

# Framing jihadist terrorism in Romanian broadcasting: the case of Brussels attacks

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## Abstract

This paper analyses how Romanian TV channels Antena 3 and Digi 24 covered the 22<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks in the aftermath of the events. Relying on frame analysis, the study investigates what frames are dominant in mediatization of Brussels attacks. Based on a quantitative content analysis, the study revealed that “episodic frame” is predominant, by comparison with “thematic frame”, in media actors discourse about jihadist terrorist attacks. In order to analyze the construction of frames, we argue that Romanian TV channels use the collective memory of recent attacks to build dominant frames on the 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks. The study emphasizes the ways the two television channels build a specific field of meaning for the terrorist attacks, as a site of danger and suffering, and construct a frame of immediate threat for spectators.

## Key words

*Brussels 2016 bombing, Antena 3, Digi 24, broadcasting, media and terrorism, framing, terrorism discourse.*

## Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel wird analysiert, wie die rumänischen Fernsehsender Antena 3 und Digi 24 über die Terroranschläge in Brüssel am 22. März 2016, unmittelbar nach dem Anschlag berichtet haben.

Basierend auf der Rahmenanalyse untersucht die Studie, welche Frames bei der Medienberichterstattung über die Angriffe in Brüssel dominieren.

Basierend auf einer quantitativen Inhaltsanalyse zeigt die Studie, dass im Diskurs der Medien-Akteure über dschihadistische Terroranschläge “episodisches Frames” im Vergleich zu “thematischem Frames” vorherrscht.

Bei der Analyse der Frames argumentieren wir, dass die rumänischen Fernsehsender das kollektive Gedächtnis der jüngsten Anschläge nutzen, um die dominante Frames für die Terroranschläge in Brüssel im Jahr 2016 aufzubauen.

Die Studie hebt hervor, wie die beiden Fernsehsender ein spezifisches Bedeutungsfeld für Terroranschläge aufgebaut haben, die als Gefahren- und Leidenssituationen bezeichnet werden, und einen Frame die unmittelbare Bedrohung der Zuschauer geschaffen haben.

## Stichworte

*Bombenanschläge Brüssel 2016, Antena 3, Digi 24, Fernsehen, Medien und Terrorismus, Framing, Bericht über Terrorismus.*

## Introduction

A new kind of political violence – y kidnapping, hurting and killing civilians or by aircraft hijacking, conducted in such a way to attract media coverage – drew researchers’ attention starting with the 1970’ (Miller and Mills, 2009, Jackson, 2012). More precisely, studies on terrorism gained momentum after 1972 München Olympics, when Palestinian organisation Black September killed two and kidnapped nine Israeli athletes, in an attack that captured the attention of international media not only to the crimes, but also to the perpetrators’ political message.

Despite the fact that scholars, governments and international organizations have so far proposed over 250 definitions of terrorism, none is yet generally accepted. In this paper, we employ the term “terrorism” to define the use of violence or intimidation against civilians by a non-state actor, in order to obtain a political gain (Hoffman, 1998, Stepanova, 2006, Wilkinson, 2006, Enders and Sandler, 2012). We highlight, as a specific feature,

that terrorism is not merely a crime – it is politically motivated crime (Hofmann, 1988, Boaz, 2002, Wilkinson, 2006, Sandler, 2014). It has a salient political goal.

Building on works on modern terrorism, we refer to a new type of terrorism, motivated “predominantly by religion” (Wilkinson, 2006, Spencer, 2016) and, more specific, driven by a particular interpretation of Islam (Bergensen and Lizardo, 2004, Wiewiorka, 2007, Weimann, 2014). Jihadist terrorism – that generated the attacks mentioned in this study – is such kind of terrorism motivated by religion.

Jihadist terrorism is shaped by Islamist extremist ideology and the biased concept of “jihad” (Löckinger, 2005, Bakker, 2006). In Arabic, the word “jihad” means a fight or a quest – intended mainly for becoming a better person. But “jihad” may be also the fight against an “unjust ruler” (Bakker, 2006, p. 1). Radical and violent Islamic groups, of which Al Qaeda and ISIS are now the most known, use “jihad” to call for armed struggle “in the cause of God” (Nesser, 2011, p. 2) and urge Muslims to fight against oppression. To inflict that fight, the spiritual leaders of the terrorists, pretending they obey God’s will, took the power to label anyone they consider as “infidel” (this practice is called “takfir”) and oppressor. In Islamic religion, *takfir* can or may be followed by a command (“fatwa”) to fight against those labeled as infidels and enemies. By using *takfir*, jihadist organizations label non-combatants and civilians as being supporters of oppressors and therefore, equally accountable. As a result of labelling, a *fatwa* is emitted, transforming the innocents in targets (Wiktorowicz, 2005, p. 88). Hence, for jihadist terrorists, killing innocents could become acceptable, and every place may be a battle field. For those who promote these views, “Jihad” is intended to be a “total war” (Hoffman, 1998, p. 95) on the world stage (Lockinger, 2005, Schmid, ed, 2011, p. 173).

