

**The Media and Labelling in the Context of  
Australia's Terrorism Environment:**  
Social Media Responses from Muslim Groups in Australia

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## Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Alannah Cooper

## Abstract

Muslims are a labelled audience in contemporary Australian society, especially in relation to concepts such as terrorism. This negative discourse is often perpetuated by Western mainstream media, encouraging an environment of suspicion and marginalisation. The impacts of labelling and influence of the media has been widely researched, though specific media sources and content consumed by this labelled audience remains largely unknown, especially from an online perspective. As labels can be damaging for both individuals and groups, it is important to assess whether, and to what degree, Muslim groups in Australia are consuming and responding to media containing these characteristics of labelling. By examining the Australian mainstream media and content pertaining to Muslims, Islam and terrorism, this thesis provides empirical data that contributes to an understanding and extent of labelling of Australian Muslim groups and the relationship, if any, to terrorism discourse. This research found an underrepresentation of Australian mainstream media, with terrorism being a preferred topic gained from media sources outside of the Australian mainstream media. Australian-based terrorism incidents were omitted almost entirely, with a focus on international incidents that has Muslim or child victims. There was also a preference overall for content surrounding Islamophobic or racist rhetoric. It is therefore suggested that the sample groups largely shared content reinforcing characteristics of labelling, such as victimisation and marginalisation, whilst actively avoiding the association with terrorism relating to Muslim offenders against non-Muslims. Another focus, however, was on positive and neutral media pertaining to Muslims, also providing a sense of rebuttal against stereotypes. This research provides updated data from a social media perspective, and from the responses of the labelled audience.

## Preface

My motivations for writing this thesis came from my work as a Counter Terrorism Detective in the Victoria Police Force. Throughout the course of my duties, I often hear opinions and concerns about terrorism from both Muslims and non-Muslims. Within the Federal and State governments, ideas are proposed about tackling radicalisation and terrorism, but when speaking to Muslim individuals directly, very different views and perceptions are voiced.

When speaking to Muslim individuals regarding national security, negative rhetoric espoused from the Western media, politicians and the general public is often relayed. It is often assumed that the dominant Australian culture (being non-Muslim) hold negative views on Muslims and Islam as a whole, with a strong sense of marginalisation. Due to this, I wanted my thesis to focus on perceptions of Muslims, and consider how individuals felt or reacted to negative discourses.

Working within Australia gave me the obvious interest of examining Australian groups, and the prevalence of social media as an information tool provided a good place to start. However, an extended study from other nations would also be of benefit in future research.

Despite limitations surrounding the inability to discuss these issues with individuals directly (the MRes timeline did not allow me to seek ethics clearance to undertake interviews), the examination of social media seemed to provide real and raw data, as individuals posted what they deemed important, without considering the need to

justify their actions to a researcher. However, further research incorporating this qualitative method would be of obvious benefit.

Although the results of this thesis may not have direct application for investigatory operations, and nor should it, it will provide new insight into actions surrounding labelling, and some reasons why individuals may act the way they do. In addition, it may be of interest to my colleagues in other areas of Counter Terrorism, such as those working on CVE programs and community engagement.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Context

The events of 9/11 dramatically increased an identification between terrorism and Islam in Australian media discourse (Aly 2007; Yusof et al. 2013). Over a decade and a half later, this erroneous framing of Muslims as terrorists and rhetoric identifying a connection between Islam and terrorism continues, with implications for social inclusion, cohesion and the marginalisation of Muslim communities from broader society.

The theory of labelling emerged as an explanation of crime and deviance in the 1960's via theorists such as Howard Becker, while drawing from conceptual roots going back to Emile Durkheim (Williams 2008, p. 421). In essence, the theory sought to explain the effects of socially imposed labels, and whether they direct individuals toward a path of criminality or deviance (Williams 2008, p. 421). More recently, it has been argued that various forms of Western media have created and reinforced negative labels and narratives surrounding Muslims in Australia, particularly since 9/11 (Aly 2007, p. 28). Whether the label is propagated by the media or another source, it has been shown that labels and labelling discourse can impact individuals and communities in a range of ways, from fostering individual feelings of victimisation, to wider societal suspicion and division, creating an 'us versus them' mentality (Aly 2007; Cherney & Murphy 2015 & 2016).

There is also potential for this negative process to encourage wider social repercussions, such as increased perceptions of marginalisation, loss of social capital and cohesion, and potentially – and debatably – radicalisation to forms of violent

extremism (Tahiri & Grossman 2013, pp. 128-130)<sup>1</sup>. With the advent of new media<sup>2</sup>, primarily the distribution of mass communications via the Internet, information is now available from a plethora of sources. This includes social media and the incorporation of traditional media and other information within it, and the phenomenon of audiences becoming increasingly active rather than passive in their consumption (Nueman & Guggenheim 2011, p. 177).

The negative effects and impacts of labelling and media discourse on Muslim communities in Australia are not primarily investigated in this thesis. Instead, this thesis tests whether, and to what extent, the labelling process is occurring through social media consumption within Muslim communities. The question of whether the labelled audiences are actively consuming and sharing this type of media, and therefore acting in ways that would conform to what labelling theorists expect, is largely unknown. This is especially unidentified from the perspective of social media.

## 1.2 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to determine whether, and to what degree, Muslim groups in Australia are responding to Western media that contains characteristics of labelling. This research will provide needed empirical data that contributes to an understanding to the nature and extent of labelling in Australian Muslim groups and its relationship, if any, to terrorism discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> The vast and expanding literature on the term radicalisation will not be detailed here, as this project is not primarily concerned with processes of radicalisation. For the purposes of this research, it will refer to an individual's escalating commitment to becoming involved in or preceding political violence (McCormack 2003, cited in Sarma 2017, p. 279)

<sup>2</sup> The definition of 'new media' has been subject to change and evolve as technology improves (Zielinski 2006, cited in Scolari 2009, p. 946). Radio and television were once new media, for example. For the purposes of this research, new media will refer to the spread of mass communications with the assistance of the Internet.

### 1.3 Research Questions

This thesis aims to address the following questions:

- 1) What role do terrorism-related mainstream media occupy for Muslim groups in Australia?
- 2) Do Muslim groups in Australia actively consume and share mainstream media containing labels through social media?
- 3) Will characteristics of labelling theory be reinforced by the content selected or omitted?

### 1.4 Significance

Social media is an increasingly popular venue for the consumption of news stories (Gottfried & Shearer 2016), yet limited research is available concerning the perspective of the labelled audience from this platform. This thesis therefore focuses on audience responses from a social media outlook. The varying and negative effects of labelling and media discourse will be acknowledged and discussed to assist reviewing the implications of media exposure and active consumption. This research will in part test the assumed connection between Muslim groups and terrorism by examining what types of media these groups are sharing and what role, if any, terrorism-related Western media plays in this sharing process. In this way, the research will do two things: First, it will provide one of the first empirical studies of what sort of media content Muslim groups are sharing and whether this conforms to expectations of labelling theory; and second, it will test and attempt to refute the assumption implicit in so much Western media coverage of an automatic connection between Muslim groups and terrorism-related content (Yusof et al 2013).

By providing data on how the labelling process operates among Muslim groups, the results of this research project can further be considered in the creation of government programs and policies that encourage social cohesion, or that attempt to respond to the real needs and concerns of Muslim communities rather than those needs and concerns that are attributed to them through a security agenda. It may also be used by the media to better understand assumptions around Muslim audiences and their preferences and responses to certain topics.

### 1.5 Method

The method used to complete this research was a mixed methods approach, consisting of the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The social media platform Facebook was selected due to its ongoing popularity, and Facebook groups were selected based on Muslim-affiliation to provide a sample of the labelled audience. The Muslim groups were examined over a six-month period to determine what media sources they were sharing, with a focus on the Australian mainstream media, and what content was most prevalent. Other media sources, whether international sources or other Internet-based sites, were also collated if they contained negative content regarding Muslims or Islam, as well as any content on terrorism. Although the initial aim was to focus on the Australian media's conflation of Islam with terrorism, as data were collected it became apparent that there was a strong focus on Islamophobic and racist content in general, not just that pertaining to terrorism. Instead, there was a large focus on Australian politician, Pauline Hanson<sup>3</sup>, as well as other Australian political issues. Indeed it was found that Australian terrorism discourse was

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<sup>3</sup> Pauline Hanson is an Australian politician and founder of the One Nation Party. She is known for her anti-Islamic and anti-immigration rhetoric and policies (One Nation 2017)

remarkably absent from most social media examined, which is in itself an interesting and noteworthy contribution of this research.

As content was collected from all media sources if pertaining to negative discourse on Muslims or Islam, or any content on terrorism, a range of media sources were provided to ensure an adequate comparison set against the Australian mainstream media. In addition, by using a mixed methods approach, numerical data, such as volume, was collated, but content analysis will further aid to explain why certain content was deemed important or irrelevant. Qualitative analysis pertaining to the direct approach of individuals was not conducted, instead relying on past research and theories to explain why certain sources and content were shared, and what effects this might have.

## **1.6 Chapter Overview**

This thesis is separated into six chapters. Chapter Two provides a literature review on the topics of labelling theory, media framing and discourse, and the emergence of social media. These provide the foundational understanding of labelling and discourse, as well as considering the increased use, and therefore importance, of social media as an information source. Chapter Three details the methodological design of this project. This includes the collection of media sources and content via a mixed methods approach on Facebook, focusing on the Australian mainstream media and content surrounding Muslims, Islam and terrorism. This also included other sources and content for comparison purposes. Chapter Four provides the results, detailing the volume of different media shared, and the content focuses of the target groups. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the results, taking previous research into

account to suggest why certain content and sources might have been selected above others, especially in consideration of the characteristics of labelling theory. It then considers the limitations and implications of this project, and provides recommendations for future research. Chapter Six is the final chapter, and will summarise the research and provide concluding remarks and directions.

At the outset of this research, it was endeavoured to focus on the Australian mainstream media and content pertaining to terrorism and Islam. As data were collected, it was decided to extend the sources to include other media provided it focused on key words, as it was to be used as a comparison. Similarly, although Islam and terrorism were the main content categories, additions to these were noted due to the potential significance.

## 1.7 Findings

The major findings of this research were separated by media source and content. Although the Australian mainstream media was a focus at the outset of this thesis, it was underrepresented in the overall media data. Terrorism-related media also received less attention from Australian mainstream media sources, despite being the most shared content for the total of all other media sources. In addition, Australian-based terrorist incidents or investigations were omitted almost entirely, with the focus of terrorism content relating to international attacks with Muslim or child victims. This also excluded any content regarding Australia's security agenda, including laws and policies. The other focus of terrorism-related content was ISIS, featuring highly and also being the only terrorist organisation mentioned. Media containing other labels

was actively consumed and shared, with a major emphasis on Islamophobic or racist content from all media sources, providing approximately half of all collected data.

