Intellectual Discourse

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Examining the Effects of News Frames as a Risk Factor of Radicalisation

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Abstract: The present study conducted an online experiment to examine whether news frames could cause radicalisation. In the study, 248 participants (age: $M = 22.89$, $SD = 6.77$) read and summarised news articles which contained either positive news frames (depict Islamist extremist groups as avengers of the Muslim communities), negative news frames (depict the groups as barbaric), or neutral news frames (news unrelated to Islamist extremism). The analysis revealed an effect of the positive news frames on the acceptance of Islamist extremism, specifically on the attitudes toward Muslim violence by others. The results indicate that news-framing content that narrates the goodness of Islamist extremist group could be a factor in the radicalisation process through media. It is recommended news content regulation is improved especially during times of crisis which could increase the public's vulnerability to extremism.

Keywords: media effects, news frames effect, psychological experiment, radicalisation, violent Islamist extremism

Abstrak: Kajian ini telah menjalankan eksperimen di atas talian untuk mengkaji sama ada bingkai berita ('*news frame*') boleh menjadi faktor berlakunya proses radikalisasi. Seramai 248 peserta direkrut (umur: $M = 22.89$, $SD = 6.77$) dan mereka diarahkan untuk membaca dan meringkaskan artikel berita yang mengandungi sama ada bingkai berita positif (menggambarkan kumpulan ekstremis Islam sebagai wira penuntut bela umat Islam), bingkai berita negatif (menggambarkan kumpulan itu sebagai kejam dan tidak

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berperikemanusiaan), atau bingkai berita neutral (laporan berita yang tidak berkait dengan ekstremisme Islam). Analisis statistik mendedahkan bingkai berita positif boleh meningkatkan penerimaan ekstremisme Islam, khususnya terhadap sikap terhadap penggunaan keganasan oleh orang-orang Islam. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kandungan bingkai berita yang menceritakan kebaikan kumpulan ekstremis Islam boleh menjadi faktor proses radikalisasi melalui media. Hasil kajian boleh memberi maklum cara penerbitan berita di masa krisis supaya masyarakat di Malaysia tidak mudah terpengaruh dengan agenda ekstremis.

Kata kunci: kesan-kesan media, kesan bingkai berita, eksperimen psikologi, radikalisasi, keganasan ekstrem Islam.

Introduction

Radicalisation refers to the process of change in the attitude and mindset towards support for violent extremism (extreme use of violence for ideological values) (Bott et al., 2009; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Is it possible that the contents of a newspaper potentially be a precipitant of support for violent extremism, hence an element involved in the process of radicalisation? Baugut and Neumann's (2019, 2020b) research work demonstrates this possibility, as they found that convicted Islamist extremist prisoners perceived the negative media coverage of Islam, leading to a feeling of rejection, and this further influenced them to accept radical Islam. Moreover, other studies have highlighted that propaganda and extremist messages disseminated via mediated technology are likely to be the contributing factor drawing to vulnerable individuals supporting extremist groups (Awais et al., 2020; Cottee & Cunliffe, 2020; Gråtrud, 2016; Pieslak et al., 2019).

Historically, the connection between media, radicalisation and violent extremism is a phenomenon that has received coverage in academic research for decades (Wilkinson, 1997). There is a likelihood that the exposure to the media news either indicating positive or negative viewpoints on Islamist extremist groups could either increase or decrease the support for violent Islamist extremism. The process is parallel to how individuals decide on societal issues (Asad et al., 2019) because the public's knowledge and general attitude about controversial events such as violent extremism are highly dependent on the perfunctory precedence set up by the mainstream media (Powell, 2011). Research

has found that variation in news depiction of social and political issues could shape how consumers of the media, i.e., the audience, perceive an issue which could ultimately form a mindset endangering social harmony (e.g., Croteau & Hoynes, 2014; Powell, 2011). However, studies examining the effect of publicly accessible news content on popular Islamist extremist movements, for instance, Daesh (also known as ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), on attitudes toward violent extremism are limited thus far. Additionally, the connection between the news frames' effect on the radicalisation process is yet to be established in empirical studies.

