Exploring the Nature of Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian Press

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Abstract
National press is considered as integral institution in articulation, propagation, and dissemination of the national agenda. The press helps general public in interpreting news stories. This article is set to explore the nature of representation of Islam and Muslims in the editorials of the Australian newspapers during January 01, 2016, to March 31, 2017. This study has employed van Dijk’s ideological square and lexicalization approaches within the critical discourse analysis paradigm to examine editorials from two leading Australian newspapers. The findings showed that both the newspapers The Age and The Australian produced entirely opposite discourses in their editorials regarding Islam and Muslims. The findings have demonstrated that The Age portrayed Islam and Muslims positively and favorably while The Australian constructed Islam and Muslims in a critical and negative way. In the editorial contents of The Age, predominant themes regarding Islam and Muslims were “victimization,” “understanding,” “multiculturalism,” “solidarity,” “cohesion,” and “harmony.” On the contrary, predominant discourse in the editorial contents of The Australian were “securitization,” “Othering,” “violence,” “categorization,” and “stereotyping.”

Keywords
Islam, Muslims, representation, critical discourse analysis, ideological square, lexicalization

Introduction
The study at hand is set to examine Australian media for representation of Muslims because of the fact that Australia is a migrant-friendly country (Alharbi, 2017) and Muslim communities have been offered all the available facilities and benefits for years without any discrimination. Muslims community in Australia is as diverse as in many other countries. According to a media release on June 27, 2017, regarding census 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) revealed that Islam has become the second largest religion in Australia making up 2.6% of the population after Christianity (52%) and took over Buddhism (2.4%).

Recent statistics show that the Muslim population in Australia has increased to over 604,000 (2.6%), a 77% rise in the last decade from 300,000 in 2006 (2%) (Tolj, 2017). They have descended from more than 120 countries around the world, mainly from Lebanon and Turkey. A sizable Muslim population is from Asian countries such as Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. They have descended from some Arab countries and also from America and Europe. Converts are a very small population in Australia. Muslims migrate to Australia for variety of reasons including family joining, to seek shelter from war and conflict in their home countries, employment, and advancement (Issues Deliberation Australia, 2007a).

Muslim community in Australia has been enjoying religious freedom by practicing their religion and by having their own schools and association for long. But recently, especially since 9/11, 7/7, Bali attacks, Madrid bombings, Brussels shootings, and so on, many studies have proved that Muslim communities have taken a negative place in media representations and that they have become vulnerable to racial attacks, discrimination, harassment, and prejudice (Akbarzadeh and Smith, 2005; Alharbi, 2017; Munro, 2006; Quayle & Sonn, 2009; Rane, 2000, 2008; Safi & Evershed, 2015; Susskind, 2002; Yasmeen, 2007).

Hence, this study attempts to map out recent trends in the representation of Muslims in two Australian newspapers The Age and The Australian during January 01, 2016, to March 31, 2017. Both the newspapers have distinctions in the Australian press that serve the purpose of the study.
The Australian Media—The Age and The Australian

The Age. The Age is a daily national newspaper in compact format being published from Melbourne, Australia. The newspaper is owned by Fairfax Media and is being published since 1854. The Age (being sixth in the list of highly published newspapers in the country) has a maximum circulation of 115,256 copies on weekends and an average 83,229 on weekdays (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2017). The Age is one of the leading metropolitan daily newspapers based in Melbourne which provides breaking local, world, and business news along with comprehensive and accurate reporting and insightful analysis on the issues of the day from within Australia and around the world (The Age, 2017).

The Age is considered as a left-leaning or as a center-left newspaper which supports the left-wing politicians and political parties (Ramirez, 2016; Reimers, 2016). The newspaper is owned by Fairfax Media, one of the largest public companies and media conglomerates in Australia, which criticizes the far-rights for conservative and anti-immigration policies. The newspaper supports the Labor Party and the Greens for their social democratic, leftist, progressive, and liberal stance. The left wing in Australia favors multiculturalism and supports migration in Australia, and The Age highlights their stance.