The overall results are significant in that they propose that domestic mainstream media does not have a significant influence in any labelling process over other media. In addition, these other media sources were gained from a plethora of international news and programs, and other Internet-based sites. This suggests that the Internet provides an apt platform for individuals to be active in their consumption of media, locating the content they desire. By omitting certain terrorist incidents and emphasising those with Muslim or child victims, it is suggested that the Muslim groups were actively disassociating themselves with the label, or highlighting that they, too, are the victims. With the large focus on Islamophobic and racist content overall, characteristics of labelling theory surrounding victimhood and marginalisation were reinforced, but also refuted by providing alternate views. In addition, a large amount of content within the Australian mainstream media referred to positive or neutral stories on Muslims or Islam, both levelling and providing a counter narrative to the negative content.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Research has shown that Muslims are a target of contemporary negative media rhetoric in Australia, and have been largely since the events of 9/11 (Aly 2007; Yusof et al 2013). Although literature covers a wide variety of theories surrounding the stigmatising of individuals, and the media effects on audiences, this thesis will focus on three major themes: Labelling theory, which will explain the effects on individuals in the realm of crime and deviance, as well as direct impacts on Muslim individuals and the communities around them; Media framing and discourse will provide evidence of negative media rhetoric, especially in regards to the promoted conflation of Islam with terrorism; and, the emergence of social media, reviewing the increased use of new media as an information source, with a focus on the popularity of Facebook. Although the literature provides a range of themes in regards to labelling and media discourse, as well as general discussions about the increasing use of new media, the review found several gaps. This included research on the specific media sources and content that is viewed by the Muslim audience, being the groups, as well as lacking research from a social media perspective. As the main aim of this research is to determine what media sources and content are being shared by Muslim-affiliated Facebook groups, theories discussed in the literature review will be used alongside collated empirical data to suggest reasons for and implications of the results.

### 2.1 Labelling Theory

In the societies around us we often see individuals, groups and topics labelled and defined into limiting categories. Specifically, in Australian society, one common occurrence is the negative and erroneous rhetoric and labelling of Muslims and Islam, especially since the events of 9/11 (Appelby 2010; Saxton 2003; Turner 2003). These



common labels, such as violent jihad, incompatibility with democracy, and an equation of Islam with terrorism, has created general perceptions about the religion and its followers throughout society, including that of a 'suspect community' (Cherney & Murphy 2015, p. 482). This, in turn, has generated research to examine the effects labels might have on individuals and communities, especially surrounding that of victimisation and self-identity (Aly 2007), and a division of society producing an 'us versus them' mentality (Quayle & Sonn 2009). With the conflation of Islam with terrorism being a major component of Muslim labelling, the issue of radicalisation has further been considered, suggesting the exploitation and recruitment of vulnerable individuals by terrorist organisations (Waldman & Verga 2016, p. 10). Labels, consequently, also serve an important tactical purpose for terrorist organisations, and consequences for the dominant society (Cherney & Murphy 2016, p. 163).

Labelling theory gained prominence as a theory of crime and deviance, referring to the effect of labels on the individual, and how it can influence that person's behaviour (Williams 2008, p. 421). The theory broadly suggests that behaviour is not inherent but defined by those in charge, or the social audience, who often have economic or political power (Goffman 1961 & Becker 1963, in Bryant & Higgins 2009, p. 270). There are numerous effects argued to be caused by labelling, including victimisation, marginalisation, and, the primary concern for most theorists, an impact on self-identity (Aly 2007; Goffman 1961, in Bryant & Higgins 2009, p.270; Thoits 1985, in Grattet 2011, p. 192). The theory suggests that as labels are propagated and applied to public perception, an individual's identity begins to be threatened. A self-application of these labels may ensue, such as the changing of physical appearance to comply with a stereotype (Grattet 2011, p. 192). This is argued to be a self-fulfilling process, resulting in the individuals becoming more detached from society, and further enhanced when

the individual locates a like-minded group to relate, and solidify this identity (Brewer 2007, in Strelan & Lawano 2010, p. 61). In addition to the impacts of labelling on the individual, implications may also affect the wider audience by shaping perceptions and reinforcing labels (Lemert 1974, in Grattet 2011, p.187; Tannenbaum, 1938, in Bryant & Higgins 2009, p. 254)

Contention surrounding labelling theory must also be acknowledged. Refuting views suggest labelling has little direct impact on the individual, as behaviours can be attributed to individual traits or motivations, or other societal factors (Gove 1975 & Manning 1973, in Petrunik 1980, p. 214). Despite this debate on the extent of impact, it is agreed that labels do have the ability to affect individuals, therefore remain a legitimate factor and concern. As this project collected media that encompassed labels, the potential effect of these labels is an important and fundamental factor to begin with.

Despite labelling theory originating as an approach to understanding crime and deviance, it has subsequently been used to examine the issues of race and religion, including Muslims in contemporary Australian society (Williams 2008, p. 67). Research has confirmed the use of labels and stigmas has enabled the placement of Muslims as the 'other' in western society (Kassaye, Ashur & van Heelsom 2016; Powell 2011; Saxton 2003; Turner 2003). This has been generated in a number of ways, including the broad proposal that Muslim values are incompatible with those of democratic, western, and even Christian morals (Powell 2011, p. 107). This is assisted by the specific focus on religion rather than another identity point, such as nationality, which allows the label to be attributed to a vast amount of people possessing who share this single identity point. Despite the vast differences individuals possess whilst still being Muslim, it is their religion that is often forced to be the overshadowing

feature, whether they believe it to be of primary importance or not (Appelby 2010, p. 423). With a focus on the Islamic religion alongside negative labels regarding their values, Powell (2011, p.108) suggests it is a process of brutalising Muslims to elevate the status of Christians. This further creates and enforces the notion of 'us versus them'. In Australian society, this can also impact Muslims openly practicing their religion without fear of persecution or other negative consequences (Powell 2011, p. 107).

Although some negative labels about Muslims or Islam are obvious, often others aren't as easily identified. Muslims, for example, are often encompassed within a homogenous group or single label that can further cause incorrect labelling en masse. Cherney and Murphy (2016) researched labels that were intended on being positive or neutral, such as the term 'moderate Muslim'. It is often cited in Australian society that this type of Muslim is better suited to fit in with 'western' values, and therefore less of a threat. However, Cherney and Murphy (2016, p. 164) argue that if one is supposedly moderate with their religion, it may indirectly suggest that violent extremists are more committed to Islam than their 'moderate' counterparts.

The effects of labelling have effects beyond misunderstanding, and this has become especially prevalent regarding the labelling of Muslims. These labelled individuals have suggested feelings of victimisation and a marginalisation, creating a detachment from the dominant Australian society (Kassaye, Ashur & van Heelsom 2016). Aly (2007) conducted research with Australian Muslim participants, confirming a high reporting of feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement from the dominant society. In addition, this discourse promoting division was largely attributed to the events of 9/11 (Aly 2007; Saxton 2003; Turner 2003). For example, a speech from former

President George Bush suggested that individuals were either 'with us or with the terrorists' (Cable News Network 2001, in Matsaganis & Payne 2005, p. 387). This developed into an uncompromising rhetoric of being American first, and Muslim second, consequently accentuating a rift by enforcing a perceived clash between Islam and the west (Powell 2011, p. 92).

When individuals feel that they are being targeted by a community or nation, solace within a similarly labelled group is often sought (Cherney & Murphy 2015, p. 483). Despite the support, other implications may occur. This can include the reinforcement of the victim identity due to the shared sense of injustice and similar grievances (Aly 2007, p.35). As these similarities are realised, loyalty within the targeted group may be strengthened as a sense of belonging is increased (Brewer 2007, in Strelan 2010, p. 61). However, this can also increase division within society as the individuals feel further removed (Anthias 2008, in Kassaye, Ashur & van Heelsun 2016, p. 776). Terrorist organisation recruiters have capitalised on this by propagating a message of inclusive victimisation and war in order to radicalise and secure followers, especially the young and impressionable (Waldman & Verga 2016, p. 10).

The discussed effects of labelling, from victimisation to marginalisation, provide a basic foundation to understanding negative discourse of Muslims in Australia, and the precarious elements of identity politics (Powell 2011, p. 107). As this project will examine specific media and content shared by Muslim groups in Australia, it is important to understand the impact of labels on individuals and communities. The media, as a principal data for this research, must also be considered.

## 2.2 Media Framing and Discourse

The media has the ability to widely disseminate labels, subsequently shaping perceptions and creating narratives for society. This has been largely evidenced in the Western media's negative portrayal of Islam, and its association with terrorism. By examining media sources and content pertaining to Muslims, Islam and terrorism, this research will suggest which media and topics are actively consumed and responded to by Muslim groups in Australia. It will subsequently address whether mainstream media is also consumed by those regarded to be external to the dominant society. As the effects of labelling have been discussed, characteristics of this theory may then be used to suggest reasons for and implications of the volume and content of media shared, or omitted.

The media, as a term, encompasses a wide array of categories and production methods, and is often synonymous with news media or mass communications (Matusitz 2012, p. 53). Matusitz (2012, p. 53) defines mass communications as the method used by organisations to distribute content to a large audience, such as television and print journalism. Olague and Ekiaka-Nzai (2014, p. 310) reflect on the term 'mainstream media', taking on the component of mass production with the addition of the 'sociocultural inclinations of the dominant group'. The mainstream media for the purposes of this research will therefore refer to the media sources that produce information on a wide scale, and largely reflect current popular opinions in society. In addition, as technology has advanced, especially since the inception of the Internet, new methods of media production have emerged. These include websites, blogs, and social media, and can be accessed from a range of technologies. The Internet has often contemporarily encompassed the term 'new media' and all of the methods of news sharing contained within it (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 30). Jenkins (2006)

further suggests the term media convergence, referring to the ability provided by the Internet for news content to flow across multiple media platforms.

The media in western society has been cited as a component of popular culture (Powell 2011, p. 93), gaining influence due to the increased availabilities and accessibilities provided by new technology and the Internet. Due to this reach and influence, it has further been argued to have the ability to set the agenda on various issues, and subsequently shape public opinion (Powell 2011, p. 93). Although it is largely agreed that the media can influence perceptions of individuals and wider society, debate exists regarding the extent of this influence. Some have suggested it as a powerful propaganda tool (Herman 1988, in Aly 2007, p. 33), whilst others suggest the media is relatively limited in its influence (Sloane 2000, in Aly 2007, p. 33). The latter positing that persuasion requires a series of steps incorporating cognition, affect, and behaviour (Severin & Tankard 2001, in Kioussis & McCombs 2004, p. 41), which vary between individuals and societal dynamics. In addition, mass media messages can be effective in altering subjects' knowledge, but not specific behaviours or attitudes (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 7). Consequently, the extent of influence of the media's messaging is contingent upon numerous conditions and factors (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 8).

Despite the variables, the media remains to be viewed as an important social institution in contemporary Australian society, often accounting for the creation of narratives on topics. This is a powerful tool that can shape opinions and perceptions of individuals, as well as cultural assumptions of wider society (Aly 2007, p. 28).

A dominant cultural, or religious, assumption in contemporary Australian society is regarding Islam. As mentioned, Islam was largely thrust into the Western media spotlight after the events of 9/11, with a majority of individuals in Australian society having limited previous knowledge of the religion. With individuals in Australian society often relying on the media as their primary information source (Powell 2011), fundamental 'knowledge' on Islam and Muslims is often collated based on the information and contextual disposition provided in the media. As Islam has been overwhelmingly depicted negatively in the Australian media (Aly 2007; Cherney & Murphy 2016; Hague 1998 & Karim 1997, in Saxton 2003, p. 118), preliminary negative perceptions are suggested.

