
Coverage Of Crimes In The UK Exacerbate Islamophobia

The prominence of Islamophobia can be seen in the UK's modern society through the means of current media. This dissertation will discuss whether or not Islamophobia is spread through the medium of newspapers (printed and digital) and the extent to which the media plays a significant role in the formation of these perceptions. The aim of this project is to explore how newspapers portray a certain group of people and how this guides the wider public's understanding of them. The fact that this is largely reflected in the increased reporting of crime specifically, may indicate that there are negative views that are projected through the media onto the general population. Notably, it has been said by learned academics that 'the portrayal of Muslims [in the media] has been largely negative and stereotypical informed often by a virulent, racialised Islamophobic discourse' (Sian K et al, March 2012). This topic is particularly important to society as it highlights deficiencies within the extensive media that lead to the unfair misrepresentation of a minority on a regular basis. It could also lead to the recognition that there may be bias within the journalistic structure that can be addressed. As the media is also often connected with the word 'mass', it suggests the extent of influence they have over a population of people is substantial; this may be significant in rapidly converting opinions. As well as this, the combination of religion and politics in the current political climate is something that interests me outside of my A-level subjects as I routinely keep up with such affairs in my leisure.

'Islamophobia' has many meanings and connotations for different people as it is a label that has been commonly used to describe a plethora of attitudes. In terms of media influence, it is best referred to as the negative view towards Muslims/Islam in ideological terms and actions that may be taken as a result of that. This includes the processes of marginalisation and later intolerance that lead to the exclusion of Muslims as a group in society. The focus of this dissertation is also specifically geared towards newspapers as the medium of influence, including tabloids and broadsheets, to reveal the differences between them. The geographical location will be focused on the UK only to narrow down the field of research. The time period will be limited to the relatively modern-day (last 20 years or so) as time periods differ vastly in terms of social norms and customs. Crime statistics will be the criteria to measure whether or not Islamophobia has been exacerbated as it could be said a majority of news reports about Muslims are negative recounts of various terror-related activities.

Reporting of 9/11:

Research has shown that the media plays a fundamental role in the formulation and establishment of popular views and attitudes in society. There is abundant evidence that the media can and do influence people's perceptions, especially on topics where the public's previous knowledge was scant and opinions unformed. So whilst no direct evidence exists to suggest that the media's role causes Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hate, the media's role cannot also be entirely dismissed either given that it has the ability to shape and influence public attitudes that could create and justify an Islamophobic culture. The issue of Islamophobia is one that has steadily worsened in the UK in recent years, becoming apparent in the negative headlines newspapers choose to implement. This can be largely attributed to the tragedy of September 11th, 2001 as media coverage of Muslims used to be few and far between before it; they were not an overly visible group within society in general (Jaspal R, Cinnirella M, 2010).

The population of Muslims in the year 2000 within the UK was an estimated 1,596,391 out of a total population of 58,907,407 (Kettani H, 2010) which is a minuscule 2.71% overall. It is argued by Jaspal and Cinnirella that this terror attack was a trigger event for the media to begin an onslaught of consequent negative articles as it 'encouraged social representations of negativity and threat'. Much of what followed in the coming months demonstrates the failure of journalists to provide any historical or political context for the attacks. Instead many quarters of the press seem to have firmly linked 9/11 to Islamic belief, suggesting that belief in Islam was the core motivation for such behaviour (Elgamri E, 2005). It is an accepted fact that it became hard to mention Islam without referring to 9/11 and its devastating effects on the perception of the religion. The notion of threat is clearly evidenced in a wider analysis of articles published throughout September to November. For example, Michael Gove, who at the time was a journalist for The Times was an instrumental figure in demonising Muslims in the country using his power within the publication. Following the catastrophe of 9/11, the theory of the 'hypervisibility' of Islam in the media was routinely applied to explain the overemphasis of threat in UK newspaper headlines. Hypervisibility refers to the heightened state of being able to see or be seen. In this context, it is appropriate to apply it as the increase of hyperbolic titles demonstrates the greater awareness of Islam by press. Considering the fact that Muslims only made up an estimated 2.71% of the entire population qualifies the label hypervisibility.