A distinctive feature of jihadist terrorism is that it often implies suicide: in most cases – and as intended –, the perpetrator dies together with his / her victims. That happened already in the European Union, where terrorist attacks – conducted by two of the most active jihadist organizations, Al Qaeda and ISIS, or by their affiliates –, stroke Spain (2004, 2017), France (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019), Belgium (2016), United Kingdom (2005, 2017), Germany (2016), The Netherlands (2004, 2018) or

Sweden (2017) (Bakker, 2006, EUROPOL-TESSAT, 2011-2019).

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon that requires approaches from different perspectives, and, as a consequence of that, researches on terrorism were conducted in academic fields like anthropology, sociology, psychology, political sciences or media studies and communication. A result of these studies were the widely accepted concepts, ideas and interpretations regarding terrorism and its relation with the media, which we will mention in the following.

Scholars agree that terrorism has a political dimension, and an act of terrorism has a meaning. The act of violence carries a message to public at large (Wieworka, 2007, p. 96, Dayan, 2006, p. 16, Pattwell, Mitman, Porpora, 2015, p. 1120), in order to change audience’s behaviour. Terrorism can be understood as a combination of violence and propaganda (Schmid, 2010).

There is a “symbiotic relationship” (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 147) or at least a connection between terrorism and media. While some authors reveal that terrorists depend on the media for reaching their goals (Nacos, 2006, p. 4) by frightening a public larger than the immediate victims (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 147) in a “theatre of terror” (Weimann, 2008, p. 70), others consider that media, in their struggle for audience and profit, are eager to cover conflictual, unusual, violent events that have social consequences, such as terrorist acts and, in doing so, they promote terrorism “by stressing fear” (Altheide, 2007, p. 287).

As a result, most authors share the view that contemporary terrorism - jihadist terrorism included – is “mass media oriented terrorism” (Peresin, 2007, p. 6).

Given the political dimension of terrorism and its intention to change someone’s behaviour, one must pay attention to the relations of power established between three social actors: *the terrorists* – who try to gain the power over a group of people (through an act of terror) –, *the political establishment* – which have the power to maintain the status quo (presumed legitimate), and *the mass-media* – which retain the power to represent and to propose meanings of events or other actors’ actions.

It is important to note that media discourse regarding to the phenomenon of terrorism, specifically “rhetorical biases in how terrorist acts are described by the press” may affect public perception

of terrorism (Papacharissi, 2008, p. 55). Hence, the importance of studying the mediatization of terrorism.

In Europe, jihadist terrorist attacks came again into public attention after a series of attempts, which started in 2015 with the killings at the French satirical weekly newspaper Charlie Hebdo, in Paris, went on in 2016 with bombings in Brussels and a truck driven into crowds in Nice and continued in 2017 with the attacks in Berlin, London and Barcelona. Since early 2015, jihadist terrorist attacks in Europe brought not only suffering, but more public concern about terrorist threat. Standard Eurobarometer revealed that in Autumn of 2015, 25% of the Europeans were concerned about terrorism, and few months after the Charlie Hebdo attack, in Spring 2016, 39% of EU citizens considered terrorism as “the most important issue facing the European Union” (Standard Eurobarometer 85, p. 5).

On 22 March 2016, Brussels was struck by two jihadist terrorist attacks, in which 32 people were killed and 340 injured. In the first attack, at 8 o'clock in the morning, local time, two suicide bombers detonated explosives in the check-in area of the main airport of the city, killing 11 people. The second suicide attack was carried out one hour later, in a metro station only few hundreds of meters away from the European Union Commission headquarters. According to Europol (TESAT, 2017, p. 24), the perpetrators had links with Islamic State (IS) terrorist organization.

In the context of previous terrorist events in Europe, the Brussels attacks instantly occupied the first position on media agenda of Romanian television news stations and continued to be the lead story since March the 22<sup>nd</sup> until the end of the day after.

Starting from this background, this study aims to investigate how Romanian television channels *Antena 3* and *Digi 24* framed jihadist terrorism while covering the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks.