The Australian. The Australian is a daily national newspaper in broadsheet format being published from Sydney, Australia, and available throughout Australia. The newspaper is owned by News Corporation (also known as News Corp or News Limited) and is being published since 1964. The Australian (being the biggest selling national newspapers in the country) has a maximum circulation of 219,242 copies on weekends and an average 94,448 on weekdays (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2017). The Australian has weekend readership of 952,000, and on weekdays almost 441,000 people read this newspaper daily. The Australian is one of the leading national dailies in the country having journalists, photographers, and one permanent bureau in every state and territory capital. Overseas, The Australian has its correspondents in 10 major cities around the world including Bangkok, Beijing, Honiara, Jakarta, London, Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo, Washington, and Wellington (The Australian, 2017).

The Australian is considered as a rightist or as a decisively right-wing newspaper, which supports the Liberal–National Coalition over the Greens and Labor politicians and political parties (Neagle, 2016; Ramirez, 2016; Reimers, 2016). The newspaper is owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp, the largest media conglomerate that owns majority of the media in Australia, which is a news organization criticized widely for its conservative agenda and for its alignment with the United States’s Republican Party (Elund, 2007). The newspaper supports the Liberal Party for its nationalist and anti-immigration policies and criticizes the leftists and the Greens for their liberal and pro-immigration stance. The right wing in Australia favors the anti-immigration position, and The Australian highlights and advocates its stance.

This study considers The Age and The Australian as representative sample of the “Australian media” for the desired objectives. These newspapers are selected because both of them are very candid, outspoken, and clear in their ideological lines whereby the former represents the left-wing political ideology and the latter one advocates the right-wing explicitly. Both the newspapers are highly reputed in their respective categories and readership. The Age, on one hand, is the most read and circulated left-leaning newspaper and The Australian, on the other hand, is the largest circulated and the most read newspaper in Australia. Both the newspapers have been selected, in this study, to explore the nature of representation of Islam and Muslims during selected period of time.

Literature Review

Mass media have played a key part in the production, reproduction, and distribution of ideologies and cultural knowledge (Gitlin, 1980; Hall, 1990; Poole, 2002). News media perform a central function in producing and then upholding a particular discourse that affects our daily life and creates an environment where we make our perceptions about ourselves and the world around us. Therefore, the mass media reflect, manifest, and corroborate (Creutz-Kämppi, 2008) different contending political and societal discourses, which have impact on the meaning construction and the evolution of the society as a whole.

A discourse is a set of successive statements that offers a language to situate a specific form of knowledge about a topic (Hall, 1992). Within a particular discourse when statements are made about a specific theme, the discourse helps to construct the theme in a specific way limiting any other possible ways to construct it. A discourse is not a static entity, rather, in interaction with other discourses, produces webs of meaning (Hall, 1992a).

Many scholars believe that among the many sources of information that contribute to distort the image of Islam and Muslims in Westerners’ minds, the media is the most influential one. This phenomenon of prejudiced, negative, and biased representation and propaganda against Islam and Muslims by Western media is not a new one. Many studies in the field of media and political discourse have determined that Western Media, at large, portray Islam and Muslims in an unfavorable, stereotypical, and discriminatory way. The image of Islam and Muslims as negative “Other” is a strong attribution of Western media portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Tone of the media allegations on Islam and Muslims varies “from a simple suspicion to an explicit accusation” (Alghamdi, 2015).
A plethora of scholarly and pedagogic work examining the representation of ethnicity and race in the Western media has drawn our attention to the depiction of inferior “Other” by the superior “Westerners” (Hall, 1997; Poole, 2002; Poole & Richardson, 2006). The “Other” is a central concept in Edward Said’s (1978/2003) Orientalism wherein it is described as people living in the East and constructed as exotic and opposite to the Occident and “progressive” Western world. The “Other” is represented from the “Western” standpoint by freezing the “Other” in time to create reasons for the West to control and/or fear the Rest (Said, 1978/2003, also cited in Roy, 2009). However, the concept of “Other” has been used by many other academics in different fields such as philosophy, feminism, and cultural studies (Wadumestri, 2010).

Nahid Kabir (2005) in her book titled Muslims in Australia: Immigration, Race Relations and Cultural History tried to find out answer to the question that whether Muslims faced any discrimination in Australia due to their religion. She found out that historically Muslims and other racial and religious minorities did not face discrimination on the basis of race and religion but on the basis of national interest and security. The minorities faced such discriminations as they were perceived as threat to national identity and security during colonial and “White Australia” periods. Such threats included job saturation, lower living standards, contamination of Australian lifestyle with bad habits, disease, and potential rebellion in future. During the period of multiculturalism in 1970s and 1980s, Muslims from different ethnic backgrounds settled in Australia. This was the time when they started experiencing discrimination at their workplace because of their religion.

