

OF MINORITIES, MEDIA AND MISINFORMATION: A FRAMING ANALYSIS OF THE
U.S. NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WISCONSIN SIKH TEMPLE SHOOTINGS

by

SRAAVANI PERE

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Today, with many news outlets scrapping their religion beat, religion news is often underreported. This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated by a study conducted by The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The content analysis spanned 60 months and found that, "Religion-related issues and events accounted for only 0.7 percent of the total "newshole" or amount of space and time devoted to news online, in print, on television and on the radio in 2011. That was down from 2.0 percent in 2010."¹ The research concluded that although the U.S. is highly religious, religion stories, more often than not, are not the primary focus of the news. It also says that religion makes it to the news predominantly when it 'engenders controversy'.²

¹ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public life, "Religion in the News: Islam and Politics Dominate Religion Coverage in 2011." Last modified 2012. Accessed December 6, 2012.

² *Id*

Many editors and their teams shy away from this subject either because they have inadequate knowledge or interest on religion, or they seek to avoid offending religious groups in ways that could have grave consequences. It is in this context and with this outlook that journalists set out to cover the Wisconsin Sikh temple shootings.

It was a Sunday morning, on August 5, 2012, at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, a city in the Milwaukee County, Wis., where devotees had gathered to offer their weekly prayers. At around 10 a.m., a single gunman forayed into the temple and opened fire, killing six people and injuring four others. According to ensuing news reports, the killer (who also shot himself), Wade M. Page, reportedly had ties with white supremacist groups.

Underreported and in the background

This tragic incident occurred less than a month after James Holmes went on a shooting spree at a crowded midnight showing of a Batman movie in Aurora, Colo., killing 12 and injuring several others. Jeneba Ghatt of *Politico* compared U.S. news media coverage of the Colorado incident to the Oak Creek incident and said:

When a mass shooting occurs in the dead of night in middle America we get immediate and nonstop reporting and coverage, educating us about all we need and want to know. When a mass shooting occurs in the middle of a sleepy Sunday as most Americans are watching the London Olympics and the

victims are members of a Wisconsin Sikh community, you barely get a warning interrupting the water polo semis.³

Ghatt went on to explain why she felt the one incident was reported far more extensively as compared to the other and said, "there may be tiers of Americans - those who are foreign-born, of foreign parentage and practicing a religion foreign to many maybe just too foreign to warrant the same sympathies and attention from the media and general American public."

Misreported and Misunderstood

The U.S. news media was severely criticized by media professionals around the world for its "sloppy reporting" of the Sikh temple shooting incident, stating that the coverage of the incident "prompted misinformation," and displayed "outright ignorance about the Sikh religion."⁴ Among the critics was British journalist, Sunny Hundal who lamented the coverage of the incident, in his article for the *Guardian* newspaper, where he collected a series of tweets demonstrating the ignorance of mainstream journalists with respect to this minority religion and incident.⁵

³ Ghatt, Jeneba. "Sikh Temple Shooting: Less Media Coverage and Analysis Than Aurora." *Politic365*, August 07, 2012. <http://politic365.com/2012/08/07/sikh-temple-shooting-less-media-coverage-and-analysis-than-aurora/> (accessed December 6, 2012).

⁴ Zara, Christopher. "Wisconsin Temple Shootings Media Coverage Criticized For Lacking The Outrage Of Aurora Massacre." *International Business Times*, August 07, 2012.

⁵ Hundal, Sunny. "Comment is free Wisconsin temple shooting: Sikhs have been silent scapegoats since 9/11." *The Guardian*, August 06, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/06/wisconsin-temple-shooting-sikh-scapegoats> (accessed December 6, 2012).