The news framing effect originated from the framing theory and the agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Price & Tewksbury, 1997) specifies that an individual's mindset and attitudes towards social and political issues could be framed through the consumption of news frames (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2018). Following the theory, the present study hypothesised that the consumption of online news content regarding Islamist extremist groups and their respective ideology could affect Muslim's attitudes towards violent extremism. To test it, the present study examined the effect of news frames that differ in content based on how they portray prominent Islamist extremist groups, including Daesh which was active during the peak of the Syrian Civil War, and their violent activities. The portrayal of the group in either positive and sympathetic light or barbaric and betrayed human rights was expected to have two opposing reactions: support for or rejection of violent extremism. The study further examined the differential effects of news framing across age, gender, and personality as the radicalisation process could vary due to individual differences (Holmer, 2013).

Radicalisation Process Through Media

The media's ability to influence public opinion could be attributed to the public's high dependency on media for information related to general knowledge and public events (White, 2020; Williamson et al., 2019). During times of uncertainty and crisis, the society's dependence on mass media increases rapidly to cope with the unfolding circumstance and those who actively seek information through the news to declutter the uncertainty are likely to be affected by the content (Ball-Rokeach, 2010; Lin et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2021). There are identical situations related to extremist threats. For instance, individuals would rely on the

media to make informed decision regarding extremist groups (Traugott & Brader, 2003; Williamson et al., 2019). However, studies examining the effect of news frames related to Daesh and the Syrian Civil War on attitudes towards violent extremism are somewhat limited. Moreover, studies on radicalisation and violent extremism have found that adopting an attitude or mindset that accepts violent extremism may vary due to individual differences, including age, personality and thinking patterns, such as cognitive distortion or the tendency to confirm personal bias (Rashid et al., 2020). Thus, it necessitates the present study to examine the effects of news frames based on individual characteristics.

Agenda Setting and News Framing Theories

The agenda-setting theory hypothesised that the media directs consumers to be attentive to particular parts of an issue, which sets the agenda for what the public should deem critical to forming their thoughts and attitudes towards societal issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). An extension of the agenda-setting theory is the framing theory which looks at frame variation (Wanta & Alkazemi, 2017). Frame refers to the media content that draws attention to selected aspects of reality and makes other elements ambiguous or vague (Entman, 1993). Parallel with the agenda-setting theory, the framing theory theorised that variations of frames could further construct or strengthen various thoughts and attitudes among consumers of media (Price et al., 1997; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The actual effects of framing could include changing an individual's attitudes from positive to negative, strengthening opinions and attitudes towards the extreme end, adding new knowledge, or modifying existing knowledge leading to opinion formation (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2018).

How issues or objects of the issue are depicted becomes a significant focus in the studies of framing and the effect of frames (Weaver, 2007). In a frame, how a story unfolds, informing the audience of the details of the who, what, where, why, how, and when forms the message that illicit particular emotions among the audience, allowing them to connect at a deeper level (Bennett & Edelman, 1985). Personalising the story allows consumers to identify and feel more attached to the unfolding events in the frame. For example, in the case of the Syrian Civil War and the group Daesh, highlighting the suffering of the Muslim community is a form of personalising the message for Muslim readers (Abu Bakar &

Aslam, 2019). The personalised message as news frame content will be examined further in the present study to assess its effects on forming either positive (supportive) or negative (rejection) attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism.

The Psychological Effect of Radicalisation Via News Frames

The efficacy of radicalisation frame narratives that connect with the audience could be explained by understanding basic human needs and motivations (Kruglanski et al., 2014a). Abraham Maslow proposed that individuals are motivated to ensure their basic needs are met to avoid deprivation and cultivate self-growth towards self-actualisation (Maslow, 2012). When basic human needs are unmet, they seek explanations and solutions to the problems at hand, and selected individuals may seek out extremist groups for answers (Kruglanski et al., 2014b; Kruglanski et al., 2019). The need for explanation is further accentuated in times of crisis, and the media provides relevant answers through the news. Studies that have analysed extremist ideological narratives found that the narratives would likely demonstrate the ingroup members as being deprived of needs or victimized, and violence is the most effective means of retribution (Baugut & Neumann, 2020a, 2020b; Chan, 2020). In addition, case studies and analyses of extremist groups, both alive and demise, found that the supporters and members of the groups are motivated either by the desire to fulfil those unmet needs or avenge for it (Baugut & Neumann, 2018, 2019; Horgan, 2014; Post, 2007).