A survey report, published in The Guardian by Michael Safi and Nick Evershed (2015), revealed that a clear majority of the Muslims in Australia believed that anti-terror laws passed by the Australian government unfairly targeted Muslims. The three quarters of the Muslims who were surveyed said that the terrorist groups distorted the image and meaning of Islam. The study revealed that the Muslims in Australia had to change their dressing, outlook, worship place, and the route to work place to avoid any scrutiny by police following the counterterrorism laws enforced by the government. Majority of the Muslims believed that the Australian media treated them unfairly and that they felt under siege by the police (Safi & Evershed, 2015).

Elisabeth Poole (2002) analyzing the strategies for representing Muslims by the U.K. press during pre and post 9/11 era claims that the Muslims are being excluded from the European identity and culture, and they are denied the citizenship and equality. European Muslims and their lifestyle are represented as inferior, “partial, incomplete, and belated as compared to the European modernity.” European Muslims are portrayed as threatening, “so different,” and associated with religious and political intolerance, and as having allegiance with external religious and political centers. She points out that the British press represents Muslims as a security threat, and as a cultural threat provoking problems in interpersonal relations (Poole, 2002). She further argues that such representations have conflated Islam and Muslims with an extremist minority and have refused to translate between “us” and “them” to understand other’s point of view before judging them. She concluded that there is a clear evidence that the U.K. press reproduced anti-Muslim racism prior to 9/11 era. An Islamification discourse is clearly evident in the U.K. press’s representation of Muslims (Poole, 2002, in Mertens & Smaele, 2016).

Poole (2016) identifies three prominent elements or strategies in the U.K. press coverage of Islam and Muslims: categorization, decontextualization, and the process of othering. She maintains that findings have revealed that the U.K. press most frequently categorized Islam and Muslims as terror, extremism, militancy, extremist, terrorist, terrorist, suicide bomber, Islamist, and militant. In terms of decontextualization, she explains that the U.K. press reporting clearly linked the acts of terrorism to Islamic belief without providing any political or historical contexts. The Muslimness of the perpetrators has been emphasized, and belief has been perceived as the motivating element behind the violent behavior. She further adds that the U.K. press reporting linked terrorism and violence to the “extreme religious and murderous ideology” (p. 29) and “Othered” it by locating it outside the United Kingdom and by individualizing the perpetrators from the broader Muslim community in the United Kingdom (Poole, 2016, in Mertens & Smaele, 2016, p. 29).

The reviewed literature suggests that the nature of the representation of Islam and Muslims in international media is problematic. There are different trends regarding Islam and Muslims in their coverage by the media which include stereotyping, categorization, collectivism, decontextualization, othering, violence, conflict, and securitization, so it is worth studying how Islam and Muslims are being portrayed and represented in the Australian press during the period under study, that is, January 01, 2016, to March 31, 2017.

Method

Data Collection and Sampling

Data were collected from a reliable source “LexisNexis” using “Islam” and “Muslims” as key terms during a time period January 1, 2016, to March 31, 2018. The search results produced 575 items within The Age contents that contained the terms “Islam” and/or “Muslim” in them. On the other hand, there were 2,305 items within The Australian contents that contained terms “Islam” and/or “Muslim” in them. These items consist of all kind of news items, columns, articles, and editorials. Employing “Census Sampling” technique, that is, going through every single item in the collected data, 24 editorials (OPINION; Leaders) were selected from The Age and 173 editorials (COMMENTARY) were selected from The Australian.
In the next step of sampling, the researcher followed “data cleansing” procedure to select extremely relevant editorials from the selected editorials. After careful reading of all 24 editorials selected from The Age, 11 editorials were cleaned out that were relevant to the study and those which contained terms “Islam” and/or “Muslim” more than once in them. In the same way, reading out all 173 editorials from The Australian, 93 editorials were found relevant that served the purpose. The 13 editorials were left out from The Age and 80 from The Australian because they mentioned “Islam” and/or “Muslim” out of the context or they used the terms in continuation of discussing other religions and ethnicities. For instance, in an editorial, the term “Muslim” was used in the comment on Mr. Trump’s presidential speech regarding his policies toward Mexican people, China, Iran, and Muslims.