One news channel in Milwaukee, WITI-TV Fox 6 News, reported that the Sikh religion is a “religion based in northern Italy.”⁶ Andrew Kaczynski a reporter at Buzzfeed voiced his criticism of CNN’s Eric Marrapodi for stating, “Sikhs are sometimes ‘unfairly’ mistaken for Muslims or Taliban.” Kaczynski tweeted in response to Marrapodi’s comments, “Seems to imply it's fair to target Muslims.” Even the FBI’s categorizing of the crime as an act of terrorism, created confusion in the media, “NBC News reported that ‘it was not immediately clear why local police were classifying the shooting with domestic terrorism.’ A Fox News analyst claimed the shooting was not terrorism because Page was a ‘nut job’ who mistook Sikhs for Muslims.”⁷

The Sikh temple incident demonstrates yet another case where a minority religion made its way into the American mainstream media primarily as a result of conflict and controversy. The need for this research is rooted in the occurrence of this phenomenon, where journalists seem to be consistently framing news, including religion news with conflict and controversy to ensure newsworthiness.

Literature review

Owing to the recent occurrence of the Sikh temple shooting, there exists minimal or no literature, analyzing the media coverage of the topic. With a population of about 25 million to 30 million Sikhs worldwide and only about

⁶ Zara, *supra* note 4

⁷ Ali, Rozina. "The U.S. media discover Sikhism." *philly.com*, August 13, 2012. http://articles.philly.com/2012-08-13/news/33183286_1_guru-nanak-mission-society-sikh-temple-beards-and-turbans (accessed December 6, 2012).

500,000 living in the United States⁸, Sikhism can be classified as a minority religion in the U.S. Although not many studies have been done with respect to media coverage of Sikhism particularly, there have been general studies on how the media has covered other minority faith groups and framing has been an integral part of these studies.⁹

In 1980, Hart, Turner and Knupp examined media's perception and reporting of religious issues using Time magazine as an example of how the media tried to construct religious perceptions in their audiences and found that, "religion, no matter the denomination, is permeated with conflict, with four out of every five articles on religion in the past 30 years of the study containing a primary conflict element."¹⁰

The study conducted by the Pew Forum demonstrated similar patterns of how in the year 2010, the Park51 Islamic center and mosque controversy was the most-read religion story of that year and how it accounted for a little more than a fifth of the entire religion-based news coverage of that year. ¹¹ The study revealed how nearly three quarters of the stories about that subject featured within a time frame of two weeks in August, just after President Obama spoke in favor of building the Islamic center. This displays how although it was considered as religion news

⁸ See www.sikhcoalition.org

⁹ Review of Religious Research, Vol. 39, No. 2, Special Issue: Mass Media and Unconventional Religion (Dec., 1997), pp. 101-115

¹⁰ Davis, Kimberly D. (2008). "Framing Faith: Religion coverage in Time and Newsweek, 2004-2008." A paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, August 2009. Boston, Mass.

¹¹ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public life, supra note 1

coverage it was embedded in a controversial frame. As per the study, the phenomenon is evident in 2011 as well; where close to 10 percent of the year's religion coverage was attributed to Rep. Peter King's congressional hearing on Islam.

It is therefore reasonable to say that apart from being underreported, the subject of religion in the mainstream media is, more often than not, entwined within another media message or frame. The consumers of this information will thereby have a media-induced frame on a particular religious issue. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine how mainstream American news media framed religion and faith in reports of the Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting incident.

Framing theory

Framing, as a theory in mass communication studies is one of the oldest and most well established concepts, with copious amounts of scholarly research conducted on it. Framing theory¹² embodies what issues media audiences think about, and the way in which they think about them. Framing with reference to the media is the media's perception of a phenomena after which a collective media message is sent out. This process can occur in any of the three stages in the mass communication. Framing can happen either while forming the message, transmitting it or assimilating it. The media therefore through their frames affect what and how people perceive things, situations or even other people. Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern stated, "A media frame can be described as an organizing

¹² Entman, Robert M. "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm." *Journal of communication* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51-58.

mechanism for media content. As such, it provides immediate context to the recipient of the frame, through the selection, emphasis or exclusion of specific facts or ideas.”¹³

Applying the framing theory in the study of religion reporting has intrigued media scholars for decades. Olasky¹⁴ and Silk¹⁵ extensively studied framing with respect to religion, by exploring the types of methods journalists used to present religious content to their audiences. Kellie Kotraba exemplifies Silk’s study on framing in religion, “What Silk refers to as *topoi*, others would call frames. Silk’s *topoi* involve general conceptions and ways of viewing religion that are informed by ideas that are sometimes almost unconsciously, ingrained in American culture.”¹⁶

Framing analysis was popularized by social studies scholar, Erving Goffman in his 1974 book “Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience,” validating it as a research method.