Such a small minority in society suddenly rising to prominence within a small space of time (a matter of mere months) throws into question the intention behind the press as an informatory body to the public. A widely accepted role of newspapers is to inform people of major local and global events without extreme emotive language or ulterior motive. Do they feed off of panic and fear to boost sales?

Newspaper portrayal:

Inconsequent discussions concerning how newspapers portray the 'threat' of Muslims, Jaspal and Cinnirella draw upon the critical investigation conducted by Moore, Mason, and Lewis (2008). In their content analysis of 974 newspaper articles between 2000 and 2008, they identified three major 'news hooks', namely (i) terrorism or the war on terror; (ii) religious and cultural issues; and (iii) Muslim extremism. This has been widely supported by many different analyses of exaggerated headlines, evidence of the fact that the press may prioritise titles that will catch a reader's eye compared to factual accuracy. It could be said the press did in fact echo this and began producing sensationalist headlines to attract readers and therefore boost sales. They rose to acclaim in the UK where newspaper sales in the direct aftermath of 9/11 demonstrated that 13 million people purchased a national newspaper every day (Allen F, 2014). This included The Times, Telegraph, Guardian, Independent, Financial Times, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Daily Star, Mirror and The Sun adding an additional 2.5 million copies to their normal combined print runs, all of which sold out on a daily basis. An example of these popular headlines is a specific article penned by The Times which read "No refuge for Islamic terrorists" - a direct quote from the then Prime Minister Tony Blair (The Times, 26th September 2001). Using the combination 'Islam' and 'terrorists' immediately makes the two alike and almost interchangeable with one another in the eyes of a reader. Using massive generalisations (namely linking Islam with violence) is hazardous as it brands Muslims as people who will incite terror in the view of readers. This effect is enhanced with the particular section of the public who rely on newspapers as a primary source of information. This may include the over 65 age group as it is speculated this sector prefers certain printed media (Jigsaw Research, 2017-2018). It

may be said this group is also thought to be resolute and unyielding in their views and opinions. A resulting consequence shown from this particular unfortunately headlined article is the way fear is reinforced through these panic-inducing titles. A byproduct of using hyperbolic headlines is the almost certain establishment and then continued development of fear within public. It seems the repetitive nature of these titles causes a moral panic where Muslims as a minority were perhaps targeted by the media as a source of danger (Cohen S, 1972). Cohen elaborates on this and calls this alienated group 'folk devils', specifically people or things held to be a bad influence on society. The impact this has not only on the general public's perception of Islam, but the demoralising effect upon the mindset of Muslims around the country is a decidedly negative one.

A repercussion of these sensationalist headlines is the formation of an 'us and them' mentality in the outlook of regular newsreaders. It does little to calm fears already held by a growing portion of the public and seeks to brand Muslims as 'untrustworthy' and the 'enemy'. All Muslims are placed under suspicion and this fails to promote community cohesion. An 'us and them' culture is created as a result which serves to isolate the two groups further, moving farther and farther away from a harmonious society. This was especially noticeable post 9/11 as hostile attitudes rose both in the minds of the public and the more privileged politicians of the UK. This is not to say that the views of such figures should not be covered but it is when the press reports these views as representative of all Muslims that issues begin to arise. Readers can assume that such figures speak for all of public when this is not the case. An example of an antagonistic opinion is that of Baroness Thatcher who Allen refers to within her research (Thatcher M, 4th October 2001). This view is evident in The Times, which published Baroness Thatcher's blanket condemnation of all Muslims. She claimed that all Muslims should share the responsibility for 9/11. Another such inaccuracy was published by the Daily Mail in July 2018 and was a good result for the Centre for Media Monitoring and the Muslim Council of Britain (Muslim Council of Britain, 2019). It was another such instance whereby this minority was depicted as being a large, threatening group that had close ties to immigrants in Paris. This reporting portrayed them as '300,000 illegal migrants... living in one teeming suburb.' A correction and clarifications paragraph was promptly released by the Daily Mail editors in light of these issues raised which addressed the inaccuracies within the first article. This is an example of how Muslims as a minority could be said to be demonised in society and cast as outsiders who do not conform to values (immigrants as a group are thought of negatively in general). To make such public accusations arguably demonstrates a distinct lack of understanding which is then projected onto members of society who remain undecided on the issue, therefore negatively swaying the opinions of certain demographics who are more impressionable.