Building on works referring to media framing of terrorism and media discourse about terrorism, conducted on the French media (Połońska-Kimunguyi and Gillespie, 2016), the United States media (Altheide, 2009, Norris, Kern and Just, 2003) or England media (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2008), this study aims to contribute to the research of terrorism mediatization from a multimodal perspective (Kress and Mavers, 2005, Kress, 2005, Jewitt, 2013, Price et alii, 2013, Van Leeuwen, 2015).

Although in Romania were published consistent researches on how media construct meanings on issues debated in the public sphere (Lazăr, 2008, Beciu, 2013, Beciu, Lazăr and Mădroane, 2018), yet studies of media discourse on terrorism did not rely on those works.

In Romanian academic literature, terrorism was approached only from the perspective of the state security, as extreme violence and crime (Simileanu, 2008, Pîslariu, 2016, Diaconu, 2016) and not as political communication.

The study addresses the following research questions: (1) what frames are dominant, in mediatization of Brussels attacks? In order to analyze the construction of frames, we consider (2) how Romanian broadcasters use the collective memory of previous attacks to build dominant frames and (3) how media combined language, image and sound to build a discourse on jihadist terrorism.

In the first part of the article, the analytical framework, we situate the research in the paradigm of constructivism and we develop the notions of framing and discourse, showing the connection between them. Since we employ the idea that a discourse is “almost always multimodal” (Van Leeuwen, 2015, p. 447), in the first part of the paper we explain the interest for analyzing how language, image and sound are combined in media discourse on terrorism.

The second part of the paper presents the research tool, the empirical area and gives details about the research design. The research tool we developed for this study allowed us to conduct a quantitative research, which led us to the revealing of dominant frames used by media actors. Furthermore, the research tool made possible a multimodal analysis of media discourse on terrorism.

The article ends with a discussion about the linguistic and visual frames which Antena 3 and Digi24 used in their discourse on terrorism.

### Theoretical framework

As media are “important signifying machines” (Carpentier et alii., 2019, p. 21), it is essential to briefly describe how the process of producing meaning through media texts occurs.

In this respect, we employ the framing theory – which emphasizes the ability of the media to shape and create the reality, by highlighting some

interpretations and ignoring others (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliverira, 2008, p. 54). In the first place, framing should be understood as a process of selection, completed by an author of a message, which result in “an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic (de Vreese, 2005, p. 53), in order “a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner” (Kuypers, 2010, p. 300). A similar view is expressed by Beciu, which considers that “the social actors communicate by selecting certain aspects that they construe depending on the specific situation they interact with” (Beciu, 2011, p. 20).

Later, in the methodology section, we will choose a working definition for framing and, consequently, an approach of the study.

We use Perloff’s (2014, p. 159) view on framing, considering frame being “at the heart of political discourse”, and, as such, we consider framing important to discourse on terrorism. From here, we introduce the notion of discourse, placed in the paradigm of a “socially constructed” reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 13) and, accordingly, in the constructionist model of communication.

By “discourse” we mean a communication act – composed of a text and other communication resources – used by its author to propose an interpretation of an event and to establish positionings or “a relational position” (Jackson, 2007, p. 396) towards events and actors. Charaudeau (2011, p. 30) considers that a discourse is always addressed to someone, with the intention of establishing or reproducing a symbolic power relationship with the interlocutor. As such, media discourse on terrorism uses language and other semiotic resources in order to construct meanings (Carpentier et alii., 2019, p. 9) and representations of terrorism, and, in the same time, establishes positionings towards audiences and political/social actors.

As Martha Crenshaw argues, the “social construction” of terrorism depends on when and where this phenomenon is constructed, being “relative [...] to historical context” (Crenshaw, 1995, p.8).

Also, this paper employs Barthes’ understanding of “anchorage” and “relay” functions of the linguistic message with regard to the iconic message (Barthes, 1977, p. 38), accepting the idea that “at the level of mass communications, it appears that the linguistic message is indeed present in every image: as title,

caption, accompanying press article, film dialogue” (Barthes, 1977, p. 38).

Since this paper investigates the media frames regarding terrorist events that belong to a intensely mediated series, as we have already explained, we have also researched how Antena 3 and Digi 24 have referred to the past attacks in order to construct a meaning for the ongoing events. As such, we employ notions like memory and collective memory.

Based on Radstone work (2005), we understand memory as “primarily an inner representation of the past” (Radstone, 2005, p. 135). In addition to that, we use Halbwachs’s view on collective memory, considering it as a reconstruction of the past “in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 40) and, in that sense, a reconstruction “under the pressure of society” (idem, p. 51). Following Erll and Rigney, we consider that in the process of reconstruction of the past, individuals and groups “reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites” and “reconfigure their relationship to the past” (Erll and Rigney, 2009, p. 2). This process of reconstruction through remembrance continue to operate as long as people reinvest sites of memory “with new meaning” (Rigney, 2005, p. 18) and use them as “a point of reference (Erll and Rigney, 2009, p. 2). From this perspective, media – which connect the individual to the world and are instruments for sense-making – are central to collective memory (Erll and Rigney, 2009).