Religion news and framing

A review of existing literature suggests that framing of religion news has existed for almost as long as religion news itself, however what seems to have significantly changed over the years is, exactly how and what frames are being used. During the American colonial period, published material voiced the opinions of

¹³ Daniela V. Dimitrova, and Colleen Connolly-Ahern (2007): A Tale of Two Wars: Framing Analysis of Online News Sites in Coalition Countries and the Arab World during the Iraq War, *Howard Journal of Communications*, 18:2, 153-168

¹⁴ Olasky, M. (1990). Democracy and the secularization of the American press. In Q. J. Schultze (Ed.), *American evangelicals and the mass media* (pp. 47–68). Grand Rapids, MI: Academie/Zondervan.

¹⁵ Silk, M. (1995). *Unsecular media: Making news of religion in America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

¹⁶ Kotraba, Kellie. University of Missouri, "Reshaping the God Beat: How three community news websites frame religion." Last modified 2012. Accessed December 6, 2012.

particular faith groups and Puritan theology.¹⁷ But over time, the focus has considerably shifted to adapting a conflict frame. Judith Buddenbaum, a scholar and journalism professor who has done extensive research in the field of media studies and religion, in her analysis of religion news coverage in three major newspapers found that each paper had “a higher proportion of stories emphasizing change or conflict than cooperation or human interest.”

Conflict frame as the dominant frame in religion reporting

Along with being one of the most dominant frames across all news, it has been established earlier that the conflict frame is also the most dominant frame adopted while reporting on religious issues in the mainstream news media, it is important to find out what effect that has on the consumers of these stories. Stout and Buddenbaum discuss the effects of framing religion on audiences:

In the study of religion and media, framing has value far beyond just knowing what is in the news; it also determines the types of information that ultimately contribute to public opinion about particular religions.¹⁸

By studying what frames were used in the news package regarding the Sikh temple shooting incident, this paper will help future researchers who aim to study the American media audiences’ opinions on the Sikh religion and the effects these

¹⁷ Daniel A. Stout, and Judith M. Buddenbaum (2003): Media, Religion, and "Framing," *Journal of Media and Religion*, 2:1, 1-3

¹⁸ Stout and Buddenbaum, *supra* note 17

frames had on them.

Covering minority religions

Stuart Wright in his paper on media coverage of unconventional religions, enlisted some factors that contribute to media bias while reporting on minority faith groups, they are:

- Journalists' knowledge/familiarity with subject matter
- The degree of cultural accommodation of the targeted religious group
- Economic resources available to journalists
- Time constraints of journalists
- Journalists' sources of information
- The front-end/back-end disproportionality of reporting.¹⁹

Most of these factors are self-explanatory but front-end/back-end disproportionality becomes especially important with reference to incidents such as the Sikh temple shootings, where, as soon as the story breaks, there is a surge of coverage on it and soon the story fizzles out and audiences are left hanging. Most of

¹⁹ Review of Religious Research, Vol. 39, No. 2, Special Issue: Mass Media and Unconventional Religion (Dec., 1997), pp. 101-115

these stories make it back to front-page news only when there is an anniversary commemoration or event. Not completing a full circle in the news cycle leads to front-end/back-end disproportionality.

Having a thorough understanding of the biases journalists possess while reporting on lesser-known faith groups as a whole provides a checklist to verify, while conducting a framing analysis of mainstream media coverage on the Sikh temple shooting. In order to determine the frames formed as a result of the aforementioned factors, this study aims to answer:

RQ1: What frames were used by the mainstream news media while reporting the Sikh temple shooting incident?