Two existing theories could explain why the messages created by extremist groups are attractive among targeted demographics – the relative deprivation theory and the social identity theory. The relative deprivation theory specifies that individuals' dissatisfaction over perceived or actual deprivation of basic needs could build up frustration, causing them to act violently or support violent extremists fighting for a similar cause (Gurr, 2016). Studies have shown that when individuals or a group of individuals feel that either they or members associated with their group are deprived of social and psychological needs, the need to avenge and reclaim their rights motivates extremists' thoughts and actions (Agbiboa, 2013; Nivette et al., 2017). On the other hand, the social identity theory posits that every individual needs to categorize or identify themselves with a social group to form an identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). In support

of the theory, several studies have shown that support for extremist ideology could also be attributed to the need to feel that fellow extremist supporters or members validate one's beliefs regarding Islam (Rieger et al., 2019; Doosje et al., 2013; van Bergen et al., 2015). Some Malaysian Muslim youths expressed that their identification with Islam perpetuates conflicting personal urges on the need to fight to protect their religion (Yusof et al., 2021).

In the 21st century, the media, especially the social media, is like a bloodline for the society, ensuring ongoing streams of communication and emotional content that provide social validation, e.g., the importance of preserving group members or religious values from extinction due to perceived threat (Kashima et al., 2019). Humans detect emotional cues presented in media content and become gravitated towards it. This further accentuates the connection between extremism and media as extremism news is quintessential of "breaking news that is watched by record audiences and far transcends the boundaries of theatrical events" (p. 28, Nacos, 2003). The media are quick to cover violent extremist attacks due to their desire to provide the public with a sensational story and nearly every extremist attack fits into the category of sensational news (Matusitz, 2015; White, 2020). Extremists are aware of the power of the media, and they prioritise achieving public awareness of their existence to gain legitimacy and recognition which in turn would allow an increase in supporters and followers to their cause (Archetti, 2013; Nacos, 2016; Ross, 2007). As Laquer mentioned, "journalists are terrorists' best friends, because they are willing to give terrorist operations maximum exposure." (p. 44, 1999). This connection between media and extremism could be referred to as a symbiotic relationship, a "product of the convoluted interrelationship between the methods used by terrorism (extremist groups) and the main priorities of the media." (Matusitz, 2015, p. 54).

Extremist groups want their deeds to be publicised, as stated by the Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, "publicity is the oxygen of terrorism" (Nacos, 2016, p. 24). The likely reasons could be that media coverage of extremist attacks may portray or draw the public's attention towards the government's incompetence and vulnerability (Bassiouni, 1981). Additionally, the coverage of extremist groups in publicly accessible media constructs the perceived legitimacy of the group among the audience (Bassiouni, 1981; Jenkins, 1974).

The use of unnecessary and barbaric violence by extremist groups may draw supporters away from their cause because violence could be perceived as threatening, and the media coverage of extremist attacks would likely cause fear rather than admiration (Hoffman, 2006). Nevertheless, a more sympathetic response may be incurred with the right audience and frame that portrays the group as avengers of oppressed members. The role of the media is to inform or reaffirm the idea among the targeted demography that their community is suffering and needs to be protected or avenged, and reveal the group that is responsible for their sufferings (Baugut & Neumann, 2020a, 2020b; Weirman & Alexander, 2020). For instance, the media portrayal of Muslims as terrorists may incite anger towards perceived "enemies of Islam", which could increase support for violent extremism (Baugut & Neumann, 2019). The present study tested the personalisation story by incorporating the relative deprivation theory and social identity theory application specifically relating to its use among members of Daesh who advocated that their fights are meant to avenge the Muslims who were victims of the attacks from Western nations (Baele et al., 2019; Ingram, 2017; Weirman & Alexander, 2020). Therefore, the selection of participants was restricted to Malay Muslims as they make up the majority of the communities that resonate with the Islamist extremism movement due to perceived religious obligation, i.e., to protect the religion and their believers (Jaafar & Akhmetova, 2020; Jaafar et al., 2020; Yusof et al., 2019).

Conclusively, the main objective of the present study is to ascertain whether it is possible that the content of news frames that purportedly depict notorious extremist groups in a positive light could potentially change the attitudes of Malaysians towards violent Islamist extremism. A search for news frames on the Syrian Civil War and extremist groups that portrays the oppression of Muslims and the Islamist extremist groups as avengers of the Muslim communities was conducted. In addition, news frames that depict the groups as barbaric were searched and the news content was included as the main independent variable of the present study which will be further explained in the method section. The news frames' effects on support for violent extremism were examined. The hypotheses of the present study are specified below:

1. There is a significant effect of exposure to news frames on attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism.