So, after “Census sampling” and “data cleansing,” 11 editorials were selected as sample from The Age. However, to select desired and equal number of editorials as sample from The Australian, the researcher employed “Systematic sampling.” Using the Kth selection technique, \( k = N/n \) (where \( k \) is the ratio of sampling frame \( N \) and desired sample size \( n \)) (Bhattacharjee, 2012), all the “sample frame,” that is, 93 editorials, were arranged according to date and were divided by the “desired sample size” as 93 / 11, and every eighth editorial was selected as sample. So, picking every eighth editorial the desired sample size of 11 editorials was selected from The Australian.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

CDA helps to investigate issues related to power, ideology, and domination, particularly in text and generally in speech. This theoretical approach is informed by numerous philosophical propositions (Matu & Lubbe, 2007). According to CDA, the journalists’ ideologies cannot be apparent always but hidden in implicit use of linguistic forms which can only be unpacked and understood by examining the linguistic structures “critically” (Kuo & Nakamura, 2005, p. 395). So, the CDA provides means to explore how language operates in a particular society and emphasizes the “critical” reading of the text instead of accepting the “reality” as it is presented (Shojaei et al., 2013, p. 860).

There are various approaches and offshoots of CDA as developed by the major proponents based on different theoretical aspects, such as Ron Scollon who described CDA from microsociological perspectives, while Siegfried Jager, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak developed their stances from the theories on society and power closely premised in Faucauldian school of thought (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This study, however, is based on the paradigm of social cognitive perspective as developed and advocated by Teun A. van Dijk (1993, 1995b, 2000a). This approach assumes that power is exercised by manipulating and influencing the minds. In other words, dominance and discourses have a direct social cognitive connection which deems it imperative to critically analyze the (re)production of texts and also the way they are perceived and interpreted (van Dijk, 1993).

The “Ideological Square,” as proposed by van Dijk (1998b), is a theoretical and methodological approach that incorporates positive in-group and negative out-group strategies. Both these strategies of taking binary positions are manifested through lexical choices and various other linguistic facets in a discourse (van Dijk, 1998b, also cited in Shojaei et al., 2013). Van Dijk argues that many group ideologies seem to be polarized in representing Self and Other, that is, Us and Them, in terms of “We are good and They are bad” (Shojaei et al., 2013). The “ideological square” operates to present a polarized image of in-group and out-group by portraying “Us” in a favorable way and “them” in an unfavorable way (Kuo & Nakamura, 2005).

The “Ideological Square” is a theoretical model that emphasizes on examining media texts to determine ideological strategies that ascertain eminent descriptions of different social groups (Philo, 2007). According to van Dijk (2004), there are hundreds of analytical strategies within the “ideological square.” Lexicalization and Polarization (us-them Categorization) are two of them. Lexicalization belongs to the “style” and Polarization belongs to the “meaning” domain of discourse analysis.

The “ideological polarization” is manifested in a discourse through various forms such as in terms of “Lexical Choices” wherein positive and negative evaluations are employed (Shojaei et al., 2013, p. 859). The strategy of employing binary opposition in a discourse is manifested through “Lexical items” to portray in-group (us/Self) positively and out-group (them/Other) negatively. The strategy is one of many categories of “ideological square” analysis and is called as “Lexicalization.”

So, considering the relevance and appropriate nature of the “Ideological Square” and “Lexicalization,” this study has employed these two approaches within the premises of CDA paradigm to analyze the editorial contents of The Age and The Australian to determine the nature of Muslims’ representation during January 01, 2016, to March 31, 2017.

In this study, editorials from two prominent newspapers from Australia have been analyzed using Ideological Square and Lexicalization within the CDA paradigm. The procedure of data analysis includes the analysis of headlines and the whole text of the editorials. Using ideological square and lexicalization, the interpretation and analysis of the data have been described. Prominent text including; verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and sentences have been pointed out using the lenses of ideological square and lexicalization.