RQ2: Was the conflict frame among the frames used while reporting the incident?

RQ3: Which frames were dominant in the news stories that covered this incident?

Methods

For this study, 10 articles, in a 12-week time span, selected from three news outlets were analyzed. The articles were sourced from the main news sections of the *New York Times*, the *Huffington Post* and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. All the articles were hard news pieces that were published between August 2012 and November 2012, excluding editorials, op-ed pieces and blog posts. This is the time

period from when the Wisconsin Sikh temple shooting occurred to the month when the last victim was released from hospital.

The New York Times was selected to get a view of the national coverage on the issue versus the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, which provided local news coverage of the incident. Both of these are traditional news sources; yet different in the sense that one provides a national outlook while the other gives the local picture. The third outlet, the *Huffington Post*, is a digital news source that is considered a curator/aggregator news outlet. It has a dedicated religion beat and is known to cover the topic of religion extensively. The differences among these three news sources will provide for a variety in news articles enabling a holistic view of the frames used by the American mainstream media in covering the Sikh temple shootings.

Qualitative research was a natural choice for this researcher because it is a form of research methodology that lays emphasis on the natural observation and interpretation capabilities of the researcher, thereby providing scope for deriving meaning out of scenarios, as opposed to quantitative research methods that rely heavily on mathematical derivations. According to Lindlof and Taylor, qualitative research aims to examine and preserve the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations.²⁰

²⁰ Lindlof, T. R., and Taylor, B.C. (2002). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis as a method, especially with reference to media studies, has long been used to probe various subjects. It is one of the most widely used methods while adapting to framing theory as a framework. It differs from quantitative content analysis in the sense that we study the inferences and nuances of texts, which in turn represent reality.²¹

Hoover in his book "Religion in the Media Age,"²² discusses how qualitative methods are increasingly being used to analyze religion and media studies because they result in the examination of outcomes like "meaning" and "identity." These outcomes can be determined through "the rhetoric and language used, along with the headlines and overall treatment of the story."²³

Framing analysis

A review of existing literature suggests that framing analysis as a qualitative research method has become increasingly popular in the field of media studies more specifically with reference to news coverage.

Stout and Buddenbaum in their article, "Media religion and framing" describe framing analysis as:

²¹ Acosta-Alzuru, C. (2003). "I'm not a feminist...I only defend women as human beings:" Production, Representation and Consumption of feminism in a Telenovela. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 20(3), pp. 198.

²² Hoover, S. M. (2006). *Religion in the Media Age*. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.

²³ Kotraba, supra note 16

The study of how events in everyday life are organized or made sense of in coherent ways. We react to things in the world based on the information coming to us through frames. Mass media frame events by organizing them into news stories, which are the products of a journalist's perceptions and a business organization's effort to attract audiences.²⁴

Having acquired a lucid understanding of the process of framing analysis, through existing literature, the next step is to establish what methods would be appropriate to conduct a framing analysis on the U.S. news media coverage of the Sikh temple shooting incident.

Pan and Kosicki²⁵ identified four main news dimensions that influence the development of frames:

- Syntactic structures, or word choice
- Script structures, or an evaluation of the newsworthiness of an event
- Thematic structures, including causal themes for news events
- Rhetorical structures, which includes "stylistic" choices made by

²⁴ Stout and Buddenbaum, *supra* note 19

²⁵ Zhongdang Pan, and Gerald Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An approach to news discourse," *Political Communication*, 10 (1993): 55-75, <http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=da50de74-9a61-4921-9f5a-a7c36059549a@sessionmgr4&vid=2&hid=20> (accessed December 6, 2012).

journalists²⁶

Using these parameters to evaluate and assess all the media coverage during the event, will help build a holistic and credible frame analysis. For instance, making a list of words that are used repeatedly in stories covering the instance can help derive a pattern to deduce a particular frame. Similarly, evaluating the elements of newsworthiness with reference to this incident such as timeliness, proximity, conflict, impact visibility and unusualness will serve as a means to determine the script structures used in news stories that appeared in the mainstream media.