The discourse surrounding 9/11 not only instigated a stereotyping of Islam and Muslims, but also as part of this rhetoric, commenced an ingrained association with terrorism. Prior to 9/11, the word terrorism was a passing reference in the mainstream media (Entman 2003, p. 425). Despite its obvious existence, Australian society was largely unfamiliar with the complexity of the term, often attributing it to attacks in far-off nations with little effect on their own lives or existence. 9/11 altered this, providing not only context surrounding terrorism, but placing Islam into its very definition. With this, media narratives of Islam and terrorism commenced, promoting a fear of future attacks on Australia, and other western nations (Powell 2011, p. 102). As Islam was deconstructed, or created, in the media, the religion was presented as boasting an anti-modernist and anti-secular agenda (Brasted 2001, in Aly 2007, p. 29). By attributing terrorism with Islam, the Australian media was further able to suggest an encompassing view that Muslims were fanatical as a part of Islam. This also suggested a condoning and promotion of violent jihad against the west (Cherney 2016,

p. 162) due to a blind following of faith. This essentially constructed the west as a civilised people, with Muslims targeted as ignorant and uncivilised (Aly 2007, p. 29).

Despite the events of 9/11 occurring over a decade and a half ago, this was how Australian mainstream society largely learnt about Islam, and its perceived symbiosis with terrorism (Miller 1982, in Powell 2011, p. 91). Due to the attacks occurring in the United States, a close and more powerful ally of Australia, a culture of fear was similarly created domestically (Powell 2011, p. 102). The media has continued to promote this concern, likelihood, and prevalence of Islamic extremism and terrorism in Australia (Cherney & Murphy 2016, p. 162), enabled by the popularity of the topic throughout the nation.

As the events of 9/11 become less of a focus, and new media allows a platform for a wider range of views, discussion and debate regarding the association between Islam and terrorism have appeared increasingly in contemporary media. However, the Western media's representation of Muslims as a homogenous unit has remained relatively stagnant, often ignoring differences within the religion, as well as individual beliefs and behaviours (Aly 2007, p. 28; Cherney & Murphy 2015, p. 492). This singular narrative of Muslims aids to the continued shaping of Australian community perceptions of Islam. This, therefore, also continues to direct the attitudes of Muslims in Australia about the media (Aly 2007).

With the Australian media being a continuing and major distributor of negative discourse about Muslims and Islam, distrust of the media from Muslim individuals and communities in Australia remains (Aly 2007, p. 34). Even as 9/11 becomes less of a focus, other terrorist incidents remain a popular topic, especially with the unwavering



conflation of terrorism with Islam. This single-focused narrative has consequently resulted in an increase in attacks against Muslims following major terrorist incidents in the west (Cherney & Murphy 2016, p. 162; Turner 2003). As Muslims are continued to be viewed as a homogenous group, they are similarly seen as the other, and the 'enemy within' (Cherney & Murphy 2015, p. 481). Subsequently, the events of 9/11 have started to fade, but rhetoric reminiscent of President Bush's words regarding the War on Terror remains.

The media has an enormous amount of influence in shaping agendas and public perception, evidenced by society's knowledge of and conflation of Islam with terrorism. As labels can have such enormous implications, the media has the potential to inflict this impact upon individuals and society. However, with the increased abilities provided by the Internet and technologies, audience control of content has also increased. This ranges from the selected of desired content, the provision of alternate views, and an indispensable platform for dialogue or debate (Wilkinson 1997, p. 60).

### **2.3 The Emergence and Influence of Social Media**

The ubiquity and reach of contemporary media is both impressive and imposing, largely attributed to increases in technology and online platforms. Social media, originally created for personal material, has moved towards a news and general media source, altering how individuals gain their information. As this research aims to collate media shared from an online platform, it is important to understand the significance media had in this realm, both in volume, audience consumption, and the effect on audience behaviour.

The rise and progression of the Internet has allowed for people to connect, but also for information to be accessed and shared from all over the world and in real time (Gilboa 2016, p. 665). As the influence of the media has been discussed, but it must also be acknowledged that traditional media sources, such as newspapers, have converged with these online platforms to ensure and continue their relevance in today's society. This allows for continued reach and exposure, but mere saturation is not the only factor influencing individual consumption. In regards to the social media platform, Facebook, the incorporation of algorithms assist in dictating what information a user will see (Burrows & Ellison 2004, in Beer 2009, p. 989). The Facebook algorithm calculates the users' previously selected and reacted to preferences, altering exposure of similar information to match. Essentially, it is attempting to guess what the user will want to see. The implication of this is continued exposure to a certain topic or opinion, to the omission of alternate views, is the potential for the user to believe their opinions or predilections are more widespread and common than is necessarily correct (Difonzo et al. 2016, p. 22). With this directing of information, as well as the recently observed issue of 'fake news' during the 2016 United States presidential election (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017, p. 212), the influence of social media's information and media sharing is becoming an increasingly relevant and pertinent topic.

The consumption of information via social media is increasing exponentially. In 2016, it was reported that 62 per cent of adults in the United States used social media to gain their information and news (Gottfried & Shearer 2016, p2). Similar results were reported for Australians, with 65 per cent of adults using this platform in the 12 months leading up to March 2017 (Roy Morgan Research 2017).

Facebook was the pioneer of widespread social media, and despite increasing competition, remains the largest social networking platform, reaching 67 per cent of adults in the United States (Gottfried & Shearer 2016, p4). Two-thirds of these users, or 44 per cent of the general population, report gaining their news from Facebook (Gottfried & Shearer 2016, p4). In Australia, there are 16 million Facebook users, equating to 65.8 per cent of the population (Cowling 2017). And in 2016, these Australian users were reported to spend more than 12.5 hours per week on Facebook alone (Sensis 2016, p.3).

The influence of Facebook can be argued purely by presenting user statistics. However, as previously mentioned, the implementation of an algorithm to media saturation incorporates a new factor in audience consumption. Although the abilities of the Facebook algorithms has not been entirely released, it has been conceded to contain the ability to control what users see based on their perceived preferences (Lazer 2015, p. 1090). The algorithm approximates what the user likes or dislikes, and shows that content accordingly. Essentially, the algorithm is able to perpetuate bias, limit choices, and created filter bubbles in an attempt to match what it is perceived that the user likes or wants (Lazer 2015, p. 1090). With the constant reinforcement that the user's views are the dominant, it can distort an individual's perception of the news and the world around them (Lazer 2015, p. 1090). The action of this algorithm is an important consideration for this research, as sources and content collected might have been reinforced due to perceived preferences. If a user, for example, reacts to Islamophobic content, then more content of similar nature might be more readily available, opposed to the wider range of topics available in traditional media.

The repeat or reinforcement of information in the media is, however, not a new phenomenon. Research has suggested that when statements are repeated they are more likely believed to be true than unrepeated statements (Dechene et al. 2010, Foster et al. 2012, Henkel & Mattson 2011, Weaver et al. 2007, in Difonzo et al. 2016, p. 22). This includes statements that are only thought to be moderately plausible to begin with, and is known as the Illusory Truth Effect. In essence, it suggests that the repetition of statements increases validity judgments by individuals (Difonzo et al. 2016, p.22). Once this information is encoded, even if it is later revealed to be false, it can further continue to influence the subsequent opinions of individuals (Ecker et al 2011, in Difonzo et al. 2016, p.22). Therefore, repetition leads to familiarity, and familiar information (familiarity heuristic) leads to a higher likelihood of validity inferred by individuals (Schwarz 2004, in Difonzo et al. 2016, p. 24). In the context of the Facebook algorithm, it aids to explain why users might believe certain information to be a social consensus, and more likely to be true (Difonzo et al. 2016, 22-23).

Within the scope of this research, data collected must be evaluated with the above-discussed content. Online platforms have allowed for plentiful media source availability outside the mainstream media, and preferences for certain content might not only be explained by individual motivations, but via the direction of algorithms.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The above discussion highlighted the effects of labelling; confirmed the presence of negative media rhetoric in Australia regarding Muslims, Islam and terrorism; and, reviewed the increasing use of social media as an information source. Although the literature provided theories of these concepts, and effects they have on audiences,

there is little empirical research from local Muslim populations regarding their interpretations or responses to the media containing these labels (Cherney & Murphy 2016, p. 160), especially from a social media perspective. The present research project therefore aims to extend upon these ideas to review the specific media sources and content being viewed, or ignored, by the Muslim groups. As data are collected via social media, and without the surveying of individuals directly, the theories explored here are useful as they offer insight into individual's responses to labels and the media. The literature suggests numerous effects on individuals whom are labelled, from the creation of a division within society to marginalisation, but fails to address what media and content this targeted population is actually responding to. If the content is not seen, or alternate views are just as accessible, impacts of the labels will differ. This research will subsequently fill this gap by suggesting what media sources and content is being shared by Muslim Facebook groups in Australia, and use the existing literature to assist in understanding reasons and implications of this consumption. The next chapter will detail the methodological process for this project.

## Chapter Three: Methods

The aim of this thesis is to determine whether, and to what degree, Muslim groups in Australia are responding to media that contains characteristics of labelling. As previous research largely addresses the effects of negative media discourse on individuals and groups, this thesis will focus on media consumption by Muslim groups. This is completed by collection and examination of the media sources and content shared by Australian Muslim groups from a social media perspective. As new media is becoming an increasingly used source for information, the platform of Facebook will be utilised. With a specific focus on the Australian mainstream media and content containing key words, the audience are Muslim-affiliated Facebook groups within Australia, over a time period of six months, between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017. As this thesis focuses on Muslim groups and the identified label in Western media discourse between Islam and terrorism, the content collected focuses on the keys words of Muslim, Islam and terrorism. However, all content shared by the groups from the Australian mainstream media is also collected to ensure a comparison set is available. By directing the research towards social media, a large amount of data are accessible to view on the users' page. This avoids any obstacles relating to qualitative interaction with users, such as a lack of memory, desire to participate, or misleading information. Instead, specific media sources and content can be collated and assessed largely on the basis of volume and existing theories of labelling.

### 3.1 Mixed Methods Approach

The methodological choice for achieving the aims of this study is based on a mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative research, including media content analysis. Facebook groups were analysed during a specified time period to determine

which media sources were being shared when containing certain key words, with a focus on the Australian mainstream media. The Facebook groups were limited to those that were Australian-based and identified as being Muslim or Islamic. The content collated focused on the key words of Muslim, Islam and terrorism. By collating these data, results could suggest the preferred media sources and content based on the volume shared. This, essentially, suggests the preferred sources and the content most responded to. Based on the utilisation of a mixed methods approach, this research focused on the numerical data of media source sharing on Facebook with the addition of content analysis. The research did not aim to examine the resulting impact on individuals or groups, but to provide who and what the groups are responding to, and to consider why certain content might be more prevalent than others.

Although the concept of media analysis for a limited and specific amount of key words seems theoretically clear, it can encapsulate a vast amount of methodological and conceptual techniques, including content analysis, framing and messages, quoted sources, and large amounts of data collection (Shoemaker & Reese 1996, in McNamara 2005, p4). The aim of content analysis, however, is clearer, primarily used to determine or understand the meaning and effects of the content (Shoemaker & Reese 1996, in McNamara 2005, p. 4). It became increasingly popular with the expansion of mass communication in the twentieth century (Mayring 2002 & Titscher et al. 2000, in Kohlbacher 2006), especially surrounding framing of racism, gender and violence (McNamara 2005, p.1). With most research, including media content analysis, the preference for either quantitative or qualitative procedure is fundamental to the project. As quantitative research collates data for numeric purposes, and qualitative observes meaning and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, in Kohlbacher 2006), each has benefits and limitations. Content analysis as a whole aims to make valid

inferences from the text (Weber 1990 & Stone et al. 1996, in McNamara 2005, p. 2). This is often via the use of coding and a system of categories (Titscher et al. 2000 in Kholbacher 2006), and can be utilised by either quantitative or qualitative approaches. Quantitative content analysis specifically gathers data pertaining to volume, key topics or key words, audience reach, and frequency of circulation or topic use (McNamara 2005, p.4). Fundamentally, it assigns numeric values to measure the differences between topics or content (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 30). Qualitative content analysis aims to maintain the advantages of quantitative content analysis, but incorporate a qualitative text interpretation (Kholbacher 2006).