2. The scores of attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism are significantly different among participants in the control (neutral) condition, positive news frame condition and negative news frame condition.

   a. Participants in the positive news frame news condition would show higher scores of attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism

   b. Participants in the negative news frames condition would show lower scores of attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism

   c. The covariates of the present study may significantly influence the effect of news frames.

Method

This study employed experimental design, combining between-subjects and within-subjects designs. The between-subjects design allows observation of possible effects from different news frames on individuals' support for violent extremism. In addition, the repeated measures design allows the study to account for changes in attitudes, pre-and-post exposure to news frames, and differences across various news frames positive, negative, and neutral (also known as a control condition).

Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

The inclusion criteria for the participants include adults with a minimum age of 18 years, Malay, and Malaysian citizens, who identify as Muslim and are fluent in the Malay language. The underlying reason for selecting Malay Muslims who are fluent in the Malay language is that the items used in the research are all written in the Malay language and adapted to be suitable for the cultural values of Malay individuals residing in Malaysia. Additionally, cultural context is crucial to address the process of radicalisation, and in this case, the selection of articles focuses on the process of radicalisation that insinuates the suffering of Muslims and depicts the bravery and heroism of Muslim extremists in avenging the Muslim victims. As indicated in past research, this is a common persuasive message used by Islamist extremist groups to convince Malaysian Muslims to be sympathetic to their activities (Jaafar &

Akhmetova, 2020; Jaafar et al., 2020; Yusof et al., 2019; Yusof et al., 2021).

Initially, 399 participants were recruited via the convenience sampling method. Accessibility to the participants was mostly restricted due to the presence of the Covid-19 threat. Additionally, systematic random sampling was non-optional due to limited manpower and access to details of all Malaysians is restricted due to fear of privacy breaches. Thus, the convenience sampling method was the best option to allow any users of social media to encounter the advertisements by chance and demonstrate keen interest without feeling obliged or forced to participate. Nearly half of the participants ($n = 151$) dropped out halfway through the experiment (during the reading of the news frames section) because they felt that the experiment took a significant amount of their time. The final number of participants was 248 (age: $M = 22.89$, $SD = 6.77$). There were 83 male participants (33.5%). Most of the participants recruited were also young adults between 18 to 29 years old who have obtained or are currently completing higher education. The youngest participants were 18 years old, and the oldest one was 57 years ($M = 22.21$, $SD = 4.6$).

Research Materials

Sociodemographic Variables

The sociodemographic variables were gender, age, employment history, the highest level of education, religion, and race.

Covariates

In a study by Rashid et al. (2020), it was found that activity and impulsive sensation-seeking personality traits have a positive predictive value to support the use of violence for ideological reasons. Additionally, the study found that self-centeredness is also predictive of a similar mindset. Therefore, the present study included the three measures to examine whether the three psychological predictors could covary with the primary outcome of the present study.

- Personality traits: activity and impulsive sensation seeking

  The measure of activity and impulsive sensation-seeking personality traits used the Malay-adapted version of the scale (Mohammad Rahim et al., 2013a) based on the Alternative

Five-Factor Model which was originally founded by Zuckerman (2002). Activity personality trait refers to an individual's tendency to constantly seek out activities as remaining idle may cause impatience and feelings of restlessness (Zuckerman, 2002). Meanwhile, the impulsive-sensation-seeking trait score reflects a combined tendency to act quickly and impulsively with little planning and a personal preference for excitement, thrills, unpredictability, constant change, and novelty in life. For activity traits, items 9 to 16 from the scale by Mohammad Rahim et al. (2013a) yielded a .80 reliability value, while for impulsive sensation seeking, items 33 to 40 from the scale yielded a .74 reliability value.

• Self-serving cognitive distortion: self-centredness

The last covariate predictor was self-centeredness of the self-serving cognitive distortion, which was assessed by the Malay-adapted version (Mohammad Rahim et al., 2013b) of the original scale known as How-I Think (HIT) Questionnaire by Barriga et al. (2001). Self-centredness self-serving cognitive distortion could be referred to as the tendency to interpret environmental situations in an unrealistic, inflexible, or extreme manner centring towards personally owned views, expectations, needs, rights, immediate feelings, and desires while disregarding views of others, regardless of their legitimacy and logic (Crick & Dodge, 1996). Schemas from distorted thoughts could lead to justifying and enforcing antisocial and violent behaviours to possibly reduce internal tension caused by conflicting moral values and personal actions (Gibbs, 2019). The items taken were items 1 to 6 from the adapted scale (Mohammad Rahim et al., 2013b), which yielded a .75 reliability value.