Many media scholars, including Kotraba, have used Silk's *topoi* or frames as guidelines when conducting a framing analysis. They serve as a starting point for studies attempting to categorize articles and help develop new frames. Silk's frames include:

- Applause for good works
- Embrace of tolerance
- Contempt for hypocrisy
- Rejection of false prophets
- Inclusion of worthy religious others
- Appreciation of faith in things unseen
- Concern about religious decline²⁷

²⁶ Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern, *supra* note 13

Findings

All articles from the three news outlets were analyzed using the previously elucidated criteria and categorized into a corresponding and relevant frame. Some of the frames used were Silk's already established frames, while the researcher identified the presence of some altogether new frames. The researcher supplemented the primarily qualitative research with some quantitative data in the form of a table, thereby adapting mixed methods for this particular analysis. This section will therefore include a numerical breakdown of all the frames and how many fit in each category through Table 1, and later, each category will be discussed in detail using quotes and examples from the articles.

Table 1. Frames for coverage of attacks on Sikh temple

Frame	New York Times	Huffington Post	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	Total articles
Conflict	1	2	4	7
Criminal	2	3	0	5
Political	2	0	1	3
Good works	0	1	2	3
Tolerance	1	0	0	1
Inclusion	1	2	1	4
Mistaken identity	2	1	0	3
Tribute/Event	1	1	2	4

²⁷Kotraba, supra note 16

Textual results: Frames

This section will first discuss the various frames that were identified through the course of this analysis of the coverage of the Sikh temple shootings in detail. While the researcher identified frames including conflict, criminal, political, mistaken identity and tribute/event, some of the frames included Silk's existing frames or *topoi*. Among Silk's frames, the ones that appeared in the selected articles were: good works, tolerance and inclusion.

Conflict

According to the numbers indicated in Table 1., it is evident that this is the most common frame that was adapted to report on the gruesome incident. However, this came as no surprise because it was definitely an act of terror in which a gunman opened fire in a Sikh temple and caused six people to lose their lives on the spot and injured several others. Most of the articles that immediately reported the occurrence of the incident on August 5, 2012, as a breaking news story, used the conflict frame to report the story. *The New York Times* article that was published on their website, as soon as the incident occurred on August 5, described the incident as a "domestic terrorist type incident." The other two outlets also had breaking news stories, published on August 5, which used the conflict frame to describe a round up of events that led to the horrific killings.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel had the most stories that fell under the conflict frame. This can be owed to the fact that as the local newspaper, most of the stories

were disseminated as breaking news and spoke about the incident itself, which as discussed previously, involves conflict. The first story featured on the day the event occurred, August 5, while the other three are published subsequently on August 9, August 22 and October 29, 2012. One article reports on a forum held in the city, where people of the Sikh community and other communities discuss the horrific event and recall the victims, the other is a story on the police releasing a 911 recording from the day of the incident, where gunfires and screams can be distinctly heard, and the last article is again about an event where the two police officers who braved the situation narrate their personal encounters and experiences when the shooting occurred, respectively.

Huffington Post, just like the other two news sources has a breaking news story that is classified under the conflict frame. It also has another article that was published on the day of the incident, August 5, 2012, titled, "Temple Shooting Spreads Fear Among U.S. Sikh Population," that uses the conflict frame. The article describes the disruptions the incident has caused in a civil society, causing it to be classified under the conflict frame. "This is something we have been fearing since 9/11, that this kind of incident will take place," said Rajwant Singh, chairman of the Washington-based Sikh Council on Religion and Education."

"Every Sikh American today is hurting, grieving and afraid," said Valarie Kaur, 31, a New Haven, Conn., filmmaker who has chronicled Sikh attacks for 11 years." References to the Wisconsin incident and 9/11, which also involved conflict, help us identify that the frame used for these stories was the conflict frame.