Despite a potential lack of faith amongst the community that wild accusations remain unaddressed, we can see that specific action is able to take place in light of complaints. An article published by The Sun on 23rd November 2015 with the headline '1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis' was quickly met with outrage. Many statistics quoted within the inside pages detailed the levels of sympathy Muslims had towards terrorists and included: '5% of those surveyed had a lot of sympathies, 14% some sympathy and 71% no sympathy'. Despite the clear majority holding a contrasting view to the one headlined in the article, the other two statistics were played upon by the writers. They do not accurately reflect the Muslim population and this was recognised by the Independent Press Association Organisation. Prompt response from the Independent Press Association Organisation was subsequently published in 2016 and highlighted concerns that members of the public explicitly expressed (IPSO, 2015). The presence of a large, regulatory body that is responsible for controlling the spread of press

content is reassuring to people who are concerned about misinformation and sensationalism. This particular article was drawn to their attention by the Muslim Engagement and Development who sought to point out that the article breached Clause 1 - Accuracy of the Editors' Code of Practice (IPSO, 2017). This ethical practice is one that needs to be adhered to by journalists and 'prohibits the publication of inaccurate, misleading or distorted material which includes pictures' as set out by IPSO themselves. This was also used in combination with a potential breach of Clause 12 - Discrimination which IPSO outlined as 'the press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability. In light of these issues being emphasised, IPSO remained a resolute, advisory body that weighed up the arguments from each side. It was ruled that The Sun was entitled to conduct a poll into the attitudes of Muslims towards ISIS (especially due to the fact that it was carried out by a reputable polling company) but the interpretation of these results were misconstrued and resulted in misleading information being broadcasted out to the wider public. This in turn played a significant role in influencing their perception of Islam, potentially worsening any negative views already held by a small number of the population. The presence of such an organisation as IPSO is instrumental in regulating the newspaper and magazine industry in the UK. They hold newspapers and magazines to account for their actions, protect individual rights, uphold high standards of journalism whilst still helping to maintain freedom of expression for the press.

On the other hand, there is evidence of goodwill on the behalf of global newspapers. Contrary to the influx of negative opinions spreading across the media, a select few publications chose to exert their influence in a positive way and used 9/11 to attempt to educate readers about Islam. The Guardian published a weeklong series on Muslim Britain. The Telegraph produced a sixteen-page supplement on Islam which was acknowledged by Inayat Bunglawala, media secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), as 'perhaps the most extensive and positive look at Muslim community that had appeared in a national newspaper' (Bunglawala I, 17th October 2002). These are valuable, positive examples of how there were sections of the press who used their role as information providers responsibly. This in turn boosts the reputation of these broadcasts as they present themselves in a more fair, justifiable light which is what we should come to expect from noteworthy print. However, whilst following 9/11 many newspapers had used their columns to defend Islam and Muslims, it is evident that the news space was imbalanced; a greater proportion of publications were devoted to more negative stories. This has led some to claim that 9/11 exacerbated and fed the growth of Islamophobia which was not considered a mainstream issue compared to previous years.

Broadsheet vs Tabloids:

It is notable that the more balanced articles were penned by a higher number of broadsheet newspapers as opposed to tabloids which suggest major differences between them in terms of intention. This links to the decade-old discourse referring to neutrality vs sensationalism as both types of newspaper lie apart on the spectrum. It is commonly understood that broadsheets endeavour to be more objective (avoiding extreme bias) and aim to report a story from all perspectives to eliminate prejudice as broadcasting companies provide reliable, high-quality news whereas tabloids focus more on high entertainment value. Culturally, it is known that UK broadsheet publications such as The Independent, The Guardian, The Financial Times, The Times, and The Telegraph are perceived to be for a more serious and intellectual audience as they look different, contain varied news, have a different style of writing and aim to a separate