**Nature of Representation of Muslims in the Australian Press**

Using “Lexicalization” and “Ideological Square” as tools to analyze the editorial contents of The Age, the researcher has found that out of total 11 selected editorials seven contained
positive, supportive, and favorable themes regarding Islam and Muslims. Three out of 11 editorials contained neutral, balanced, or mixed contents while reporting issues related to Islam and Muslims. Only one editorial out of total 11 contained negative, critical, or opposing themes regarding Islam and Muslims. In the “negative” categorized editorial, The Age criticized the “mobocracy” in Indonesia while reporting on the “extraordinary trial” against a “Christian governor” for “insulting Islam.” The newspaper used negative words, verbs, and phrases to report the issue such as the following:

...worrisome signal, unscrupulous politicians, hardline Muslim, conservative enclaves, deliberately fomenting, religious extremists, violent radicalization, persecution of minority sects, threat of terrorism, mobocracy ... (The Age, Dec 18, 2016)

Use of such words, verbs, and phrases by the newspaper produced negative themes regarding Islam and Muslims.

In another editorial, titled “PM’s Cowardly Stance on Trump Shames Us All,” published on January 31, 2017, the newspaper used the term “Islamist terrorism” while criticizing Mr. Trump for his policies against Muslims. This is first of the only two instances in the whole analyzed sample from The Age wherein this term has been used.

The editorials categorized as “Neutral/Balanced” contained following prominent themes/terminologies regarding Islam and Muslims.

The editorial, titled “Syrian Conflict a Damned Dilemma,” published on September 22, 2016, has been categorized as “Neutral/Balanced” because The Age used mixed (both supportive and critical) themes/terminologies to report and opine on the issue. The “Positive/Favorable” themes are botched air strike, grievous errors, regrettable, and extra- dinary refugee crisis. The “Negative/Critical” themes are as follows: Islamic State fighters, atrocities, and chief perpetrator.

The second editorial marked as “Neutral/Balanced” was published on July 11, 2016, with the title “Western Voices Must Swell as IS Grip Slips.” The newspaper used following “Positive/Favorable” themes for Islam and Muslims: slaughter of civilians, vulnerable targets, Muslim holy month, bloodiest event, worst single atrocity, invasion, biggest victims, and victims. And the themes that contained a negative image of Islam and Muslims are as follows: Islamist terror; Islamist terrorism, violence, security theatre, and escalating Saudi-Iran rivalry.

This is the second and last instance in the whole analyzed editorial contents wherein the newspaper used the term “Islamist terrorism.”

The last editorial among the three categorized as “Neutral/Balanced” was published on March 24, 2016, with the title “Combat Evil With Courage and Solidarity.” The newspaper used following themes/terms to give a balanced opinion regarding the issue:

...terrorists, wreaked havoc, outrage against humanity, murderous militants, the militants’ barren claims, terrorist bombings, devastating civil war, terrorists, dreadful terrorism, ISIS; it is not a humanitarian organization ... an organization that is prepared to murder men, women and children—innocent people, of all races, all colors, all creeds and all nationalities, act collectively and resolutely, terrorists, not to trample, unnecessarily curb, civil liberties ... (The Age, March 24, 2016)

Such words, verbs, labels, and phrases used by the newspaper produced balanced themes regarding Islam and Muslims.

The editorials categorized as “Positive/Favorable” contained following prominent themes/terminologies regarding Islam and Muslims.

The first editorial among seven categorized as “Positive/Favorable” is “Australia Must Condemn Atrocities in Myanmar” wherein The Age (March 16, 2017) gave a favorable and supportive coverage to Rohingya Muslims using themes and terminologies such as the following:

...ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, military crackdown, halt the violence, shocking cases, awful instance, Persecution, denied basic rights, blatant abuses, deeply concerned, atrocities, crackdown, military junta, appalling acts of oppression, brazen attempt, intimidation, the plight, military abuses, atrocities committed against the Rohingyas . . .

The newspaper used such words, verbs, labels, and phrases to produce favorable and supportive themes while covering Islam and Muslims in its editorials.

The editorial, titled “PM’s Cowardly Stance on Trump Shames Us All,” published on January 31, 2017, contained following themes and terminologies that favored Islam and Muslims: deluded belief, blatant and pathetic anti-Muslim move, targeted Muslims, bombastic campaign, and ridiculous ban.

In the editorial, titled “Restraint Is Right Call After Bank Tragedy,” published on November 22, 2016, The Age used following themes and terminologies that favored Islam and Muslims: asylum seeker, Australia’s hardline policy, the right note, and to flirt with prejudice.