Criminal

The criminal frame can be viewed as an offshoot of the conflict frame. However the reason the researcher included it as a separate category was the nature of the incident and the distinct knowledge and identity of the gunman. Articles and profiles of the gunman Wade M. Page constituted a significant portion of the news related to this incident. While his life, criminal history, family, girlfriend, band, activities and motives dominated the articles, religion featured in these pieces only as a result of the crime he had committed.

One of the articles in the *Huffington Post*, that was published on September 19, 2012, was not about the assailant or his activities but still was classified under the criminal frame. It was about one of the victim's son requesting the FBI for acknowledgement and tracking of all hate crimes against the Sikh community including this particular incident. The article later talks about a Q&A session where the crowd asks an FBI agent details about hate crimes and the assailant, resulting it to be classified under this category.

It can also be noted here that articles that used the criminal frame featured predominantly in national news outlets, while a majority of the articles that featured in the local news outlet *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* focused on the victims rather than the assailant. Although there have been mention of Page in many of the *Sentinel's* articles, the frame used is usually not criminal.

Political

The researcher has identified this particular frame as a frame used when a particular faith group or religious story is covered as news due to the political implications it enlists. With reference to this particular incident, articles were categorized under the political frame when, the president or other nationally recognized politicians, responded to the shooting. The news outlets ran articles about Obama's comments on the incident and speculated about his decision on gun control laws following the incident. This resulted in the identification of a new frame — the political frame.

One article, related to this incident, in *The New York Times*, on August 7, 2012, focused on leadership, the Obama administration and racism. Using the shootings as a background it discussed how “data collected by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors hate groups, shows that the number of ultra-right-wing militias and white power organizations has grown sharply since the election of President Obama in 2008.”

The political frame is especially interesting, when it is used in news reporting, the story often uses a religious backdrop, like a particular faith group or religious tenet, but ultimately addresses or describes a political issue or event as opposed to religious.

Good works

This is one of Silk's frames and is succinctly described by Kotraba as, "coverage of religious bodies conducting service projects or holding special events, along with traditional holiday pieces and profiles of "good examples" within a community of faith. It could be described as traditional "church page" news."²⁸

Although this is a very popular frame and a fairly commonly used one in religion reporting, it is not the case with the coverage of this particular incident, owing to the violent nature of the shootings. One article where we see this frame being used is in *Huffington Post*, published on August 9, 2012, where the heroic deeds of two children who alerted devotees in the temple, were described along with the bravery extended by the two police officers on the scene, who were involved in cross firing with the shooter. Acts of bravery and heroism that eventually benefit humanity or a larger cause fall under the realms of good works.

The other two articles under good works were in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. One which was published on August 12, 2012, described how worshippers returned to the temple and Sikhs from all over the country show their solidarity; they had a special prayer service and intended to start afresh after the horrific incident, "Much of the healing, will take place in the kitchen where "aunties" have returned to prepare the *langar*, fulfilling the Sikh principle of seva, or service to others," this demonstrates restoration in faith and doing good things. While the other, which was published on August 6, 2012, was about how a Sikh group pledged

²⁸ Kotraba, supra note 16

\$10,000 to the wounded officer, who put his life at risk, to protect devotees at the temple. This can be classified under good works also as it describes a good Samaritan act on the part of a community that had just been a target of horrific hate crimes.

Tolerance

This is another of Silk's established frames that is constantly used in reporting on religious issues. As the word suggests, the frame refers to religion with a "desire not to offend," and subsequently also includes the opposite of it — intolerance or a desire to offend. The existence of this frame in these stories was determined by the word choice in the selected articles and Silk's definition of the frame itself.

This frame appears in an article published in *The New York Times* on August 9, 2012, four days after the fatal incident. Syntactic and word choices in the headline that reads, "After Deadly Shooting at Sikh Temple, Neighbors Turn Out to Work for Tolerance," offers the first sign of the classification of this story under the tolerance frame. The story goes on to describe the secular support extended by various communities, irrespective of their religious backgrounds. "'To me, it's an awareness of each other,' Mr. Scaffidi said. 'People always talk about tolerance. If you don't meet people, or if you don't interact with them, you don't have a chance to make that happen.'"