group of readers (referred to often the 'the quality press'). The European Journalism Observatory notes that social stratification plays a key role here as broadsheets are thought to be for the middle class as they 'take a certain pride in their social affiliation and are often distinguishable not only through their jobs but also through the media they consume' (Nadkarni M, 7th March 2011). As a result, it could be said that certain broadsheet newspapers do not exacerbate the spread of Islamophobia through their reporting of crime as they seek to offer an impartial narration of events. Contrarily, tabloids tend to present their content through the sensationalist headlines discussed previously. As their primary focus, it is conceivable that in order to maximise sales, eye-catching titles are produced with little regard for accuracy. The journalism process is markedly different as less time is dedicated to thoroughly checking for errors and ensuring factual precision due to the tighter deadlines (the papers are ideally printed within 24 hours to be ready for the following day). Consequently, exaggeration occurs which sometimes leads to articles going viral and reaching a big proportion of the public. This is a demonstration of negative use of the influence papers such as the Daily Mail, Daily Express, The Sun, Daily Mirror and Daily Star exert over the wavering opinions of the greater public. They are more liable for the spread of anti-Muslim hate not only due to their nature but also to their political affiliations compared to broadsheets. A significant point to consider regarding the reporting styles of various publications is their political affiliations that reflect through in the writing of articles. This is an important factor to acknowledge when debating the issue of neutrality vs sensationalism as journalists are often swayed by the paper's alliance with a particular Party whether they are the ruling government at the time or not.

Reporting of 7/7:

Furthermore, the development of anti-Muslim hate came to a head in the aftermath of the London Bombings which occurred on the 7th July 2005 on public transport in Central London. The attack on the World Trade Center in New York City had only happened four years prior and generated palpable tensions across the globe. The occurrence of a similar attack in the wealthy, financial hub of the UK, rocked the country and had all the major news outlets desperate to cover the story. In an analytical

sense this media reporting of terrorism (a moment when traditionally differentiated newspapers respond collectively to this incident) is interesting to deliberate as they all focused on various aspects of the situation.

Figure 1: Showing the frequency of story themes both positive and negative.

Vital research conducted by Matthews illustrates the coverage of the event by popular newspapers; Figure 1 shows the results of this analysis (Matthews J, 2014). The coverage is broken down into responses to the attack. Some of the common themes that newspapers built upon were: experiential accounts based on ordinary people directly involved (e.g. tales of heroism and survivors; victims/the missing), London's reaction, the perpetrators (bombers identities), and the reactions of the institutionally powerful (e.g. reconstruction and reaction; police investigation). As shown in the table, the criminal aspects of the bombings were focused on heavier compared to other features. Accounts of their human suffering accompany newspapers' descriptions of the 'horrid and senseless' bombings and the 'carnage', 'horror' and 'atrocious' of their outcomes. This specific terminology seeks to evoke an emotion from the reader, emphasising the brutal nature of the senseless attack so close to home. To supplement

this, research conducted analysed public opinion polls following the terrorist attack (Sobolewska M, Ali S, 2012). In the hands of the mass media, results of public opinion polls are a powerful tool they can harness to claim as fact. Many polls were commissioned by media outlets themselves and conducted in the months after the calamity as police sought to identify exactly how many Muslims in the UK posed a serious security risk. Sobolewska and Ali analysed the news climate in the 18 months following the incident and found that the broad themes/topics corresponded closely with news coverage at the time; specifically, 344 mentions of Muslim opinion polls referenced within various broadsheet articles. Since half of these polls were commissioned by broadsheets, we may expect that the security and integration themes would dominate newspaper reporting of the polls. Even limiting the scope of polls used to broadsheet only, it accounts for a minuscule proportion of data used; well below the two percent figure quoted for the overall use of all survey and poll data (Lewis J, 2011). The two frequent themes that were found consisted of mainly integration/security and the obvious public concern with security threats related to terrorism.

Figure 2: Positive and negative mentions of poll questions by theme and newspaper.

Figure 2 from Lewis' analysis illustrates the dominance of fatalistic views, suggesting journalists have an unconscious bias and are inclined towards news of a cynical nature. This exemplifies the fact that certain negative attitudes are given utmost focus in the media, perhaps allowing the expansion of Islamophobia ideas. It can also be argued that Islamophobic attitudes are given a platform to develop further as this reporting style only adds fuel to the fire so to speak.

Islamophobic attacks and government response:

The development of Islamophobic attitudes in public through the media can be translated into criminal actions taken against Muslims.