Independent Variable

Six articles (three for each frame condition, neutral/control frame, negative frame, and positive frame) from online news sites which had great trust among readers based on Reuters' analysis in 2019 (Nain, 2019) were selected for their salient depiction of the frames due to the language used, and the information provided related to the issue perpetuating either positive or negative viewpoint for the violent

extremism movement. The positive frames contain stories about violent extremist groups and their motivation as valuable and essential to the Muslim community, while the negative frames describe the groups and their activities as barbaric and inhumane. Therefore, it is expected that the exposure to positively and negatively framed content would cause an increment and a decrement respectively in the score of attitudes towards violent extremism from pre-exposure to post-exposure

It is recommended to have a baseline or control condition to ascertain the effects of news frames (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2018). Therefore, a neutral frame (alternatively referred to as the control condition) was set up. In this frame, three news articles were selected from the most recent news published from July to August 2020 sourced from the same news outlet. The articles mainly covered news related to technological advancement and the most recent global event, Covid-19. Therefore, it was expected that repeated exposure to this news article would cause no effect from pre-exposure to post-exposure in the score of attitudes towards Muslim violence by others measured using the newly adapted scales.

Primary Outcome Variable

A scale was identified and adapted for the Malaysian Muslim population's use. It was developed by Doosje et al. (2013) in their study of the radicalisation process. The scale measuring the support for violent extremism and willingness to use violence only contains seven items. These items are under the sub-factor of potential predictors of radicalisation determinants. Specifically, the items selected include the four items assessing "attitudes towards Muslim violence by others" and "own violent intentions". The items were adapted and translated into the Malay language during the pilot study, prior to the conduct of this research. The translated items were tested among Malaysians (N = 363, Age: M = 22.21, SD = 4.57) fluent in the Malay language. The principal component analysis depicted two factors with at least three items with primary loadings above 0.5. The two factors were retained and respectively labelled, "own violent intentions" (sample item: "I would be prepared to disturb the order and peace in order to get something done that I think is very important.") and "attitude towards Muslim violence by others" (sample item: "What is your opinion on radical extremist members that murdered Western politicians who are

against and criticises Islam?"). The participants rated each item on a scale of 1 to 5 (from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). The internal consistency for each of the factors was calculated and Cronbach's alpha for "own violent intentions" ($\alpha =.804$) and "attitude towards Muslim violence by others" ($\alpha =.732$) were found to be satisfactory. Collectively in this paper, they are referred to as attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism.

Ethical Consideration

The present study was approved by the IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC). The briefing section of the survey form indicated participants' rights, including the right to withdraw from the study without consequences. The study procedure utilized equipment and measures which were non-invasive and should not have induced harm to any of the participants involved in the study. However, the light from the computer screen could cause eye strain due to prolonged exposure. Therefore, participants were encouraged to take a short break between reading the articles in the briefing and instruction sections.

The participants were not given full disclosure regarding the purpose of the study before completion of the study, specifically on the nature of this study which is to examine the effect of news frames on attitudes towards violent extremism. Instead, they were informed only of the study's partial purpose of assessing their thoughts and opinions after reading specific news articles. In addition, debriefing was sent via email to ensure that they were not fully concealed from the complete objective of the study. It is noted that there is a risk of manipulation. However, the manipulation is deemed necessary to prevent the greater risk of the experimenter effect, which could lead to false-positive results, Type II error.

To ensure that the confidentiality and privacy of the participants were maintained, access to their private details, specifically their email address/contact number was only given to the main researcher in an online secure file which is password-protected. The data and the email exchange were later deleted after the completion of data collection to remove traces of their participation in the research in order to prevent exposure of confidential information to a third party.

Data Collection

Recruitment

During the early recruitment process, the invitations to participate in the survey were circulated via email and several social media applications, including WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Alternatively, posters were printed and placed in several places at a local university, containing the QR code linking to the pre-exposure online survey form.

Pre-Exposure to Frames Survey

Interested participants gained access to the first survey form via a link. In the form, they were requested to provide their email, and basic sociodemographic details, and complete the scales containing the items measuring covariates and the items for the primary outcome variable. The participants took approximately 30 minutes to complete the first survey form.