Silk also explains that this frame is used in reporting court proceedings of religion-related topics or while describing clashes between religion and the

government. Tolerance, with respect to this situation, is from the American general public regardless of their religious affiliations. This frame appears in only one of the articles analyzed and although others do include some elements of tolerance in them, it is not always the predominant frame or topic of focus used by the U.S. news media.

Inclusion

This is another frame called *topoi* identified by Silk. Kotraba defines this frame simply as taking “a cultural or religious ‘other’ and folding the group into the norm. ‘Jew in America’ or ‘Muslim in America’ are examples.”²⁹ Inclusion paves way for religious pluralism and therefore stories that adopted the viewpoint that the attack on the Sikh temple was an attack on the American civil society, were categorized under this frame. All three news outlets had this frame as a part of their news package for this incident.

Quotes from the story in *The New York Times* that was published on August 10, 2012, illustrate how it fits into the inclusion frame : “No matter what country your ancestors came from, no matter where you worship, no matter what your background, as Americans, we are one,” said Mr. Walker. ‘When you attack one of us, you attack all of us.’”

Similarly, in a *Huffington Post* story published on August, 6, 2012, about Pat Robertson’s comments on the incident, he laments on how the violence is against all people of God in America, whether they are Sikh or Muslim or Southern Baptist.

²⁹ Kotraba, supra note 16

Lastly, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* August 9, 2012, article that evidently used the inclusion frame in saying, "an attack on one religion is an attack on all religions," said conference moderator Rabbi David Saperstein, who directs the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism." "Now is a time to come together to engage one another in acts of reconciliation and hospitality as we reject violence and fear," said Bishop Mark Hanson, representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America."

Mistaken Identity

This frame has been identified by the researcher and is quite specific to this particular incident. Owing to the immense media coverage related to this individual aspect, it became necessary to identify this as a separate and significant frame. Sikhism for most religion reporters in the United States, is a fairly new religion and involves terms and principles that are unheard of to them. This paves the way for an abundance of confusion and mix-ups in their reporting. Mistaken identity also encompasses the lack of knowledge about Sikh identity.

Mistaken identity, with reference to this incident, is when Sikhs were confused with Muslims. This confusion is two-pronged – one related to speculations by the media that the shooter mistook Sikhs for Muslims and the other when the media themselves were confused between Sikhs and Muslims and found the need to repeatedly clarify the differences between the two faith groups.

The *Huffington Post* in one article, published on August 6, 2012, directly addresses media confusion surrounding this fairly small faith group. The headline reads, "Wisconsin Shootings Prompt Media Confusion Over Sikh Religion," the

article further demonstrates how the media misreported and mistook the identity of the religion in totality.

The New York Times carries two articles that use the mistaken identity frame, and both stress on the fact that Sikhs were mistaken for Muslims. This is evident through the headlines of the stories — “Mourning Victims, Sikhs Lament Being Mistaken for Radicals or Militants,” published on August 6, 2012, and “If the Sikh Temple Had Been a Mosque,” published on August 10, 2012. The articles, in their body also time and again lay emphasis on the origin and history of Sikhism, “I’m just an ordinary man, just like other people, just like other Americans,” said Inder Mohan Singh, 73, who owns a Western Union location, lives in Woodbury on Long Island and has been in the United States for 40 years. “I should cut my hair? I’m wearing the turban. I have to do it. I don’t want to say, ‘No, now I’m not going to wear my turban because of this man.’”

And they move on to describe how they are often confused with Muslims, ““Hundreds of times since the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, Sikhs have been the victims of bias crimes. The perpetrators have invariably assumed that because Sikh men wear turbans and have beards they are Muslims, even specifically Taliban,” the article states.

These confusions, clarifications and misrepresentations have resulted in the emergence of a new frame – Mistaken identity.