Since the attacks already occurring in Europe have produced profound changes in security measures and in European law, being “sequences of ruptures” (Sewell, 1996, p. 871) which had the power to dislocate and rearticulate the structures (Sewell, 1996, p. 861) we can call them historical events. As European Barometer proved it, those attacks are carved into collective memory.

As such, we studied how media actors used the recent jihadist attacks in Europe as a point of reference and examined if media consequently proposed a symbolic interpretation for ongoing events.

The paper builds on theoretical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis as “a method of analysis of the television text that treats the linguistic and visual choices on the screen as subtle indicators of the power of television to mediate the world to the world” (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 84). In this respect, this study

follows the multimodal approaches and, as such, it analyzes how media actors combined moving images, photographs, on-screen text and music – understood as semiotic modes integrated into multimodal text – to produce a discourse on jihadist terrorism. We used Orgad's (2012, p. 48) understanding of *media representation*, which is “an active process of meaning production” through text, sound and images. In the contemporary society, the meanings of most messages need more than language to be revealed (Kress and Mavers, 2005, Kress, 2005, Jewitt, 2013). In fact, communication and representation gains meaning by adding, next to verbal enunciation, of different “modes”, which are sets of resources – culturally and socially modeled – used to create meanings. The “modes” include writing, static image, moving image, sound, color, speech, gestures, gaze or posture (Price et alii, 2013). An unanimously accepted perspective is that images offer (and create) meaning, through what they contain and by organizing their content. More than that, it is also considered that when it comes to evaluating a prominent figure, “televised portrayals are remarkably potent” (Grabe and Bucy, 2009, p. 5).

Also, it is gradually accredited the idea that modes, combined, support each other's meaning and confer sense (Abraham and Appiah, 2006, Fahmy și Neumann, 2011).

In conclusion, modern discourse is “almost always multimodal”, meaning that “different semiotic modes (for instance language and image) are combined and integrated in a given instance of discourse” (Van Leeuwen, 2015, p. 447) – an idea we consider valid especially in television.

### **The research design, empirical area and the research tool**

The research design relies on frames analysis in order to emphasize how media produce news frames (Iyengar, 1990, p. 22, Claes de Vreese, 2005, pp. 53-56) and visual frames (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 177-208).

Because the concept of framing has roots in multiple disciplines – such as sociology, psychology and linguistics – and has been so intensely analyzed and explained (Goffman, 1986, Entman, 1993, Scheufele, 1999, D'Angelo and Kuypers, 2010, Iyengar and Simon, 1993) we have chosen a working definition and therefore an approach.

This paper is based on the concept of framing postulated by Entman, for which *to frame* “is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Authors like Shanto Iyengar and Claes de Vreese proposed a typology of news framing. According to this typology, one can identify *issue-specific frames*, that are relevant only to specific topics or events, and *generic frames*, that go beyond thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics (de Vreese, 2005). Among generic frames, Iyengar describes *episodic frames*, which are event-oriented, and *thematic frames*, which refers to historical, social, economic context and/or antecedents (Iyengar, 1990, pp. 21-22).

In this paper we used content analysis to determine what frames are dominant: episodic or thematic frame (de Vreese, 2005, Matthes and Kohring, 2008).

The definition of framing proposed by Entman was used in searching what aspects of a perceived reality are made more salient, what definitions of terrorism and perpetrators are promoted, what causal interpretations of attacks, moral evaluations or recommendations on European security are proposed by media actors.

In order to explore the ways in which media actors represent people, events or situations, we used visual content analysis (Bell, 2008, in Van Leeuwen and Carey (eds), p 14).

Following the works of Messaris and Abraham (2001) or Fahmy and Neumann (2011), we consider visual framing “potentially more effective in communicating specific interpretation of news events” than textual framing (Fahmy și Neumann, 2011, p. 4), or being “very effective tools for (...) articulating ideological messages” (Messaris and Abraham, 2001, p. 220, apud Fahmy and Neumann, 2011, p. 4).

Consequently, in the study we elaborately analysed the image composition: the placement of elements, the relative size, colours, differences in sharpness or the way the elements of image are connected or disconnected (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p 177). Also, basing on the methods used in relevant works in the matter (Fahmy, 2004, Abraham and Appiah, 2006, Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, Grabe and Bucy, 2009, Parry, 2010) we examined the

visual representation of social actors involved in the events, in order to reveal how media described the social distance, relation and interaction between them.