The editorial, titled “US Refugee Deal Could Quickly Come Unstuck,” published on November 17, 2016, contained following themes and terminologies that favored Muslims: needless misery, inflicting, policy of offshore processing, base appeal to prejudice, flied, languished too long, rights of these people, harsh treatment, and punishing the weak.

In the editorial, titled “One Nation Should Be Heard—and Rebutted,” published on July 6, 2016, The Age used following themes and terminologies that favored Muslims: barring Muslims, fanning fears of terrorism, attacked Asians, railing against Asians, swamped by Asians, refugees, shameful dog-whistling, demonization, asylum, and innocent individuals.
The editorial, titled “Real Voices That Must Be Heard,” published on April 21, 2016, contained following themes and terminologies that favored Muslims:

. . . their stories, their lives, their fears, neighbours, friends, colleagues, marginalization, disaffection, overarching message, peace, violence, conflict, practical difficulties, ideological prejudice, outrageous slurs, ignorance, passionate, Marginalization, discrimination, Muslim voices, passion for life, plea for understanding, aching entreaty, simple respect, embrace difference, challenge our assumptions, stretch our viewpoints, our compatriots, our neighbours, speak out against prejudice, intimidation, ignorance, ruthlessly exploited . . . (The Age, April 21, 2016)

In the editorial, titled “Trump Has None of a President’s Qualities,” published on February 23, 2016, The Age used marginalized and disparaged to portray Muslims favorably.

So, in The Age the overall nature of Islam and Muslims’ representation and majority of the key themes/terminologies associated with them are positive and favorable. There are only two instances wherein The Age conflated Islam with terrorism as “Islamist terrorism” while rest of the editorial contents contained “terrorists,” “militants,” and “extremists” terminologies for the “terrorists.”

Overall, the representational strategy by The Age in portraying Islam and Muslims is positive and favorable containing “understanding,” “multiculturalism,” “solidarity,” “cohesion,” and “harmony” as predominant themes.

Using “Lexicalization” and “Ideological Square” as tools to analyze the editorial contents of The Australian, the researcher has found out that out of total 11 selected editorials there was not a single editorial containing positive, supportive, and/or favorable themes regarding Islam and Muslims. None of the editorial could be categorized as neutral/balanced or mixed either. All the editorials contained explicitly polarized, negative, binary, and critical themes against Islam and Muslims. There was only one editorial, titled “Jihadist’s Deadly Hit on Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” published on July 16, 2016, wherein two positive adjectives, decent and peace-loving, were used for Muslims. However, these two adjectives were also contextual in one part of the sentence and the second part of the sentence contained stereotypically “violent” and “securitized” image of Muslims: “Islamist fanatics, of course, have nothing in common with decent, peace-loving Muslims who deplore such atrocities.”

The editorials categorized as “Negative/Critical” contained following prominent themes/terminologies regarding Islam and Muslims.

The editorial, titled “Radicalisation Must Be Resisted,” published on March 4, 2017, has been categorized as “Negative/Critical” because The Australian used explicitly negative, critical, and opposing themes/terminologies to report and opine on Islam and Muslims. The “Negative/Critical” themes are as follows:

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terminologies to report and opine on Islam and Muslims. The “Negative/Critical” themes are as follows:

... Jihadist’s deadly hit, Islamic State wanes, extremists, bloodied bodies, mangled strollers, radical Islamist terrorism, atrocity, source of more jihadists, Palestinian militants, jihadists, Islamic terrorism, fostered, jihadists, monitoring, suspect communities, returning jihadists, Islamic State, fanatical political Islamists, precipitating, waging jihad, impose sharia, Islamists, fear, terror, terrorism, political Islamists, terror, violent. (The Australian, July 16, 2016)

This is how the newspaper using such words, verbs, labels, and phrases to produce “Negative/Critical” themes while covering Islam and Muslims in its editorials.

In the editorial, titled “Hate Preachers Not Welcome,” published on June 15, 2016, The Australian used following plainly and unambiguously negative and critical themes and terminologies against Islam and Muslims: Hate preachers, anti-homosexual, Radical Islamist, Islamic immigration, inciting violence, persona non grata, preach hate, horrific, radical Islamist, Preaching hatred, violates human rights, and Hate preachers.