Exposure to Frames and Post-Exposure Survey

Once the participants had completed the first survey form, they were then sent an email containing the link to the second survey form comprising either the positively framed, negatively framed, or neutrally framed news articles. To ensure the process of random assignment, the link sent to the participants alternated after every five participants. The first five participants received the neutrally framed news articles, the next five received positively framed articles, and the next five received the negatively framed news articles. This process repeated itself for two months, which was the time allocated for the data collection. Participants were required to read the news articles and summarise them to indicate they have read and understood the content in the form. Until all articles were read and summarised, the participants were tasked to complete the attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism scales again available in the second survey form. Approximately, 30 – 45 minutes were required to complete the second part of the survey. Upon completion of the second survey form, another email was automatically sent. The email contains debriefing information and an additional document requesting their details to transfer a token of appreciation.

Both the pre- (responses from the first survey form) and post-exposure (responses from the second survey form) to the news frames

data were downloaded and combined into one Excel sheet. Next, the data were screened, and composite scores were calculated to be used for analysis using IBM SPSS. The composite scores calculated include the mean score for the personality traits of impulsive sensation seeking, activity, self-centeredness, cognitive distortion, and the two assessed factors of attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism (attitudes towards Muslim violence others and own violent intentions).

Data Analysis and Results

The present study used factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess the variance in means of three outcome measures of attitudes to violent Islamist extremism. The use of factorial ANOVA is recommended as it accounts for individual main effects for each variable and the interaction effect between each variable towards the change of the dependent variable (Field et al., 2012).

During data preparation for analysis, selected personality traits and self-centeredness cognitive distortion variables were calculated for their mean scores. The mean scores for personality traits and self-centeredness cognitive were relabelled as *high*, *low,* and *moderate* to indicate individuals' standing on the selected factors. Individuals with a mean score above '3.2' or a mean score below '2.8' were labelled as *high* or *low* standing on the factor. The others were labelled as *moderate*.

Although the procedure included random assignment of participants to either neutral (*n* = 85), negative (*n* = 80), or positive (*n* = 83) conditions, not all participants that received the link completed the entire experiment, thus causing an imbalance in the total number of samples recruited per condition. The final number of samples per condition did not vary above five samples variation. Thus, the variation is negligible.

Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' demographic characteristics and distribution across frame groups. The mean composite score and standard deviations for measures of the primary outcome variables of the experiment are summarized in Table 1. The differences in scores across conditions and between time (pre-and post-exposure) to news frames were analysed to assess the effect of the frames.

The data were screened for outliers and missing values using IBM SPSS. The screening results show that there were no missing variables

or extreme outliers. Levene's test results indicated that the error of variance is equal across group conditions 'Attitude towards Muslim Violence by others' (ATV), and not for 'Own Violent Intentions' (OVI). The measure of OVI was found to be positively skewed, thus the log value of the mean scores were calculated and used for the main analysis. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity also indicated that the data are spherical.

Table 1. Summary of Participants' Demographic Characteristics

	Neutral ($n = 85$)		Negative ($n = 80$)		Positive ($n = 83$)		Full Sample ($n = 248$)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender								
Male	32	37.65	25	31.25	26	31.33	83	33.47
Female	53	62.35	55	68.75	57	68.67	165	66.53
Age								
18 – 19 years	7	8.24	2	2.5	4	4.82	13	5.24
20 – 25 years	75	88.24	69	86.25	79	95.18	223	89.92
$\geq$ 30 years	3	3.53	9	11.25	0	0.00	12	4.84
Education Attained								
Higher Education	80	94.12	75	93.75	81	97.59	236	95.16
Others	5	5.88	5	6.25	2	2.41	12	4.84
Personality Traits								
Impulsive-Sensation Seeking								
(High)	8	9.41	6	7.5	10	12.05	24	9.68
(Moderate)	40	47.06	33	41.25	42	50.60	115	46.37
(Low)	37	43.53	41	51.25	31	37.35	109	43.95
Activity								
(High)	36	42.35	39	48.75	41	49.40	116	46.77
(Moderate)	39	45.88	29	36.25	32	38.55	100	40.32
(Low)	10	11.76	12	15	10	12.05	32	12.90
Self-Serving Cognitive Distortion								
Self-Centredness								
(High)	6	7.06	16	20	15	18.07	37	14.92
(Moderate)	29	34.12	17	21.25	30	36.14	76	30.65
(Low)	50	58.82	47	58.75	38	45.78	135	54.44