Tribute/Event

Lastly, a frame identified as a tribute frame, which becomes common when a ghastly incident like this occurs. This also includes event-based reporting of vigils and commemorations organized in the memory of the victims who lost their lives as a result of the incident. This frame can be commonly observed alongside various stories using the conflict frame, like 9/11 or the Colorado shootings for instance. Although Silk classifies covering events under the good works frame, the nature of occurrences leading up to the event or life story of a victim creates the need for the establishment of a new frame, thus the tribute frame.

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, owing to its locality with respect to this incident, used the event aspect of this frame to cover all the vigils and visitations held to commemorate lives of the victims. *The New York Times* and *Huffington Post*, on the other hand, being national news sources, focused more on accounts of the victims given by their close relatives. The headlines clearly indicate the frame used for reporting, is one to recognize the life and times of the dead, “For Victim in Sikh Temple Shooting, a Life of Separation,” published on August 8, 2012, and “Sikh Temple Shooting Victims Described By Families And Friends,” published on August 7, 2012 respectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researcher was able to answer the research questions previously posed. They are as follows:

RQ1: What frames were used by the mainstream news media while reporting the Sikh temple shooting incident?

RQ2: Was the conflict frame among the frames used while reporting the incident?

RQ3: Which frames were dominant in the news stories that covered this incident?

These questions were answered through the findings after analyzing 30 hard news articles total from three news outlets. The articles selected excluded blog posts, editorial and op-ed columns and letters to the editor. Had these been included, the findings of this study would have, without doubt, been significantly different. The study identifies both existing frames, as established by Silk, and new frames as established by the researcher. The use of the conflict frame as the most common frame is evident through the findings of the study, but the reason for this and ways to avoid it are not addressed by this study and therefore can be a possible research opportunity in the future.

In lieu of the violent nature of the incident, some of Silk's existing frames like good works, tolerance and inclusion still proved prevalent; however, the identification of new frames, especially ones specific to this incident became necessary. For instance, the conflict, criminal and political frames are three other very popular frames used across various subjects in the media. They are widely used by almost all journalists in the country, whether the topic being covered is

science, technology, sports or even environmental reporting. The last two frames of mistaken identity and tribute are very specific to this particular instance, but have been used previously when similar horrific incidents have occurred. Mistaken identity, in today's world of religious reporting, has the potential of becoming a very commonly adopted frame because this study does not delve into describing the reasons and implications for that, this provides an opportunity for future research on this issue.

This study however, looked into how the U.S. news media covered the event, it would be an interesting opportunity for future researchers to study how the international media covered the Wisconsin Sikh temple shootings and identify what frames they used.

Comparing coverage

The researcher observed distinct differences in the coverage and frames used by the three publications analyzed. *The New York Times* and *Huffington Post* had mostly issue-based coverage, as they are national news sources, while the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* had more event-based, breaking news coverage of this particular incident, owing to its proximity of the area where the incident occurred.

Both the national news outlets had used the mistaken identity frame, while the local news outlet did not. The target audiences of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, probably already knew about the Sikh community enough and their distinct differences from Muslims, as there was a Sikh temple and a significantly large Sikh population living within their city limits. However, both the *Huffington Post* and the

New York Times needed to constantly remind their readers of the identities of the shooter and his victims, through both their coverage and content.

The *Huffington Post*, surprisingly, did not contain articles that used the political frame, as opposed to the two other outlets, where major political leaders' response to the crime were documented and made it as front-page news articles. This study, however, only takes into consideration three news sources, with all three in the print and digital media, excluding broadcast media and social media completely. Further research can be conducted on similar framing, to analyze how the incident was framed in the broadcast and social media outlets.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study provide effective insight into the way the U.S. news media report on religious stories involving a specific incident. The frames they used in their coverage are characteristic of both breaking news stories and religion-based feature stories. The development of new frames, like mistaken identity, depicts the ignorance of the U.S. news media, while reporting on sensitive yet important issues like religion. The ambiguity surrounding the reporting of this lesser known faith group and selection of one frame over another shows the lack of awareness and appalling negligence on the part of reporters and news media sources.