We also used the classification of peace journalism frame - that promotes conflict resolution – and war journalism frame – that considers violence as a mean to resolution (Galtung, apud Fahmy and Neumann, 2011, p. 1). In this respect, following Fahmy and Neumann work (2011, p. 6), we considered that visual representations of victims and belligerents create a war journalism frame, and visual representations of demonstrators calling for peace produce a peace journalism frame.

The paper explores four newscasts from each media actor – broadcasted over a 24 hours period since the first attack. The interval covered by the study spread from the morning of 22 March to the morning of 23 March. We examined three newscasts broadcasted on March the 22nd by Antena 3 (Breaking News, started at 9:21, Journal at 12:00 and Journal at 14:00) and by Digi 24 (Breaking News, started at 9:21, Journal at 10:00 and Journal at 14:00), and the first newscast of the day from each media actor, broadcasted on March the 23rd (Journal at 6:00 in the morning). ultmodal

To start with, every newscast in the corpus was carefully transcribed. Each newscast received a short identifying name, A3-J1 to A3-J4 for the four newscasts of Antena 3, and D24-J1 to D24-J4 for Digi24's newscasts. In the second phase, for every newscast was created an addendum, containing every piece of news, its position in newscast, the duration and represented actors. The transcription was needed for searching of metaphors or expressions that could be interpreted through Entman's definition of framing. The addendum also registered the visual representation – more specific: *social distance, relation* and *interaction* – and text on screen, colours, music, audio effects and any other mode (as, for instance, the rithm of the video editing).

In the third phase, a research tool was developed. In order to do this, a matrix was created, containing categories and values added. We chose to create categories based on the need to observe what framing devices – either linguistic, visual or audio – were employed by the media in order to propose problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation (see Figure 1), since Entman's definition of framing was used for evaluating linguistic frames.

A3_J1_22-03_0921		total J1=1634									
poziția în jurnal	tip	durată	pondere	actori identificați	framing device (L)	framing device (V)	framing device (A)	problem definition lexical	visual	audio	causal interpretation lexical
1	știre	103	6.30	victime	Nadina Cimpean: "se pune întrebarea dacă sunt 2 bombe și DACĂ DIN NOU discutăm despre un atac terorist"	NU	/ prezentator	DACĂ DIN NOU discutăm despre un atac terorist	NU	/ prezentator	
			0.00		N Cimpean: "să nu uităm că Belgia - țară cu alertă de nivel ridicat"						
					Să nu uităm că Belgia este una dintre țările în care alerta este la nivel ridicat. Să nu uităm că DUPĂ [accentuează cu vocea] atentatele din Paris s-a ajuns la concluzia că ele au fost puse la cale tocmai din Belgia, iar în bx au fost acele raiduri, iar ultimul supraviețuitor al atentatelor de la Paris a fost capturat doar acum câteva zile în Bruxelles.	NU	DUPĂ [accentuează cu vocea] atentatele	Belgia este una dintre țările în care alerta este la nivel ridicat	"Două explozii au avut loc pe aeroportul din Bruxelles"		
2	interviu	144	8.81	martori	Rednic: s-a auzit bomba, a urmat încă una				BREAKING NEWS		

Figure 1. Research instrument developed (excerpt)

Then, a frame analysis was conducted.

The first step was the identification of framing devices, meaning the specific linguistic structures such as metaphors, visual icons, and catchphrases that communicate frames (Reese, 2010, in D'Angelo and Kuypers eds, p. 19). Because "reproducing a statement, regardless of who said it, is the result of a choice made by the respective journalist" (Van Gorp, 2005, p. 494), in the selection of metaphors

or expressions indicating framing we included catchphrases of guests invited in the television live debate or soundbites of interviewees appearing in the television news.

The second step was to examine latent aspects of the text, such as reasoning devices as well as specific keywords that constitute the concepts underlying frames. These two steps were critical in establishing what frames (thematic or episodic) are

dominant, or to discover war or peace frames.

Following the work of Iyengar (1990, pp. 21-22), we investigated framing devices employed for episodic frame, which is event-oriented. Consequently, we searched for expression(s) and/or visuals and/or sound that explain what happened, who did it, where, when and how.

In order to find thematic frame, which refers to historical, social or economic context, we looked for catchphrases that created a link to terrorist events (“we remember...[another attack]”), expressions that remembered assault sites (“after attacks in Paris”) or mentioned antecedents (“Belgium is a refuge for islamist terrorists”).

A quantitative content analysis revealed to what extent *the thematic* or *the episodic frames* are dominant.

