefits refugees. CNN believes that the refugee issue has led to terrorist attacks or that the refugee issue has complicated them further, arguing that "terrorist-linked passports complicate the Syrian refugee crisis," linking terrorist attacks to refugee issues in addition to religion.

Al Jazeera, by contrast, stood up for refugees and spoke up for people in need. Al Jazeera is more focused on the consequences of a change in foreign policy. It reported that statements by many us governors "refusing to accept Syrian refugees in the wake of the Paris terrorist attacks" would exacerbate fears and Islamophobia. Al Jazeera was more emotional on the refugee front, headlined "Syrian refugees in Paris fear backlash after attacks".

China's Xinhua News Agency has been objective and neutral in its coverage of the incidents, as the country was not involved. In its review and extension of the attacks, Xinhua News Agency also referred to the Charlie daily terrorist attack and the Beirut attack. Reports of the search for love's impact after the attacks mention only that many international policies may change, but do not discuss refugee issues, religious issues or policy causality.

#### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are some similarities between the three media when they reported the terrorist attacks in Paris. For example, they condemned the attacks, especially using the positions and statements of people or countries with international influence. All three media outlets also focused on the international response to the Paris attacks and the possible consequences. However, for a variety of complex reasons, the three media, particularly the American CNN and the pan-Arab Al Jazeera, are different. Due to different political demands, different historical backgrounds and different cultural traditions, CNN and Al Jazeera took different positions at the beginning of the report and used different reporting frameworks. CNN's report reflects a typical western perspective and thought, while Al Jazeera tends to report the event from Arab and third world perspectives. The Paris terrorist attacks were only a trigger, but the subsequent war of opinion between the two media outlets and the different political demands described was the final manifestation. The constructivist approach chosen by the two is selective, producing some meanings and excluding others [11]. So neither is neutral, both are biased and one-sided.

In contrast, the Chinese media Xinhua News Agency uses relatively little frame because it is not in the middle of public opinion and attacks. The Xinhua News Agency has carried out a comprehensive report on multiple viewpoints and the whole event without emotional guidance or bias, which is relatively objective and highly credible. However, this does not mean that these media still behave in the same way when they report other events. Objective media may use the frame to guide the trend of public opinion when they report their own events, and emotional media may report some things objectively. The further finding of this study is that different frames and differences in media coverage do not only exist in the three media coverage of the Paris terrorist attacks. Due to different regions, traditions, cultures and political positions, all media will use different frames to report different events, which is an inevitable situation.

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#### **Appendix**

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