The preference between these two methods is often argued amongst scholars. Quantitative analysis is suggested to be a more objective measure as the emphasis is on direct, visible and countable content (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 38). Qualitative analysis, however, argues the benefits of interpretation of data, providing meaning behind the numerical values (Cassell & Symon 1994, in Kohlbacher 2006). The limitations of each are therefore observed in the benefits of the other: between objectivity and subjectivity (Cassell & Symon 1994, in Kohlbacher 2006); numbers and interpretation (Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 34). Whilst acknowledging the benefits and limitations of each, due to the complex nature of the media and its effects, content analysis has been suggested to be conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods (Shoemaker & Reese 1996 & Newbold et al. 2002, in McNamara 2005, p. 6). As such, an overall insight can be offered from both the reduction of data to capture statistical content, and the humanist and behaviourist gauges (McNamara 2005, p. 4).

As audiences are often active rather than passive in their consumption of media, and each with varying needs and interpretations of the content, media effects theories



must also be considered. In the context of this project, it can offer explanation as to why certain groups share different media sources and content. Audience Reception Theory, for example, examines the reasons audiences engage with the media, the nature of the effect (behavioural, ideological, or symbolic), and impact the media has on the audience (Livingstone 1991, p. 287). In short, they analyse the interaction between the audience and the text (Livingstone 1991, p. 288). The examination of audience reception in past studies largely result in the observation that audiences interpret the same content in different ways depending on factors such as age and culture (Katz and Liebes 1986 & 1990, in Livingstone 1991, p. 289). Media culture has also been labelled a source of cultural pedagogy, offering views on dominant values, social relations, political ideologies, and even the forging of individual identities (Kellner 2011, p. 8-9). Amongst others, this can provide notions of ethnicity and race, to the creation and confirmation of 'us versus them' mentalities (Kellner 2011, p. 7). As this research examines the consumption of media sources, as well as the content they provide, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is preferred.

The collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data within a single study has been labelled 'mixed methods research' (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, in Driscoll 2007, p. 19). In addition to the research possessing both methods, a mixed model also suggests the integration of the two. This includes the transformation of one to the other, most often qualitative data into quantitative so the collected data can be merged to create a single, inclusive dataset (Caracelli & Green 1993 & Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie 2003, in Driscoll p. 20). This strategy has been simplified with the aid of qualitative data software programs, such as NVivo, which can collate frequency of coded data (Driscoll 2007, p. 22). By quantifying qualitative data, specific themes and categories of content can be provided, including the provision of percentages (Onwuegbuzie and

Teddlie 2003, in Driscoll p. 22) and enables the reduction and simplification of large amounts of qualitative data (Beazley 1999, in Driscoll 2007, p. 22; Riffe, Lacy & Fico 2008, p. 38). As the merging of these two methods provides pragmatic benefits to complex research questions, and statistical patterns from interpreted content (Driscoll 2007, p. 26), it has been the preferred method for many other previous studies of the media (Glasgow Media Group 1976, 1980, 1985 & van Dijk 1998, in Wodak 2004, p. 107).

This thesis relies on the collection of data pertaining to the sharing of media sources, as well as content analysis of the sources collected. Subsequently, the mixed methods approach was the most appropriate, and therefore the chosen method. However, despite the mixed methods approach largely merging the benefits of quantitative and qualitative analysis, it has also been subject to criticism. With the quantifying of qualitative data, it has been argued that the depth and flexibility of the data can be lost (Driscoll 2007, p. 25). Similarly, the coding and integrating of unorganised with organised data can be a difficult and time consuming process (Driscoll 2007, p. 25). From a quantitative view, there are limitations to the statistical measurement of quantified qualitative data, including collinearity, which suggests categories created from the data are actually a result of the coding strategy (Roberts 2000, in Driscoll 2007, p. 25). For the purposes of this research, results containing information such as audience demographics or the impact on groups or individuals will not be obtained, though it does allow for a non-intrusive approach to examine a wide amount of data over a period of time.

### 3.2 Subjects / Data

Data for this research is gained via two major sources: Groups using the social media platform, Facebook, and the media they shared. The groups are selected by non-probability, purposive sampling, requiring specific attributes, including location, affiliation, followers, and posts in English. Their accessibility is based on security preferences within Facebook. The groups are also categorised into locations within Australia and the type of group they represented, in an attempt to gain an even representation and reliable sample of the Muslim population. The media shared focused on Australian mainstream media, as well as other media that contained specific content.

### 3.3 Facebook Groups

The social media platform of choice for this study is Facebook. This, as previously discussed in Chapter Two, is selected as it remains the most used social media platform amongst the population, as well as being a source of shared media content, including the news media. With a focus on media shared by groups on social media, this is the preferred option.

The Facebook groups are selected based on certain search criteria. In the first instance, the groups are required to be Australian-based, and to identify as having a Muslim- or Islamic- affiliation. This therefore requires some indication of being based in or representative of Australia, as well as the Muslim affiliation being all encompassing of sects, such as Sunni or Shia, provided there was an identification within the group name, information page, or otherwise. The groups are therefore inclusive of, inter alia, mosques, communities, education, and the media.

Due to the significant number of Facebook groups available, and the desire to be representative of as many individuals as possible, the groups required a minimum of 500 followers or members. In addition, groups are required to post wholly in English.

Finally, the groups reviewed are required to have 'open' privacy settings. This allows, via consent, for the posts and activity of the users to be accessible for public viewing (Facebook 2015, para. 2). The decision to focus on groups with open security settings was partly due to time constraints faced in gaining ethics approval in a Master of Research timeframe. Ethics approval would have allowed for other research techniques and abilities, including the joining of 'closed' Facebook groups to expand the sample. However, the ability to gain ethics approval and collate the necessary data within the timeframe was not deemed achievable, and is, in addition, not admissible in the Master of Research program. The aims of this research were therefore tailored to ensure adequate results could be achieved without the requirement of ethics approval, instead focusing on the use of readily available data. A full list of the Facebook groups examined is located in Appendix A.

Practical limitations of subject selection include group identification, privacy settings, and language constraints. Firstly, the researcher requires the group to identify in some way as being Muslim or Islamic. If the group does not use a key word suggesting this association, the group may be overlooked. As there are numerous indicating words that suggest Islam or being Muslim, from sect identification to the use of English-written Arabic words suggesting religious claim and the like, it is largely the groups that promote the key words of Muslim or Islam, and their derivatives, that are captured. Once groups are located with applicable identifying words, the privacy

settings further dictate which groups can be explored. As privacy is becoming an increasing worry for online users (Ellison et al. 2011, p. 24), this has consequences on availability. However, it is also considered that groups on Facebook, opposed to individual users, are often more open with their settings as the desire for large amounts of members is often promoted (Ellison et al. 2011, p. 26). Finally, the omission of groups that do not post wholly in English further reduces the sample size. However, as the groups are Australian-based, a large amount post in English. Further, it can be opined that the results gained from these specific English-speaking groups potentially provide similar results obtained for groups with the same requirements, except in another language.

With the consideration of these points, the major limitation is the potential effect on Australian Muslim group representation. However, as discussed above, these limitations can also be argued depending on the desires of the group, and therefore still provide an adequate representation for this study.

### **3.4 Time Frame**

The time frame for this research is for a period of six months, between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017. There are several reasons for this time frame. In the first instance, by reviewing the most contemporary data available, it is able to update existing scholarship with the latest results. In addition to contemporary data, the period of six months is considered an adequate time frame to cover a consistent representation of typical national and global events. This includes a variety of national and religious holidays, political events, and terrorist incidents (in which known dates of future incidents could not be predicted). An obvious limitation of using a six-month

time frame opposed to twelve months is that several known events, especially those of importance to the target groups, such as Ramadan, are excluded. However, as individuals often review media already known to and used by them, and as the main focus of this research is on the media sources shared, it is opined that groups will return to many of the same sources regardless of the time period, providing it was extensive enough to gather enough data in the first place.

A final requirement for the selected groups is that they had to be active during the six-month period. Activity refers to the posting or sharing content, though a specific amount is not required. This is addressed as social media users and groups can lose interest in one platform for a variety of reasons, so it is necessary to ensure dormant profiles are not included as they can ineffectively alter the results.

### 3.5 The Media

The focus of this research is mainly on the Australian mainstream media, but also collated media from other sources if key words were contained. This, then, allows for a comparative media sample so that content and volume can be more effectively reported. As such, the following categories were created: Australian Mainstream Media, Australian Media Other, International Mainstream Media, Media Other. An explanation of whether a source is regarded as mainstream or other was made depending on audience influence or reach. For Australian media, this is based on statistics of Australia's most read or watched media, based on sales and users (Mediaweek 2016). This includes traditional sources that now have an online presence, such as newspapers and network television covering a range of programs, as well as website-specific sources, such as news.com.au. As there are minor differences

between news sources, such as 'The Australian' and 'The Weekend Australian', these sources are incorporated under the one umbrella term. This ensured all popular news sources were considered, without eliminating some due to a differing day of the week, or variation of name between states. Television news was chosen based on major network news from channels 7, 9, 10, ABC, and SBS, as well as known pay-tv network media such as Sky News. Media sources known to be Australian though not representing enough reach or popularity are categorised into Australian Media Other. This method is also taken for international media, with sources such as websites or individuals being placed in Media Other. A complete list of captured sources can be located in Appendix B.

Although a definition for mainstream media is required to provide categories to separate the sources, specific media are not targeted for searching. Rather, a review of all media available is conducted. The collection of this media is conducted in two ways: All Australian mainstream media shared within the time frame is collected, whilst content from other media sources is only collected if it contains negative associations to Muslims or Islam, or any content relating to terrorism. This is to ensure that the Australian mainstream media can be compared to other media whilst also condensing the data into relevant categories.

By selecting Australian-based Facebook groups that promote a Muslim affiliation, this research attempts to gain an applicable target sample of individuals and groups that might be the recipients of labels in the media, from a social media point of view. The examination of the media shared by these groups will add to existing scholarship by providing the media sources and content being shared and subsequently being paid attention to. This will provide insight into whether media content containing

characteristics of labelling is consumed, as well as the comparison between mainstream and other media. In addition, by collecting data from social media, this thesis will provide updated and new evidence of the specific media sources and content consumed via Facebook. This is important as it may differ from media consumption external to the Internet, and social media.

### 3.6 The Search Process

As discussed above, it is believed that a mixed methods approach will be the most comprehensive and effective method to achieve the aims of this research. As the requirements for the Muslim groups and media have been discussed, the specific method of search and collating the data will now be outlined.

In the first instance, in order to access Facebook search functions, one must have an account. As open groups are being examined, with no requirement to 'friend request' or for the researcher to be identified, examination relies on the utilisation of the researcher's personal account. The Facebook search function has the ability to select a country, subsequently selecting only those from Australia, as well as the option of 'group'. Key words can be searched via the search bar, and in this case, a specific focus on the words Muslim and Islam. As Facebook records individual user preferences, results from this initial search will most likely differ from user to user. Regardless, once implementing the key word, a list of results is provided. The researcher then examines these groups manually based on their group name. This is required as some groups that contain a key word in their name will not represent the desired target group, such as those that identified as being anti-Islam, including nationalist and right-wing extremist groups. These groups not appearing to be representative of the desired



sample are therefore disregarded. If a group is believed to be relevant, but security settings are not completely open, the group is also overlooked.