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS, and the variables include Condition, Time and two measures of changes in attitudes towards violent Islamist extremism (mean scores of ATV, and log value of mean score of OVI to correct for normality distribution). First, the condition is set as one of the main effects and the categorical variable with three levels, Control, Positive and Negative. The scores for the different frame types were compared between the randomly assigned participants. Next, time is another main effect and the categorical variable with two levels, pre and post. The means were compared with the participants' scores of ATV and log OVI across two different time points, pre-exposure to news frames and post-exposure to news frames.

Results Of ANOVA

Results of ANOVA revealed that the scores of ATV were significantly different across conditions, $F (2, 242) = 3.69$, $p = .026=$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$. The scores of ATV were significantly higher for participants in the positive condition ($M = 2.26$, $SE = .84$, 95%, CI [0.68, 0.83]) than for control ($M = 2.22$, $SE = 0 .86$, 95%, CI [0.63, 0.78]) and negative conditions ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.82$, 95%, CI [0.52, 0.67]). Post hoc test results, using Tukey HSD, revealed that the score is significantly lower for the negative condition compared to the positive one (Mean difference = -.28, $p = .02$, CI [-.53, -.03]). There was no significant score difference between control with either negative (Mean difference = .18, $p = .19$, CI [-.07, .43]) or positive condition (Mean difference = -.10, $p = .60$, CI [-.34, .14]). The main effect of Time was also significant, $F (1, 245) = 3.47$, $p = .029$, $\eta^2 = .019$, The post hoc test results further revealed there was a significant difference between pre- and post-exposure to news frames ($p = .04$) indicating that there was a significant effect of exposure to news frames with greater ATV in the post ($M = 2.21$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [2.11, 2.31]) than pre-exposure to news frames ($M = 2.09$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [1.99, 2.18]). However, there was no significant interaction effect between Condition and Time, $F (2, 245) = 0.08$, $p = .92$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$. Additionally, the covariates' influence, gender ($F (2, 240) = 0.08$, $p = .92$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$), personality ($F (2, 240) = 0.08$, $p = .92$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$), and age ($F (2, 240) = 0.08$, $p = .92$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$) revealed no significant influence for the effect of Time. The covariate influence for Condition was not run as the variation of each covariate was not equally distributed across each condition.

Robust tests of one-way repeated-measures ANOVA revealed that the log scores of OVI depicted insignificant results for both main effects of Time (F (1, 149) = 0.001, p = .97). Additionally, the main effect of Condition also revealed no significant difference on the log scores of OVI (F (2, 244) = 1.19, p = .30). Therefore, there was no significant influence of news frame exposure to the intention to commit violence among the participants of the study.

Discussion

The main objective of the present study was to examine the effect of news frames on the formation of either positive (supportive) or negative (rejection) attitudes toward violent Islamist extremism. The analysis revealed that participants exposed to news content framed to support violent extremist groups have a higher score for ATV than the other groups. The results indicate that variations in news frames affect support for violent Islamist extremism. The result from the present study is aligned with the findings of past studies that had conducted experiments on the effect of extremist narratives on support for extremism (Frischlich et al., 2019; Schmuck & Tribastone, 2020; Shortland et al., 2020). Frischlich et al. (2019) and Shortland et al. (2020) looked at the effect of extremist ideological narratives in video format or the original online extremist material to ascertain the effect of extremist narratives. Meanwhile, Schmuck & Tribastone (2020) examined the effect of political messages resonating with anti-Islamic messages. The uniqueness of the present study is that it uses excerpts of online news published in refutable news sites to examine the effect of frames on support for violent extremism.

The mainstream media, such as news platforms, have been examined for their crucial role in not only informing the public but also forming individuals' perceptions and attitudes related to political and social topics (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014). The media's ability to lure public support or hate for specific groups could be attributed to the general public's high dependency towards media for information especially related to general knowledge and public events (White, 2020; Williamson et al., 2019). Especially during times of uncertainty and crisis, society's dependence on mass media increases rapidly to cope with the unfolding circumstance and those who actively seek to declutter the uncertainty are likely to be affected by the media (Ball-Rokeach, 2010). Therefore, extremist groups acknowledge the power

of media in ensuring their presence and knowledge in the public eye is optimised. Since the media continuously revolutionise itself that nearly every aspect of human culture is mediatised (Marcinkowski, 2014; Nygren & Niemikari, 2019), the extremist group are quick to adapt to technological advancement and continue to ensure a continuous radicalisation process via the media (von Behr et al., 2013).