Figure 3: Number of racially or religiously aggravated offences recorded by the police by month, April 2013 to March 2018.

There is a discernible tension amongst Muslims following the forced accountability of the barrage of terror attacks. Statistics provided by the Home Office - a reputable source for data - states that there was a general increase in the number of religiously aggravated offences over the five-year period of 2013-2018 (Home Office, 16th October 2018). These numbers from the Home Office official records are illustrated in Figure 3 and also reflect how the increases specifically follow major global and national events. Incidents such as the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza, the fairly recent Manchester Arena terror attack, and the Finsbury Mosque attack (both in Britain) to name a few. These statistics may be unreliable because of the fact that not all crime is reported to the police due to external factors such as embarrassment or shame. It could be said some of the above statistics were additionally made worse by the political climate of the UK; the EU Referendum was a momentous election for the general public where millions of people turned out to vote and many were unhappy with the result as it meant turmoil and possible negative change for individuals particularly affected. As one of the primary ways people absorb what is happening within their own countries as well as around the world, it is plausible to conclude the media played a significant role in the portrayal of these events.

Becoming such a common issue in the UK, Islamophobia passed 'the dinner table test' as said

by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi after the Conservative-led Coalition government came to power in 2010. It has been recognised as a problem by various governments of Britain in recent years and was notably highlighted by Warsi within a speech given to Party members in 2011 following New Labour. Warsi was met by backlash after voicing her concerns, the very definition, and nature of Islamophobia being scrutinised by outsiders. The common definition for Islamophobia was provided by the All-Party Parliamentary Group who is interestingly associated with investigating the role of the media in fostering intolerance towards Muslims, this being one of their secondary tasks amongst many others (APPG, 2015). The Coalition's political discourses were initially overwhelmingly positive and acknowledged the rising problem of Islamophobia following previous catalyst events. Working with the APPG, they set about trying to redefine Islamophobia. This was resoundingly unsuccessful due to setbacks and eventually led to political actors once again using the term with a negative connotation. In the government's latter years there was a change, to the extent that its debates became similar to that of their predecessors, New Labour, who ultimately failed to change anything. New Labour attempted to introduce formal equality-type interventions such as the Equality Act of 2006 and 2010 which stated protections against discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and sexual orientation (Allen C, July 2017). This noticeably did not address the issue and became a redundant Act in the eyes of preventing Islamophobia. It is true to say that Warsi's speech was without doubt unprecedented. Creating exceedingly high expectations that the Coalition would be the first government in political history to understand the need to address Islamophobia, quite the opposite was true, in that it comprehensively failed. This suggests the government's inadequacy in attempting to solve issues in society and bring citizens together to coexist harmoniously.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be seen that whilst the media does not play the sole, defining role in guiding people's opinions on Islam and Muslims, it does have a significant extent of influence upon Islamophobia. The particular reporting of crimes and criminal activities by the press is highlighted by many of the authors of my sources. The sources point towards the media as being a body that knowingly holds power; the research finding from the aforementioned meta-analyses corroborate this conclusion. They elaborate on previous times where the journalistic media have chosen to present Muslims in both a positive and negative light, impacting the fluctuation of reported Islamophobia. It has been brought to light that the results of polls conducted on the newspaper's behalf are frequently misused, leading to incorrect assumptions about this minority. This largely fell in line with my expectations on the level of influence the media exerts over the general public as it is clear to see that they are a nationwide force which that has been established within Britain for the past few decades, to say the least. It can also be concluded that the government have successfully recognised Islamophobia as an issue and have been working towards attempting to create a solution. This project is useful in that sense as it can emphasise what journalists and editors of reputable news outlets can do in terms of singling out a minority for predominantly negative reasons. The research into this topic could have a widespread impact across the UK it may encourage us all to pursue peace and tolerance towards one another. We can see in this field of study how the press follows trends and endeavour to break negative cycles such as the overwhelming negative responses after the committed crime. A potential issue that came up during the course of my research would be the fact that the statistics cannot be wholly relied upon as it is unlikely that all offences are reported (Figure 3). Despite this, the facts still can be of some use in aiding the dissertation. However,

some questions still remain. It is still widely speculated to the present day what course the government will take to address this issue as there have been previous unsuccessful attempts to solve this.