Once desired groups are located and meet the initial requirements, they are manually entered and reviewed for the amount of followers or members, as well as the information page detailing the purpose of the group. Although the latter was not a requirement, it does assist in providing information about the group's identity or purpose.

Upon selection of groups possessing these requirements, the group's page is searched for desired content. A search option is available to review and reduce content on the group's page, however, some content is omitted based on Facebook preferences and format. A manual review for each page is therefore utilised so that no content is inadvertently overlooked. This also offers a greater perspective on the content shared.

As discussed, a record of all data pertaining to Australian mainstream media is collected regardless of content, and other media is collected if deemed relevant due to key words. A benefit of manual searching for content is that all media is reviewed, and content that refers to a topic but does not have a specified key word is also collected, such as 'attack' opposed to 'terrorism'. As detailed above, the content is then categorised based on media source, as well as content. This is conducted in the qualitative analysis software program, NVivo, which allows for the collation and categorisation of data, as well as quantitative assessment at the conclusion.

Despite some limitations in the data selection, based on the time frame and the sample

of both Facebook groups and media, the data are believed to provide typical patterns associated with media engagement, and aid towards the validity of this research.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

A common and major ethical consideration when conducting research is the impact on subjects. As previously mentioned, due to this research being conducted as part of a Master of Research program within a limited time period, there was an inability to gain ethics approval with adequate time to complete the research<sup>4</sup>. However, this did not preclude the necessity and desirability for this research to be undertaken fully in accordance with the most rigorous and protective ethical considerations.

The method for this research is, in part, in consideration of and devised to overcome this inherent limitation. As such, despite the research containing a mixed methods approach, it has the benefits of reducing, if not removing, the potential impact on individuals. Although Facebook groups are being interrogated, due to the privacy setting it is conducted without requiring self-identification of the researcher, and therefore without the knowledge of the users. Privacy settings on Facebook require the user to select their security level, and agree to those terms. For the purposes of open groups, the Facebook Terms of Service states that when content is published when using the Public setting, the individual or group allows everyone, including those who are outside of Facebook, to access and use the content, and to associate it with that user (Facebook 2015). As these groups agreed to the Facebook contract allowing their postings to be open for public viewing, it is assumed that all data can be used without any further consent. For this reason, however, it must be specified that 'open'

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<sup>4</sup> Ethics approval approximate time frames (Macquarie University 2015). In addition, researchers with subjects deemed to have a conflict of interest (refer section 8.1 Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Application Form) may also be subject to additional waiting periods.

groups also removes the ability to 'friend request' or sign up to groups in any form. If this were the case, the researcher would then be obliged to inform the individuals or groups of their identity and intentions. Apart from the Facebook users, only the open media was used, which also has implied consent for public use.

### 3.8 Conclusion

A mixed methods approach provides the benefits of quantitative and qualitative analysis, incorporating both the numerical data with the interpretation. As this research focuses on both the media shared and the content it possessed, this method is required to best report on and understand the results. As previous research has largely focused media framing techniques, and effects of labels as reported by participants, this research reviews the target samples' actions, and interprets the content. As conducted from a social media platform in recent dates, it provides updated data from a new perspective. The following chapter will present this captured data, providing results on preferred media sources and content by the labelled audience.

## Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the data retrieved from Muslim Facebook groups, and the media and content they shared. This was required to address the aim of this thesis, being to determine whether, and to what degree, Muslim groups in Australia respond to media content containing characteristics of labelling. The data are presented in three main tables on the Muslim groups, Australian mainstream media sources and content, and other media sources and content. Findings show that the Australian mainstream media was unrepresented compared to other media sources. Terrorism as a category also received more attention from sources other than the Australian mainstream media, with, and most significantly, Australian-based terrorist incidents or investigations being omitted almost entirely, and the complete exclusion of Australian counter terrorism laws, policy or other issues pertaining to the security agenda. Islamophobic and racist content also featured highly, though the positive or neutral content relating to Muslims was also collected within the Australian mainstream media, also gaining a substantial amount of attention from the groups.

### 4.1 Facebook Groups in the Sample

Prior to discussing the media results that emerged from this research, it is useful to comment on the groups that responded to this media. The samples of Facebook groups, as previously discussed, were selected based on identifying as Australian (whether based in Australia or representative of Australia or Australians), identified as having an Islamic or Muslim affiliation, and had a minimum of 500 followers, likes or members to ensure the sample was large enough to produce an adequate representation. Once the groups were selected on this basis, they were further removed if they were not active within the time period of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup>

May 2017, i.e. they did not post any content. Groups were also excluded if their posts were not in English. It must be noted that some groups had few posts in Arabic, though none that were related to the sharing of selected media. To ensure some content, Google translate was used to confirm content, though, again, none of these posts met the criteria for selection.

After completing this process, a total of 71 groups remained to examine. This consisted of a total following of over 4.8 million users, though duplicate users have not been examined and would reduce this sample. To ensure a representative sample had been obtained Australia-wide, the groups were categorised into the state they identified with, or whether they represented Australia (national) as a whole. Of the 71 groups, the following was found: Victoria 30 groups (41.7 per cent), New South Wales 19 (26.4 per cent), National 10 (13.9 per cent), Queensland 4 (5.6 per cent), Western Australia 4 (5.6 per cent), South Australia 3 (4.2 per cent), Northern Territory 1 (1.4 per cent), and Tasmania 1 (1.4 per cent). Also note, one group stated itself to represent 'Victoria and Tasmania'. This group therefore received a count for each state opposed to creating a new category, but must be noted as the total sources in Table 1 therefore reflects 72 rather than 71. However, this did not alter the remaining results.

In addition to the breakdown of state or national representations, it was also noted how the groups identified themselves. Mosque and Community were the most often self-identified by groups, each accounting for 16 (22.5 per cent) of the 71 groups. Within the Community category, two identified as Youth, and one as Legal. Universities made up 12 (16.9 per cent), Religious (whether organisations, centres etc.) had 10 (14.1 per cent), Non-profit Organisations and Schools each had 4 (5.6 per cent) (note that schools included two High Schools, one Primary School, and one which was a

combined Primary and High School). Media and Group (being that they only identified as a 'Group') each had 3 (4.2 per cent), whilst Education Other had 2 (2.8 per cent) and one Sports Venue (1.4 per cent) was selected, which was a venue from within a Mosque.

To ensure sampling was even across Australia, each group type was matched against their location. This can be viewed in Table 1. Victoria and New South Wales covered the majority of groups, suggested due to these states having the highest Muslim population sizes in Australia (Hassan 2016). National received the third highest, also predicted as it represents all states.

**Table 1 - Muslim groups by type and location**

	National	Tas	Vic	NSW	QLD	NT	WA	SA	Total
<b>Community</b>	4		8	3			1		16 / 22.5%
<b>Mosque</b>	1		7	5	3				16 / 22.5%
<b>University</b>	1		5	5	1				12 / 16.9%
<b>Religious Other</b>			3	4		1	1	1	10 / 14.1%
<b>Non-profit Organisation</b>			2	1				1	4 / 5.6%
<b>School</b>			1				2	1	4 / 5.6%
<b>Media</b>	3								3 / 4.2%
<b>Group</b>	1	1	1	1					4 / 4.2% (NB. Minus 1 as Vic & Tas as one)
<b>Education</b>			2						2 / 2.8%
<b>Sport</b>			1						1 / 1.4%
<b>Total</b>	10 / 13.89%	1 / 1.4%	30 / 41.7%	19 / 26.4%	4 / 5.6%	1 / 1.4%	4 / 5.6%	3 / 4.2%	72

## 4.2 Media Sources Shared by Groups

Although 71 groups were selected for examination, not all shared Australian mainstream media, and some shared no media at all, instead relying on posts regarding events, religious quotes, charities, and so forth. Initially, all content from the Australian media sources was collated, regardless of key words, so that a later comparison could be made between the Australian mainstream media shared that focused on desired content and those that did not. Of the entire sample, 23 groups (32 per cent) shared Australian mainstream media of any content, with all but two sharing content containing key-words. Of these two groups that shared non-key word content

from the Australian mainstream media, one did share content containing key words from another media category. The remaining group contained no major media containing key words, focusing on charity and community posts.

Of the 71 groups, 40 (56.3 per cent) did not share media or content relating to any of the desired content, if any media at all. However, it must be noted that of the groups that did not post any media, the majority (42.5 per cent) were those relating to Schools, Universities, Education and Sport. Mosques also accounted for 25 per cent of those that did not share media, combining with Education-related groups to provide 67.5 per cent, whilst Media and Community were the largest sharers. After removing the groups that did not share media, 31 remained, whether Australian media or otherwise, that contained the specified content or key words. Although this is only 43.7 per cent of the total groups, it was expected that certain groups would not share political or negative content, which still allows for a representative sample of the groups that remain. For example, it was predicted that Primary and High Schools would not share content such as terrorism. This forecast also proved true for Universities, which most likely have administrators ensuring the content was for university purposes only and not as a debate platform, as well as Mosques, which largely focused on prayer times and religious quotes. Similarly, it was presumed that the Media groups would house the most media content, as did many of the Community groups.

#### **4.3 Australian Mainstream Media and Key-Word Content**

The representation of Australian mainstream media sources and the categories of content are presented in Table 2. As Table 2 shows, there are 15 Australian



mainstream media sources, displayed against seven content categories. Both the sources and content categories are listed in the table alphabetically. The categorisation of Australian mainstream and other media sources was previously discussed in the Method section. The content categories, however, were formed after the data collation was complete depending on what was found, and categorised by a best-suited or most-relevant approach. Although key words were decided prior to examination, with Muslim, Islam and terrorism being the focus, it was quickly observed that the word 'Muslim' would not suffice as a stand-alone category, as it possessed content of numerous and varying natures, whether positive, neutral or otherwise. It must also be acknowledged that some content crossed over more than one category. Content was only categorised once to provide clear results, but is considered in the following chapter section to ensure transparency. In order to select the single appropriate categorisation of content, primacy was provided to certain categories (refer Appendix C for approach). In addition, although categorisation could be argued to be somewhat subjective, throughout the following chapter, content representing numerous categories is discussed to ensure observations are as reliable as possible.

As provided in Table 2, the three most shared sources were SBS, ABC, and the Sydney Morning Herald, respectively. These provided a combined total of 40.8 per cent of the overall shares. As might have been expected, the category for 'Muslim General' received 70 shares (35.2 per cent) of the overall shares. This was expected as it contained all posts regarding Muslims that did not fit directly into one of the other categories, and was therefore quite broad in scope. For example, a story regarding an

expose on a 'fake Imam'<sup>5</sup> surrounded Muslims, but was not a directly apparent part of politics or racism as a whole, and therefore was placed in this category.