The case of the present study, highlights another relevant key aspect of media influence towards radicalisation, indicating a potential process in the change of individuals' attitudes towards violent extremism. The experiment outcome only captured the attitudinal change in the support for attitudes towards Muslim violence by others. The change in this specific attitude captures the radicalisation process through the positive portrayal of Islamist extremist groups such as Daesh in online news. There is a lack of support for the willingness to commit to violent extremism. The willingness to use violence for socio-political causes may be a relatively rare characteristic in Malaysia. This potentially explains why a very small minority of Malaysians have been convicted for an offence related to violent extremism (Weintraub, 2017). Malaysia is well-known for its peaceful and diverse community, though the country remains threatened by the Muslim community's rising support for religious extremism (Jaafar & Akhmetova, 2020; Jaafar et al., 2020). The present study is another subsidiary evidence supporting the use of violence, and this remains a concern in Malaysia and could potentially be influenced through Muslim-personalized news frames.

However, the triggering factor changing from mere support to willingness to actively endorse and participate in violent extremist movements requires further investigation. The support for extremism remains to be an issue for the nation, and on rare occasions, a selected number of individuals have committed extremism acts and travelled to foreign nations to join extremist groups (NST Online, 2019; Zack, 2019). The present study has assisted in providing additional evidence to indicate how media news could influence individuals to perceive whether violence by others is acceptable or otherwise. It is highly recommended that future studies investigate individuals' motivational readiness in committing violent extremist activities.

It is an individual decision and aside from various factors that could cause attraction, there are additional personal traits that may

have a stronger influence towards the willingness to use violence. The thought of their in-group being outcasted or oppressed would lead to feeling a sense of belonging to a group with an established identity (Doosje et al., 2013; Rieger et al., 2019; van Bergen et al., 2015). Changes in group entitativity could mediate the changes in support for extremist groups such as Daesh which places emphasis on collectivistic movements. Vulnerable young Muslims with doubts over their identity and belongingness are more prone to seeking out extremist groups that promote a sense of unity (Harris, 2011; Harris et al., 2011). A study by Effron and Knowles (2015) indicated the potential influence of enhanced group entitativity towards the expression of prejudice. However, its potential influence in the Muslim radicalisation process requires future studies to investigate enhanced group entitativity as a mediator for the effects of news frames on radical extremist mindset.

Limitations

The results of the present study must be taken with caution. Although the analysis revealed differences across time and condition, there was no interaction effect between the two. This indicated that, although random assignment was conducted, the difference in the score was noticeable across groups prior to the exposure to news frames. The underlying cause behind this is uncertain. The differences may be merely coincidental as it is observable that even after exposure, the scores between positive and negative frames were noticeably different. Nevertheless, it is recommended that more studies are conducted to examine the effects of news frames' on attitudes towards violent extremism to ascertain whether the changes were unique to the present study, or if the news frame is applicable to the radicalisation process.

Additionally, this study is exclusive to examining the radicalisation process for Islamist extremism. It should be noted that there are various forms of extremist ideologies and movements both within the Southeast Asian region and globally. Future studies need to examine news frames in other forms of extremist ideologies to prevent biased representation in academic research.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that news reports on violent extremism have the potential to radicalise readers. The present study shows

that varied news frames have differing effects on attitudes towards violent extremism. This indicates that news frames that justify violent extremism could pose a factor in the radicalisation process. In the meantime, news frames that do not propagate extremist movements or refute their legitimacy could also lower individuals' support for violent extremism. Therefore, media regulation requires improved policies to limit public support for violent extremism

Careless reportings may lead readers to support an extremist cause rather than encourage them to avoid it. For instance, they may sympathise with the actors reported in the news or there may be a risk of bias in reporting which may cause them to think that the news producers are projecting stereotypical views on a particular community. The findings can serve as an eye-opener, especially for news reporters working in the field of violent extremism in terms of the importance of appropriate and sensitive media reporting practices so as to get the readers to reject violent extremism rather than side with it. It is also recommended that the public is educated on the harms of violent extremist groups to prevent them from identifying with their movement.

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