In order to achieve that, first we identified, in each journal, the news (or any other meaningful matter, like comments) that used thematic or episodic frames, and noted how many seconds lasted each of them. After that we made the sum of those times, and it resulted how many seconds thematic or episodic

frames were used in the newscasts, allowing us to calculate the percentages of thematic or episodic frames in the journal, meaning the dominance.

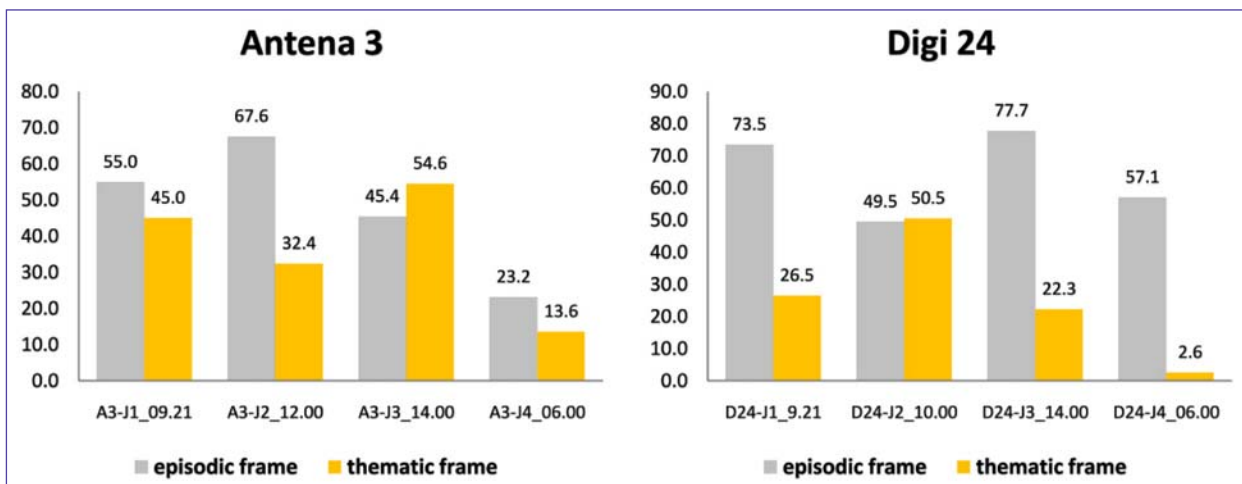
For the first three Journals of both media actors, covering nothing but the attacks, the sum of percentages, episodic added to thematic, is 100%. The fourth Journal (A3-J4 and D24-J4), broadcasted 24 hours after the attacks, contained other topics, hence the sum of percentages is below 100%.

The multimodal approach was used during the research. A first result of that was the revealing of dedicated video “teases” – in which text, images from the terrorist attacks scenes and music were combined in a discourse on jihadist terrorism.

## Findings

One of the peculiarities of Antena 3 and Digi 24 discourse concerning terrorist attacks was the predominant use of episodic frames.

Calculated as percentage in the newscasts, episodic frames exceeded thematic frames in all newscasts but one (A3-J3, D24-J2) (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Episodic and thematic frame (percentage calculated as seconds in total seconds of Journal)

One can notice that there are important differences between the two tv channels, as episodic frames were used by Digi 24 in higher percentages (with a maximum of almost 77.7% in D24-J3, comparing to a maximum of 67.6% in A3-J2), and thematic frames were employed by Antena 3 in greater percentages (with a maximum of over 54% in A3-J3, as against less than 51% in D24-J2). Since we code as “thematic frame” a package referring to context and historical antecedents, this finding means that Antena 3 spent more time explaining the connections between current and past events or referring to the social or cultural

situation in Europe, comparing to Digi 24.

Examples of linguistic devices used in construction of thematic frames are the references to the social and political situation of Muslim community in Europe, like: “400 millions Muslims in Europe”, “fundamentalists in Brussels” (in A3-J3), “important Muslim community in Brussels”, “frustrated people”, “terrorists raised in Brussels neighbourhoods” (in D24-J2).

Another finding is that “war” frame, constructed using linguistic and visual devices, dominated media discourse in both tv news channels.

Media actors used specific linguistic structures, or catchphrases that communicate war frame, like: “we are at war”, “we sent army forces”, “military vehicles on the street”, “soldiers passed by”, “battle bastion”, “every european citizen is at global war”, “the Third World War”. In the first three newscasts, both TV stations built a “war frame”, by broadcasting images with military personnel and automatic rifles. Instead, “peace frame” was built many hours after attacks, and was present in the 4th journal of Antena 3 and Digi 24. Specific enunciations, publicly displayed by people in the streets, like “we are sorry for Bruxelles”, “people prayed”, “I am Brussels”, completed with visual devices as images with children in a refugee camp and with flowers and candles at a peaceful gathering in Brussels (see Annex 1), were employed to build peace frame.