Islamophobia & Racism received the second-highest amount, with 45 shares (22.6 per cent). Within this category, the most shares were surrounding Australia being a racist or Islamophobic country, with 14 shares (31.1 per cent) of the total for the category. Incidents of general racial abuse stories or attacks provided 10 posts (22.2 per cent), with the third highest of 7 shares (15.6 per cent) being a specific incident whereby an Australia Day billboard featuring two girls wearing hijabs received Islamophobic threats and sentiment upon its erection<sup>6</sup>. Also mentioned with 3 shares each (6.7 per cent) was the racism of the Australian churches, mentions of right-wing or anti-Islam groups, and public figure Ayaan Hirsi-Ali<sup>7</sup>. Included were also two incidents of racial abuse against non-Muslims from a Nazi sympathiser and abuse against a Chinese-Australian. Although the Islamophobia & Racism category accounted for 22.6 per cent of the total shares, it must also be acknowledged that Islamophobic or racist content was further placed in other categories, such as Pauline Hanson & One Nation.

With this in mind, if removing the categories of Muslim General and Other (no key words) (as neither contained Islamophobic or racist content), the categories that remain, in addition to Islamophobia & Racism, are: Media Focused, Pauline Hanson & One Nation, Politics (Australian), and Terrorism. When reviewing the content from each of these categories, an astounding 82.65 per cent was suggestive of being Islamophobic or racist. This included shares regarding the media's agenda against Muslims within

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<sup>5</sup> Mohamed Tawhidi appeared on the Australian TV program, Today Tonight, discussing his concerns about 'extreme Muslims' in contemporary Australian communities. Backlash regarding the program was received, stating he was attempting to 'stir hate' within the community, and was not a real Imam (YouTube 2017).

<sup>6</sup> A billboard promoting Australia Day and featuring two girls wearing hijabs was taken down due to complaints and threats. A 'Go Fund Me' campaign was later set up to fund the reinstatement of the billboard (Noyes 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Ayaan Hirsi-Ali is an author and public figure known for her criticism of Islam and promotion of women's rights, particularly Muslim women (The AHA Foundation 2017).

the Media Focused category, changes to the Racial Discrimination Act being argued to increase racism within Politics (Australian), and, within the Terrorism category, the linking of terrorism with Islam and the targeting of Muslims in the Quebec terrorist attack.

The category of Other (no key words) is as suggests, with no reference to Muslims, Islam or terrorism. The content largely covered areas such as the weather, health and education. However, some did refer to topics that indirectly appeared to impact the groups, such as the events in Syria or articles on Australian values, even if not specifically mentioning Muslims or Islam. The interest here is that only 15.6 per cent of the overall Australian mainstream media shares was from this category, meaning that almost 85 per cent of all other content shared related to the key words of Muslim, Islam or terrorism, as well as Australian politics and the media, with a major focus on Islamophobia or racism.

The next category that emerged, despite not being considered at the initial stages of research, was Australian Senator Pauline Hanson, and her political party, One Nation. Hanson and One Nation received 16 posts for the category (8 per cent), with Hanson also featuring in a post in the Terrorism category. Hanson was individually named in 13 shares (6.53 per cent of the total Australian mainstream content), and with the addition of her party, this elevated to 8.54 per cent. This easily outstripped other Australian politicians and parties, with the current Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, for example, mentioned 7 times, and his party not mentioned at all. Of shares regarding Turnbull, two were regarding Turnbull's silence on the US Muslims Ban<sup>8</sup>, with the remaining receiving single shares. These included topics of the Australian

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<sup>8</sup> On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2017, President Donald Trump of the United States signed an executive order temporarily banning entry of individuals from seven Muslim-Majority nations (BBC News 2017).

citizenship test<sup>9</sup>, relations with Myanmar<sup>10</sup>, opposition remarks regarding Turnbull and Hanson, Turnbull attending an Iftar dinner<sup>11</sup>, and remarks made by Turnbull about Hanson<sup>12</sup>. From this, all content relating to Pauline Hanson or One Nation that was considered Islamophobic or racist consisted of 14 posts, or 82.35 per cent of all content relating to her and her party. Of the remaining posts, two were on the periphery of race-related issues, with one post regarding a One Nation member receiving death threats due to racist remarks, and the other regarding Hanson wanting proof from those who identify as Aboriginal. Other shares in the Politics (Australian) category, which accounted for 6.5 per cent of the total, largely consisted of other politicians, such as Jacquie Lambie<sup>13</sup> and Corey Bernardi<sup>14</sup>, on their Islamophobic views, such as the burqa ban; as well as posts on changes to the Racial Discrimination Act<sup>15</sup>, changes to the Australian immigration test, and Australian off-shore detention centres.

The other category that largely emerged only once result had been collated was 'Media Focused'. This category consisted of ten posts, 5 (50 per cent) that suggested there had been 'fake news', and 9 (90 per cent) referring to an agenda or misleading information against Muslims. The one remaining post was regarding Donald Trump incorrectly

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<sup>9</sup> Changes were suggested as a method to strengthen national security by making citizenship more difficult, and therefore providing protection from returning foreign fighters (Kelly 2017a).

<sup>10</sup> A United Nations warning of ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya people of Myanmar, with Prime Minister Turnbull suggesting Myanmar conduct its own investigation instead of backing the United Nations for an internationally-lead investigation (The Age 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm Turnbull was the first Australian Prime Minister to host Iftar (fast-breaking meal of Ramadan) at Kirribilli House (SBSa 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Prime Minister Turnbull responded to a statement by Pauline Hanson regarding the banning of Muslims in Australia, stating that Hanson was "inciting hatred" and demonising the Muslim community was what terrorist organisations wanted (Kelly 2017b)

<sup>13</sup> Jacquie Lambie is a conservative Australian Senator known for her Islamophobic statements and commitment to a 'burqa ban' in Australia (Sky News Australia 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Cory Bernardi is a conservative Australian Senator known for his Islamophobic statements and commitment to the 'burqa ban' in Australia (Bernardi 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 relates to behavior pertaining to race and ethnicity. Changes to the wording of the Act were proposed by the Turnbull government (Turnbull 2017).

referring to an attack in Sweden, with the post mentioning a 'fake news alert'. Needless to say, all shares for this category were negative towards the media.

The final category, 'Terrorism', was a focus at the commencement of this research. As Table 2 suggests, the word was used in 14 separate posts within the Australian mainstream media, comprising of 7 per cent of the total posts. Within this category, seven posts were regarding terrorism incidents. This included four posts regarding an Australian 12 year old girl killed in Baghdad by a suicide bomb claimed by ISIS<sup>16</sup>, two posts regarding the shooting at a Quebec City mosque<sup>17</sup>, and one post regarding the Westminster Bridge incident<sup>18</sup>. Also selected for this category were two posts regarding an ISIS media release promoting the targeting of Australian Muslim leaders<sup>19</sup>, ASIO refuting the link between terrorism and refugees<sup>20</sup>, a counter-radicalisation expert opinion piece, and an incident of racial discrimination whereby an individual used the phrase 'Muslim terrorist'<sup>21</sup>. Although the latter might be placed more suitably in the category of Islamophobia & Racism, it was placed in this category to easily identify which Islamophobic or racist comments were used with the association to terrorism, of which this was the only one.

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<sup>16</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017, Australian, Zynab Al Harbiya, was one of 17 people killed in a bomb blast in Baghdad, Iraq, claimed by ISIS. Al Harbiya identified as Muslim (Ritchie 2017).

<sup>17</sup> On 29<sup>th</sup> January 2017, six people were killed and 18 wounded when a gunman opened fire at a mosque in Quebec City. The suspect was reported to be a white, Quebec university student. The victims were all Muslim males (Kassam & Lartey 2017).

<sup>18</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017, a vehicle collided with pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, London, killing five and injuring 50. The incident was claimed by ISIS. The offender, Khalid Masood, was reported to be a Muslim convert (Godden et al. 2017).

<sup>19</sup> The release of an ISIS propaganda video called for the killing of Muslim clerics around the world due to collaboration with governments, including the specific naming of Australian individuals (Olding 2017).

<sup>20</sup> ASIO head, Duncan Lewis, released a statement confirming there was no evidence found to suggest a connection between refugees and terrorism in Australia (SBSb 2017).

<sup>21</sup> A female captured on camera outside Macquarie University, Sydney, yelling at a woman wearing a niqab to "Take it off, you terrorist" (The Sunday Telegraph 2017).

**Table 2 - Australian mainstream media by source and content**

	A : ABC	B : Channe l 10	C : Channe l 7	D : Channe l 9	E : Dail y Mail Aus	F : Daily Telegrap h	G : Guardia n	H : Heral d Sun	I : news. com.a u	J : SBS	K : Sky	L : SMH	M : The Age	N : The Australia n	O : Yaho o AU	Total
<b>1 : Islamophobi a &amp; Racism</b>	8	1	3	2	0	0	5	0	3	10	0	1	8	0	4	45 22.6 %
<b>2 : Media Focused</b>	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	10 5.0%
<b>3 : Muslim General</b>	11	3	9	4	1	1	9	5	0	10	2	9	0	5	1	70 35.2 %
<b>4 : Other (no key words)</b>	4	2	3	2	0	1	0	0	1	4	2	8	4	0	0	31 15.6 %
<b>5 : Pauline Hanson &amp; One Nation</b>	0	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	3	0	1	2	0	1	16 8.0%
<b>6 : Politics (Australian)</b>	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	3	0	0	13 6.5%
<b>7 : Terrorism</b>	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	14 7.0%
<b>Total</b>	26 13.1 %	10 5.0%	18 9.0%	12 6.0%	2 1.0%	6 3.0%	20 10.1%	7 3.5%	7 3.5%	32 16.1 %	6 3.0 %	23 11.6 %	19 9.5 %	5 2.5%	6 3.0%	199

#### 4.4 Content and All News Media Sources

In addition to Australian Mainstream Media, three other categories were also created to represent other media that contained key words. These were 'Australian Media Other', 'International Mainstream Media', and 'Other Media'. These three sources were placed against five content categories, as represented in Table 3. Although the initial purpose of this research was to observe which Australian mainstream media sources were being most shared, by incorporating the Internet and thus expanding reach and source availability, it was also believed necessary to consider other media sources which were shared containing the key words or desired content. As only content containing certain key words was collated for these remaining media sources, not all categories were used as per Table 2. This excluded Other (no key words) and Muslim General to limit data into content of major interest, such as terrorism and Islamophobia.

As Table 3 suggests, Islamophobia & Racism also received a large focus, receiving the second-highest amount of total shares for Table 3. Australian Media Other contained five, International Mainstream Media 32, and Other Media 17, providing 45 shares (45.9 per cent) of total collected shares from all three media categories. Of the shares within Islamophobia & Racism between the three media categories, 57.41 per cent were regarding individual racial abuse or attacks against Muslims or Mosques, including two shares of racism not relating to Islam. The Muslim ban implemented by Trump and shares relating to the burqa ban or Muslim clothing each received six shares (11.1 per cent). The Australia Day billboard story received a further three shares (5.6 per cent), as did pieces on combating Islamophobia or racism. Right-wing groups and received a minor mention with two shares (3.7 per cent).

International Mainstream Media and Other Media shared pieces allocated to the Media Focused category, whilst Australian Other did not. The content of this category could be separated into three main themes - fake news, anti-media, and conspiracy theories. Fake news received 50 per cent of Media Other, comprising of three different topics: Footage of a cricket celebration by Pakistani fans used by Paul Golding (Far-Right Britain First leader) claiming it to be London Muslims celebrating Paris terrorist attack opposed to the cricket<sup>22</sup>; a focus piece on the 'anatomy of fake news' featuring Australian-Muslim politician, Anne Aly, being incorrectly accused of anti-ANZAC Day practices<sup>23</sup>; and, a documentary advertisement depicting fake news and lies in the mainstream media regarding Syria<sup>24</sup>. In addition to the suggested fake news, Media Other also contained three conspiracy stories on 9/11, the White Helmets<sup>25</sup>, and claims of the USA poisoning water supplies in Iraq and Syria. There were also two posts regarding the media only referring to mass killing as terrorism if the offender was Muslim. These are further discussed below.