The editorial, titled “It’s Left v Left as voters asked to decide who is the most progressive of them all,” published on March 10, 2016, has been categorized as “Negative/Critical” because The Australian portrayed a negative image of Islam using explicitly negative terms as Islamic tradition and anarchic tradition.

In an editorial published without any headline on March 29, 2016, The Australian represented Islam and Muslims negatively using plainly and unambiguously negative themes and terminologies such as the following:

... Islam’s crisis, jihad, orthodoxy, self-proclaimed imams, mullahs, jihadic observance, the sword, radical message, evil acts based on religious claims, perpetrators, extreme fringes of their faith, the assertions, bulk of Muslims, jihadis terrorists, delusions, supernatural religious claims, extreme behavior, spurred on, fanatical older males, extreme extents, fundamentalist Islamic societies, medieval, misogynist, mosque-centered, murderous, death throes, Islamism, disingenuous, Islamic theocracy, extreme expression, exceptionalism, separatism, radicalism...

In the editorial, titled “Islamic Schools at a Crossroads,” published on February 25, 2016, The Australian portrayed a negative image of Australian Muslims using overtly negative and critical themes and terminologies such as financial mismanagement, serious problems, need to put their educational house in order, disadvantaged, non-English speaking backgrounds, no Muslim equivalent, Islamic schools’ problems, and not fit for a responsible oversight role.

The editorial, titled “Asia-Pacific Must Stand Against Jihadist Threat,” published on January 16, 2016, has been categorized as “Negative/Critical” because The Australian used unequivocally and unambiguously negative, critical, and opposing themes and terminologies to report and opine against Islam and Muslims. The “Negative/Critical” themes are as follows:

... jihadist threat, Islamic State, Islamic State attacks, Islamic State jihadists, homegrown Islamist groups, Islamist groups, incited jihad, jihadist uprising, Islamist cleric, jihadist group, Islamic State, financing terrorism, jihadism, threatened, jihadist attack, terrorist violence, ire of jihadists, murderous plans, battle-hardened jihadists, extremist clerics, significant risk to regional security, Islamic State, Islamic caliphate, important recruitment zone, jihadists, threat, Islamic State, combat group, brutal inhumanity, Islamic State, vulnerable to jihadism, jihadist affiliates, jihadist menace... (The Australian, January 16, 2016)

So, in The Australian the overall nature of Muslims’ representation and majority of the key themes/terminologies associated with them are plainly and overtly negative and critical. There is only one instance wherein The Australian used two positive adjectives for Muslims as “decent” and “peace-loving.”

Overall, the representational strategy by The Australian in portraying Islam and Muslims is negative and critical that contains predominant themes “securitization,” “Othering,” “violence,” “categorization,” and “stereotyping.”

In terms of comparison between the two newspapers, The Age and The Australian, the findings demonstrate that The Age portrayed Islam and Muslims positively and favorably while The Australian constructed Islam and Muslims in a critical and negative way.

**Conclusion**

The study at hand was set to determine the nature of the representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian press during the period under study. The findings have shown that both the selected newspapers The Age and The Australian gave a prominent coverage to Islam and Muslims during January 01, 2016, to March 31, 2017. However, both the newspapers portrayed them in an entirely different way.

The findings have demonstrated that The Age portrayed Islam and Muslims positively and favorably while The Australian constructed Islam and Muslims in a critical and negative way. In the editorial contents of The Age, predominant themes regarding Islam and Muslims were “victimization,” “understanding,” “multiculturalism,” “solidarity,” “cohesion,” and “harmony.” On the other hand, predominant discourse in the editorial contents of The Australian were “securitization,” “Othering,” “violence,” “categorization,” and “stereotyping.”

In a country like Australia, where a significant population of Muslims is living, when Islam and Muslims are being portrayed as “other” and threat to “us,” the importance of the nature of representation of Islam and Muslims by the Australian press has increased. During the times of division
between “us” and “them,” one of the selected newspapers, *The Age*, has portrayed Islam and Muslims positively. This would help make people understand Islam and Muslims as part of “us.” However, this positive impact is marginalized by an explicit and large negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims by a comparatively huge newspaper in Australia, *The Australian*. The negative coverage given by *The Australian* would increase the already existing dichotomy between Muslims and the mainstream Australians. As the newspaper is widely circulated, the impact of this negative coverage can result in increased racial attacks, stereotyping, and discrimination against Muslims in Australia.

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