In the construction of dominant frames, Romanian broadcasters activated collective memory through phrases like “let me recall the series of attacks starting with Madrid, 2004, London, 2005, in France, 2015...”, “after Paris attacks”, “the state of emergency in France... [after attacks]”, “remember Paris, last year”, connecting present with the past. Moreover, media actors proposed a reasoning through enunciations like “these attacks are linked with the capturing of their leader” which is “Abdeslam... responsible for Paris attacks”.

Even from the Breaking News, meaning the first live newscasts dedicated to the events, both media actors started the processes of remembering, reasoning and connecting the present and past events. From the first moments when they began to report about attacks, Antena 3 and Digi 24 put the events in context and connected, through visuals, Brussels in 2016 with Brussels as it was in November 2015, when a terrorist alert was in place. Also, images with 2015 Paris attacks were shown, and pictures containing the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, accused of terrorism, were displayed.

The research revealed that from the very beginning, in the Breaking News (A3-J1 and D24-J1), Antena 3 and Digi 24 assumed a (jihadist) terrorist organization is responsible for bombings, before any security structure from Belgium or Romania labeled the explosions as “terrorist attacks”.

Linguistic devices used to *define the problem* were terms or phrases like “jihadists”, “ISIS is worse than Al Qaeda”, “a pattern: to kill many innocents”, “an attack in the heart of Europe”, “it stroke the heart of

democracy”, “these attacks are a 9-11 in the heart of Europe”, “we are at war”, “battle of life and death, security and terrorism”, “a victory of islamic fundamentalism over democracy”. Media actors interpret *the cause* of the attacks using linguistic devices like “Brussels is a terrorist farm”, “frustrated muslims”, “Belgium authorities did not act properly over time”, “Europe could not adapt”, “the national and European institutions could not manage the issue”. *Moral evaluation* was expressed through phrases like “fundamental values are at stake”, “nothing can justify the killing of innocents”, “in what kind of God do you believe in [to justify a murder]?”. Finally, for *treatment recommendation*, Antena 3 and Digi 24 employed linguistic devices such as “*destroy* (ISIS)”, “*tighten the security* (in Schengen)”, “*control* (the EU borders)”, “a solution for *push the refugees back*”, “Belgium authorities to *control muslim fundamentalists*”, “*better collaboration*”, “*not to be dominated by fear*”.

Analysis of the visual representation revealed that media actors, while generally represented the victims at a personal distance to the viewers, depicted terrorists at a public distance. A special disclaimer should be presented here: in cases like these, it is almost impossible for a media actor to be right on the spot, from the beginning, and to get images in its own style. So, Antena 3 and Digi 24 used other professionals’ or even amateurs’ footage or pictures. Yet, 24 hours later, Digi 24 and Antena 3 had their own transmission from the site. The following observations and considerations took into account what a viewer could see on tv screen, regardless of the source of footage.

Since “the choice of distance can suggest different relations between represented participants and viewers” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 124), we noticed that victims or public were considered at a personal, even intimate social distance with the viewers, as Antena 3 and Digi 24 choose medium shots, close ups or even extreme close ups to depict the participants. The victims - people laying injured or dead – were not in interaction with the viewer, meaning they not look at camera: they did not “demand” sympathy or action directly, they just “offer” the facts: there is blood all over the place. The victims are somehow detached, as their bodies are angled away from the plane of the viewer. Whenever it was possible, media actors depicted the victims, the public or the rescuers at the horizontal



angle, meaning “equality”. In such a way, the victims are not minimized and the viewer an not “above” the situation.

On the other side, the terrorists were depicted using the only accessible image, provided by an airport surveillance camera. The angle of camera and the size of the perpetrators in the frame meant that the terrorists are at a public distance, and the viewer is more powerful than the terrorists. Yet, as we’ve already mentioned, this is not a choice per se, but merely the result of lack of pictures.

The research also showed that both media actors constructed special visual teases as a brief description (an “abstract”) of event. By using dramatic music and video editing techniques, the two studied television channels created teases like action film ones. In the time span researched, Antena 3 broadcasted two such special teases, and Digi 24 – five. Each special tease was different than the other. The second tease of Antena 3 was more dramatic than the first one, and

lasted for 49 seconds, 20 seconds longer than the previous one. All five teases from Digi 24 were different, and, comparing to those of Antena 3’s, were edited using only photos (not moving pictures). Each tease contained a textual reference to the attacks: “Terror in the capital of Europe” (Antena 3), or “Terrorist attacks in Brussels” (Digi 24).