Pauline Hanson continued to receive attention via other media sources, including four from Australian Media Other, one in the International Mainstream Media, and ten from Other Media. Of these, all shares were negative, with 14 of the 15 referring to Islamophobic or racist content. The remaining share was regarding Hanson's Chief of Staff in a finance scandal<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Footage was from a 2009 clip of Pakistan celebrating a cricket win over Sri Lanka, though titles 'Video of Muslims in London rejoicing at the Paris attacks' (Dinham 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Australia's first female Muslim Minister of Parliament accused of refusing to lay a wreath at an ANZAC Day ceremony. Aly, previously a counter terrorism and deradicalisation expert, did lay a wreath at another ceremony, unable to attend both for the sunrise. The story gained traction via social media, and continued onto talkback radio (Stott 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Documentary, 'Voice of Syria', debating mainstream media lies on Syria (Telesur 2016).

<sup>25</sup> The White Helmets are a volunteer organisation in Syria conducting search and rescue operations after attacks (The White Helmets 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Secret recording of One Nation Chief of Staff discussing making money out of an election (Baxendale 2017)



Politics (Australian) mostly contained shares regarding 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act with five shares (38.46 per cent), as well as four shares (30.8 per cent) on immigration or boarder control, with two of these including Turnbull's response to the US Muslim ban. Turnbull featured in another two posts, one regarding changes to the Australian citizenship test, and the other being a positive share regarding Turnbull being the first Australian Prime Minister to host Iftar dinner after Ramadan. The latter was the only positive share of the 28 total shares in both the Politics (Australian) and Pauline Hanson & One Nation categories in Table 3.

The final category depicted in Table 3 is Terrorism, and, varying greatly from the Australian Mainstream Media, received the most attention with a combined total of 56 shares (38.6 per cent). The highest amount of shares within this category was regards to the Quebec shooting with 12 shares (21.4 per cent), and 10 shares (18.5 per cent) for the Manchester Arena explosion<sup>27</sup>. Each received a mixture of reporting on the incident, but had a large focus on as the 'Muslim heroes' or stories regarding the Muslim victims. ISIS also received 10 shares (18.5 per cent), all condemning the organisation's actions, responding to threats made by ISIS towards Australian Muslim leaders, and one from opposition leader, Bill Shorten, stating that One Nation is aiding ISIS, and Turnbull is supporting One Nation<sup>28</sup>. It must also be noted that ISIS is the only terrorist organisation referred to in any of these categories. Throughout these three media categories, a total of nine separate terrorist attacks from around the globe were mentioned. Quebec gained the most attention of the terrorist attacks (37.5 per cent), followed by Manchester (31.3 per cent), and Westminster (12.5 per cent). All other

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<sup>27</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017 a suicide bomb exploded at the Manchester Arena during a pop concert, killing 22 people and injuring approximately 120. The incident was claimed by ISIS (Samuelson & Malsin 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Facebook post by Bill Shorten stating "If Malcolm Turnbull thinks One Nation is helping ISIS, he should stop helping One Nation getting elected" (Shorten 2017).

incidents received only one share each (3.1 per cent each), being attacks in Zurich<sup>29</sup>, Jakarta<sup>30</sup>, Canberra<sup>31</sup>, Istanbul<sup>32</sup>, Egypt<sup>33</sup>, and San Bernardino<sup>34</sup>. Regarding San Bernadino, the offender was suggested to be a devout Christian. The article argued the double standard of the media and politicians in that the incident was not labelled as terrorism, and representatives of the Christian community were not called upon to offer condemnation. This anti-media was also mentioned in an article in Other Media questioning why US-lead attacks were not classed as terrorism. 'White' terrorists also received four mentions overall (7.1 per cent).

As can be seen in Appendix B, 87 media sources were cited throughout the collection period, including local media and radio, international media, Government / Politicians, Muslim representative councils, websites, and individual's videos or posts. In regards to postings on terrorism it was the Other Media category that provided the most with 42 shares (75 per cent). It was sources pertaining to news media that represented terrorist attacks the most, with 13 posts (23.2 per cent) over the three media categories. However, Muslim representative councils also featured highly, with 11 shares (19.6 per cent) from six different councils, as did Muslim-specific media organisations with seven shares (12.5 per cent). Muslim representative councils also featured highly in regards to Hanson, with five shares (50 per cent) being media releases from these sources, all condemning her actions or views on Muslims or Islam.

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<sup>29</sup> 19 December 2016, a man entered a mosque in Zurich, Switzerland, shooting people during evening prayers. Three were injured (Scheven 2016).

<sup>30</sup> 24 March 2017, two suicide bombers in Jakarta killed three police and injured others (Hawley 2017).

<sup>31</sup> 7 April 2017, two teenagers fatally stabbed one and seriously injured two other in Queanbeyan, New South Wales. Apparent links to ISIS (ABC News 2017).

<sup>32</sup> 1 January 2017, a lone gunman fatally shot 39 in an Istanbul nightclub. Claimed by ISIS (Arango 2017).

<sup>33</sup> 26 May 2017, gunmen fatally shot 28 Christians on a bus in Cairo, Egypt. Claimed by ISIS (Walsh & Youssef 2017).

<sup>34</sup> 10 April 2017, a gunman fatally shot a student and a teacher at North Park Elementary School, San Bernardino, California. The offender, Cedric Anderson, was a devout Christian, with questions of why the incident wasn't reported as terrorism, nor any calls for statements by the Christian community (Kuruvilla 2017).

**Table 3 - Other media by content**

Type	Australian Media Other	International Mainstream Media	Other Media	Total	Australian Mainstream Media
<b>Islamophobia &amp; Racism</b>	5	32	17	54 37.24%	45 45.9%
<b>Media Focused</b>	-	1	6	7 4.83%	10 10.2%
<b>Pauline Hanson &amp; One Nation</b>	4	1	10	15 10.34%	16 / 16.3%
<b>Politics (Australian)</b>	4	1	8	13 8.97%	13 / 13.3%
<b>Terrorism</b>	1	13	42	56 38.62%	14 / 14.3%
<b>Total</b>	14 / 9.66 %	48 / 33.10%	83 / 57.24%	145	98

#### 4.5 Conclusion

The presented results provide several points of interest. The Australian mainstream media did produce 57.8 per cent of the entire media collected. However, as limited content was collected for other media sources, the comparison amount reduced it to 40.3 per cent. The Australian mainstream media also had the General Muslim category, which largely provided positive or neutral articles pertaining to Muslims. However, overall data also featured highly with Islamophobic or racist content. Similarly, a high amount was shared across all other media sources outside of the Australian mainstream media, only exceeded by the terrorism category. Of significance, the terrorist attacks focused on were pertaining to those that had Muslim or children victims, largely omitting other incidents. Further, there was only one reporting on an Australian terrorist attack, with all other Australian investigations or counter terrorism laws and policies, or those related to the national security, excluded entirely. Although this thesis commenced with a focus on terrorism-related content, it also examined other labels and content pertaining to Muslims and Islam. The following chapter will therefore discuss the media sources and content selected by the Muslim

groups, and consider how characteristics of labelling theory are reinforced, if at all, by the content selected.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

The initial aim of this research was to determine whether, and to what degree, Muslim groups in Australia responded and contributed to media containing characteristics of labelling. To answer this aim, this thesis observed which Australian mainstream media sources were being shared by Muslim Facebook groups, as well as a review of their content. A reduced selection of other media was collected to ensure a comparison sample. Identified content was based on key words surrounding Muslims, Islam and terrorism, and was selected due to the contemporary framing practices of the Australian mainstream media to associate Islam with terrorism. With negative perceptions and effects occurring from this discourse, it was important to identify which media sources were being viewed, especially from those on the receiving end of the negative rhetoric. The results presented can therefore begin to suggest the relationship between the Australian mainstream media and these specific Facebook groups, as well as suggesting which sources and content appear to be of importance.

The main findings from these results can be separated by source and content. The Australian mainstream media, as the initial primary focus of this research, was found to feature less than originally anticipated, providing 57.8 per cent of all collected data, but reduced to 40.3 per cent based on comparative content collected for other media sources. The topic of terrorism, as the parallel focus to Australian mainstream media, was underrepresented as a topic within the Australian mainstream media, yet the major focus of collected data for the total other media sources. Islamophobia & Racism as a content category was a major feature for all media sources, with approximately half of all data relating to this topic.

In regards to specific media sources, Australian mainstream media was only shared from 14 sources, with a further ten from other Australian sources. The international mainstream media, however, provided 31 different sources for relevant content, and other media (such as websites) provided an additional 32. In addition to these preliminary findings, further content categories, such as Pauline Hanson & One Nation, were created to provide a platform for content shared at a higher rate than expected. As these raw results have been detailed, it is important to review why certain media sources and content was shared, and what implications this might have.

The results of this research concur with numerous existing studies in several ways. This includes Facebook users and their online dispositions (Lampien et al. 2011, in Sleeper et al 2013, p. 793), and content shared reinforcing characteristics of labelling theory (Aly 2007; Cherney & Murphy 2015 & 2016). The main findings of these results were the apparent indifference to media source selection; the almost entire omission of Australian-based terrorism incidents, investigations, and counter terrorism law or policy; the preference for international terrorism incidents, especially those with Muslim victims; and, the attention to Islamophobic or racist content, though balanced with positive or neutral articles regarding Muslims or Islam in the Australian mainstream media.

## **5.1 The Australian Mainstream Media**

It was presumed at the outset of this research that the Australian mainstream media would hold a significant amount of shared content from the Muslim groups, as they identified as Australian, therefore presuming an interest in domestic content. In addition, being the 'mainstream' media, it was also regarded as the most viewed and

popular choices throughout Australia. As previously discussed, a range of Muslim groups were selected, with ten different types of categories, including education, religious and community. It was opined that certain group types, such as education establishments, would not post largely on news media or generally controversial content, as they were most likely forums for specific information rather than media. Due to this, all Australian mainstream media shares were collated so that a broad volume could be presented regardless of content. Content from other media sources, however, was only collected if it contained or referred to the negative use of key words of Muslim and Islam, or any content relating to terrorism. This was due to the need to reduce the total volume of data, and focus on the content that related specifically to the aims of this research.

The results provided varying data regarding the most shared Australian mainstream sources overall, being the SBS, ABC and Sydney Morning Herald, which continued for certain content categories, such as Muslim General and Other (no key words). There were slight changes for other categories, such as Islamophobia & Racism, where The Age featured the most. However, it was the Australian mainstream media as a whole that was of most interest to this research. To return to the initial data collection, there were 71 groups that met the selection criteria and were examined for media. Of these, only 31 shared media that possessed applicable content for recording, and of the total, 23 groups (32 per cent) shared content from the Australian mainstream media. Although the total posts from all Australian mainstream media was 199, it must also be remembered that two major content categories were not collected for this other media, being Muslim General and Other (no key words), as a measure of reducing data. When removing these two categories from the Australian mainstream media collection, the total shares remaining were 98, against 145 posts for all other media.

