

Anti-Muslim framing in Australian social media

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Sets of derogatory words evoke a particular *frame* in the FrameNet sense (Ruppenhofer et al. 2010). For example, *stupid* and *dumb* frame a person as having a particular mental property, whereas *dog* and *pig* metaphorically frame a human as an animal. However, not all derogatory frames are racist. The current study sets out to identify which frames (and therefore which words) tend to indicate racism.

The study examines how the public Australian Facebook group ‘Stop the Mosque in Bendigo’ frames Muslims and other segments of society. All 4,533 adjectives and nouns referring to human beings were collected from sixty-three consecutive posts and their comments on the group’s page. Nouns and adjectives were selected because it was easier to determine whether they described a human, etc., than it was for other parts of speech. Items were then screened for membership in sixteen semantic categories based on WordNet associations with *racist*, *evil*, *parasite*, and other words involved in derogatory framing (Hoffman and Modi 2012; Hülse and Spencer 2008; Mulsoff 2007, 2015; Spencer 2012; Santa Ana 2002). FrameNet did not include enough relevant words, so WordNet Synsets were taken as an approximation of the sets of words that evoke a frame.

The frames describing Muslim referents were first compared with those describing other groups in the ‘Stop the Mosque’ corpus. Muslims were the main target of particular frames, accounting for 94% of word tokens evoking the ‘disease’ frame, 91% of tokens evoking ‘parasite’, and 62% of those evoking ‘domestic animal’, for example. Frames were then compared with those found in previous framing studies analysing immigration discourse in the US and the UK, German news reports on terrorist groups, and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, in order to assess the levels of racism in the framing of target groups.

Based on the comparison of this and previous studies, the complexity and type of the frames in the studies are argued to suggest three general levels of perceived threats. Firstly, the frames in non-racist discourse, such as ‘Stop the Mosque’ group members describing non-Muslim Australians, may be insulting but rarely frame the targets as dangerous to non-group members. The second threat level appears in the frames that the members of ‘Stop the Mosque in Bendigo’ employ to describe Muslims. Frames at this threat level are more systematic than those at the lower threat level, and include the ‘parasite’ and ‘criminal’ frames. The frames that Germans use to describe Al-Qaida and the frames Britons and Americans apply to immigrants also indicate this level of threat. I concluded that the final, highest threat level is demonstrated by Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, as analysed in Musolff’s 2007 study.

At the time I initially submitted this abstract, I concluded that the ‘Stop the Mosque in Bendigo’ language lacked some of the cognitive structures associated with the most extreme level of racism as found in *Mein Kampf*. However, following the 15 March 2019 attack in Christchurch, ‘Stop the Mosque in Bendigo’ was taken down, but data from the related group ‘Stop the Mosques Australia’ show an increase in extremist framing as compared to the 2018 data, suggesting a rise in extremist thinking.

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