Colours of the moving pictures, along with sound and editing pace, contributed to the meaning proposed by media actors. Antena 3 chose to use rather desaturate pictures or did not colour-correct any images, suggesting a foggy, dusty and bleak site of tragedy. Digi 24 followed their own style and corporate identity colours (mainly blue), resulting in a more restraint and temperate tease, with insertions of European Union symbols (flag, yellow stars) (see Figure 3). In this respect, the techniques of visual editing used in special teases constitutes one of the practices through which media trigger off spectators’ emotions.



Figure 3. special video teases captures – Antena 3 (up) and Digi 24 (down)

## Conclusions and discussion

In a constructionist paradigm, a social actor relay on its experiences and on moral values of the surrounding society to interpret an event that seems to be one in a series. Journalists, using frames as “interpretive packages” (D’Angelo, 2002, p. 877), propose their discourse on terrorism.

In this paper, we have researched how Antena 3 and Digi 24 Romanian Tv channels covered terrorist attacks in Brussels, and especially, how media actors framed those events. In conducting the study, we used the framing concept formulated by Entman and the typology of frames proposed by Iyengar and de Vreese.

Using quantitative content analysis, the study revealed that Antena 3 and Digi 24 had focused on events, rather than historical, social and economic contexts, meaning that “episodic frame” was predominant, comparing to “thematic frame”, in media actors discourse about jihadist terrorist attacks.

Another significant finding is that “war” frame, constructed using either linguistic devices or visual devices, is more noticeable than any other frame that Antena 3 and Digi 24 used in their discourse on terrorism.

Furthermore, the paper revealed that both media actors described the differences in fundamental values between terrorists (“they”) and Europeans (“we”). In the media actors discourse, “we” (the victims, the Europeans) love life, liberty and human rights, and “they” (the terrorists, the jihadists) do not. As such, treatment recommendation is based on a war frame: “We” must keep “them” away.

This distinction between “us” and “them” is also noticeable at visual level. The examination of visual representation revealed that media actors generally depicted the victims at a personal distance, signifying that the victims could be close acquaintances to the viewers: they would share not only citizenship, but core values. On the opposite, since they were depicted at a public distance, terrorists were represented as aliens. Their core values do not belong to the European Union political space.

Answering the second research question, the paper revealed that media actors had used collective memory and, recalling previous attacks, they put the event in social, political, historical even economic context. For instance, media actors referred to the

social and political situation of Muslim community in Europe.

Both media actors referred to the event as a “terrorist attack” a few hours before any request from a terrorist organization and assumed that the perpetrators were jihadist terrorists. “There is no doubt: it is a terrorist attack”, journalists said in the first moments of the events were broadcasted, and, few hours later: “ISIS claimed responsibility – we expected that”. We cannot prove with this research that media actors use “context” – meaning, the rise of ISIS/ISIL in Irak and Syria, the emergence of jihadist cells in Europe and previous deadly events in France – to jump to the early conclusion of a terrorist attack, hours before any official statement on the subject. The process that lead the media actors to labeling an event as a terrorist attack in the matter of minutes since its occurrence is still to be researched. In this respect, an structured interview with journalists should be conducted in the future to reveal the construction of news discourse.

Also, the paper showed that Antena 3 and Digi 24 had constructed a frame of immediate threat for the audience, by combining words, images or sounds. The multimodal construction of this specific frame relies on specific visual practices such as the special video teases, which concentrated media’s message and accentuated drama through music and video editing techniques.

The results of this study are on the line with other works which analysed terrorism discourse of European or international media actors (Gerhards and Schäfer, 2015, Połonska-Kimunguyi and Gillespie, 2016). For instance, in the immediate coverage of Charlie Hebdo attack, the French tv channel France 24 “defined the act as a ‘terrorist attack’ on the day of its occurrence, before the act was established by investigators as terrorism or any arrest or formal action was undertaken by the authorities” (Polonska-Kimunguyi and Gillespie, 2016, p. 573). Similarly, this study showed that Antena 3 and Digi24 labeled the event as a “terrorist attack” and the perpetrators as “jihadist terrorists” from the very first minutes of the coverage of Brussels attack.

In addition to this work, we could investigate in the future if and how the Romanian media discourse on terrorism changed since January 2015 (Charlie Hebdo attacks), or if and how Romanian media actors used striking visuals in their multimodal construction of discourse, over time.

ANNEX 1

War frame vs Peace frame  
visual devices

war frame, A3-J1



war frame, D24-J4



peace frame, D24-J4



peace frame, A3-J4



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