This suggests that the Australian mainstream media was shared 40.3 per cent of the time in relation to these content categories that can be compared to all other media. As a general amount, this might not be surprising on an Internet platform like Facebook, as the availability of numerous other sources is readily available and shared between users. However, from the view of these specific content categories, especially as they are largely news-related in content, it was opined at the commencement of this research that the Australian mainstream media would have a larger overall impact as a broad source.

To answer the question of why this might be the case, the aspect of individual control is considered. Due to the nature of social media, individuals have more control over the content that is shared to an audience; it is no longer a matter of receiving a newspaper that presents articles, but a method of selection over numerous sources prior to sharing those believed to be relevant or important. Chadwick (2011, p. 25) labels this as the move from the conventional "news cycle" controlled by the mainstream or major media, to the "information cycle" that allows regular individuals the ability to construct, contest, and disseminate information that pairs with their views. This extends to the fact that the Internet has provides a vast amount of sources, whether reputable or otherwise, for individuals to easily find a source that promotes their view. With the assistance of algorithms, as discussed in Chapter Three, the user will then be unknowingly directed towards similar content, especially when posted by a friend or fellow group member. This allows information to be seen and shared in one group, for example, and quickly duplicated amongst other groups, often as users that are also members of several of the same groups. Although there were only 15 Australian mainstream sources located, even with the addition of ten other Australian



sources, this was far below the 31 international media and 32 other media. In total, only 16.09 per cent were Australian mainstream media, or, even with the addition of the other Australian media sources, 27.59 per cent. Preferences due to control detailed by Chadwick (2011) assist to explain this, but the results further highlight the vast sharing of international news media as well as other sources such as websites, and the plethora of sources selected for a range of topics. In addition, as the Other (no key words) category for Australian mainstream media only possessed 15.6 per cent of the shares, it suggests that the Muslim groups appeared to show more interest in Muslim-related content.

The significance of these results returns to the initial aims of this research when questioning what media is being most paid attention to by the sample groups. It shows that the Australian mainstream media does not appear to hold any major significance, neither in overall content or specific content. This may suggest it is a source used if the content fits the users desired purpose or interest, and more prevalent purely due to the reach 'mainstream' media possesses. However, popular mainstream content for the dominant society might not be in line with these Muslim groups, and, further, if the desired content was not available, the Internet offers numerous other sources to choose from.

## 5.2 Terrorism

As discussed, the topic of terrorism is well documented and popular in contemporary Australian media. Due to its prevalence in the media, it is a constant topic of debate regarding the media's conflation of terrorism with Islam. Due to this, it was believed that it would feature highly as a topic. Sub-topics were initially considered, including

terrorist attacks, media framing on terrorism and Islam, and individual's responses to both attacks and media reporting. However, it was decided to initially collate all data pertaining to terrorism, and later make an assessment from the results.

The results found that within the Australian mainstream media, terrorism was largely underrepresented, providing 7 per cent of the total shares. The minor sharing is further highlighted when compared to all other media sources, which consisted of 38.6 per cent of the total shares. Again, the removal of the two content categories that were not collated for other media must be considered. As such, this would elevate the total terrorism shares for the Australian mainstream media to 14 per cent, though still remains significantly below other media, with a little over a third of their shares. This is not believed to be due to the lack of reporting by the Australian mainstream media, but rather considered that it might be the content that it espoused, as discussed above. The content within the terrorism category for the Australian mainstream media was varied. The highest amount of shares related to an Australian Muslim schoolgirl killed by an ISIS bombing in Iraq with 28.57 per cent. There were two mentions of the Quebec attack, and two regarding responses to ISIS threats. The remaining was varied amongst references by experts, individuals, and other attacks. On the other hand, other media sources focused more on terrorist incidents, such as Quebec, Manchester, and Westminster. In total, nine terrorist attacks were mentioned, equating to 64.3 per cent of the total terrorism content. This must also be considered in the context thousands of global terrorism-related incidents occurring for the period<sup>35</sup>. ISIS was also directly mentioned ten times, with it being the only organisation mentioned in any media collected for the entire period. Within this entire content, only one Australian-based terrorist incident was mentioned, with other Australian investigations or arrests, and

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<sup>35</sup> December 2016 alone resulted in 915 terrorist incidents (University of Maryland 2017).

counter terrorism policy, laws or national security not mentioned at any stage by any source.

The limited focus of terrorism-related content by the Australian mainstream media in comparison to all other media is not believed to be due to the omission of the topic by that media source. As terrorism as a topic is widely popular in the Australian mainstream media<sup>36</sup>, it was assumed that this topic would be widely and consistently shared. Rather, it is considered that it might be the specific content or the framing of specific incidents espoused that has encouraged the Muslims groups to post from other sources. The preference for sharing the content regarding the Australian schoolgirl killed was not a surprise coming from Australian mainstream media, as other media might not have shown as much interest in reporting on 'minor' news from other nations. However, this may also suggest why other media was preferred for international terrorism incidents, such as Quebec and Manchester.

The inclusion of ISIS as a terrorist organisation to the complete omission of any other terrorist organisation might be explained as it is the more popular choice within the media contemporarily. This may be enhanced by ISIS' comprehensive media strategy, ensuring they are prevalent and noticeable, especially in their online presence. The focus on ISIS by the Muslim groups might also be echoing this mainstream interest. On the other hand, it might be highlighted due to the brutality of this specific organisation, providing a more dramatic difference between the organisation and the Muslim groups, which may assist in highlighting a dissimilarity and therefore disassociation.

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<sup>36</sup> For articles relating to deadly acts of terrorism, there was a 155 per cent increase in 2016 compared to that of 2001 (Segalla 2017).

One significant question emerging from these findings is the almost entire omission of Australian-related terrorism investigations. In the first instance, it must again be acknowledged that there is a strong association between terrorism and Islam in the contemporary western, and Australian, media. It is considered then that by avoiding the sharing of terrorist-related content within Australia, especially those perpetrated by those claiming to represent Islam, Muslim-affiliated groups may be attempting to disassociate themselves from this link by removing the ongoing sharing of content. Avoidance by Muslims to publicly voice their opinions on terrorism, counter terrorism policy and laws, or national security, has been suggested to be due to a fear that they will be labelled as supporting terrorists or other backlash from the community (Cherney & Murphy 2015 & 16; Kundani 2014 cited in Cherney 2016). Again, by omitting this content and not allowing further opportunity for association, this may be a specific aim to break the association, whilst protecting themselves. Further, the content that was shared largely focused on Quebec and the Australian schoolgirl killed, each having Muslims as the victims of terrorism. Manchester, though not focused on Muslim victims, was mainly children. This specific victim focus is of significance. By focusing on Muslim victims, it might be a method to show that Muslims are also targets of terrorism; and by focusing on children victims, it may be stating that the outrage over innocent victims is felt just as much. This may subsequently be suggesting that there is no societal division when it comes to terrorism, enforcing the terrorists as the other, and the general Muslim community as a part of the dominant society. With individuals having more control over the media due to social media, this may be a major method considered by Muslim-affiliated groups to break down media framing and rebut links between Islam and terrorism.

In addition to specific terrorist incidents, it was also the entire omission of Australian counter terrorism laws and policies, or other national security issues that was surprising. This extended to other domestic laws or debates, such as increased screening at airports, often with Muslims or ethnic minorities argued being targeted or stereotyped. As the topic of terrorism is a popular category in mainstream Australia, it was considered that these points would also feature somewhat within the data collected, though it was not. Similarly to the broader topic of terrorism, it is suggested that the Muslim groups are actively disassociating themselves with these issues, as they may not wish to appear hostile towards laws protecting national security. Therefore, only a public reaction is provided if the law or policy was directly Islamophobic or racist.

### **5.3 Islamophobia & Racism**

Due to the media often associating terrorism with Islam, a consequence throughout mainstream Australia has been the creation of Islamophobic or racist perceptions or actions. This extends far beyond terrorism, with a division in society creating the 'us versus them' mentality, from arguments suggesting incompatibilities due to laws, morals, and even clothing. Due to this, it was believed that content surrounding Islamophobia and racism would be a major contributor of shared media, whether from instances of public figures promoting negative rhetoric, to rebuttal arguments.

Content within this category did feature highly for all media sources. Within the Australian mainstream media, it provided 22.6 per cent of the total collected content. When, as above, removing the categories of Muslim General and Other (no key words) content suggestive of being Islamophobic or racist rose to 82.65 per cent. This

occurred similarly with other media sources, commencing at 37.4 per cent, and rising when accounting for the other categories.

Similarly to the emphasis on sharing of content relating to terrorist attacks whereby the victims were Muslim, the overall prominence of sharing Islamophobic or racist content might be suggested as a confirmation of the widespread media and general public perceptions of negativity towards Islam. As Muslims are a minority group in Australia, accounting for 2.6 per cent of the Australian population (ABS 2017b, para. 2), it is suggested that the groups are reinforcing or proving that they are a labelled audience.

As discussed in Chapter Two, labelling theory can have effects such as a sense of victimisation and impact on self-identity, which can be further reinforced in a group setting providing solidarity against the dominant player (Aly 2007). This ongoing sharing of content as evidence of a plight can also reinforce the 'other' group, both for strength and solidarity, but also perpetuating or continuing with the label.

Although the dangers and benefits of this can be argued, the major significance is that Islamophobia and racism is a topic of major focus and importance to the Muslim groups. The content was provided from a varied range of sources, including the mainstream media and others, with the results suggesting that any content, regardless of source, would be shared. As labelling theory applies only if the target audience is actually receiving the content, although there is limited Australian mainstream content shared as a whole, it is still being reviewed as content from this category remains a high share. Groups contributing to the ongoing sharing may, in itself, also be another feature of encouraging the sense of victimisation and othering. This moves the aspect

of media framing and labelling from a direct action with an impact, to a cycle of continuation. Therefore, even if the mainstream media beings to curb its negative discourse, it is questioned whether the content will be continued and retrieved from other sources.

#### 5.4 Identified Content Categories

Content surrounding terrorism, Islamophobia and racism was predicted to feature in data collected, though other content categories also emerged which had not previously been considered. It was presumed at the outset that Australian mainstream media would hold a significant amount of shares pertaining to the Australian-focused categories, as provided in the results with the categories of Pauline Hanson & One Nation, and Australian Politics. However, Hanson and One Nation shared an equal amount of posts between the Australian mainstream media, and all other media combined. As for the Politics (Australian) category, there was only a slight increase of four shares from the Australian mainstream media. In addition, Hanson was by far the most shared Australian politician from all sources. The inclusion of Hanson was predicted due to her strong anti-Islam sentiment, and, as stated above, provides for evidence that Muslims are a labelled and targeted group. Similarly, the introduction of the Media Focused category revealed shared content on 'fake news' and anti-Muslim media discourse. As presumed, Australian-focused media rhetoric was mostly contained in the Australian mainstream media, whilst other topics featured more in other source categories.

As considered within the terrorism category, the inclusion of these specific topics may also relate to individual control over content. It may therefore be considered as users'

ability to rebut against popular media, and confirm the existence of labelling and targeting. For the media focused category, one suggestion is the ongoing distrust of the media by Muslim populations since the events of 9/11 (Aly 2007, p. 34). Despite these negative references, the category of Muslim General within the Australian mainstream media must also be acknowledged due to its largely positive and neutral content. Although this category could not be collected for all other media sources, the Australian mainstream media did contain a high amount of data for this category, with 35 per cent of the total. This provides a rebuttal against the negative content, promoting the positives of their minority group. However, despite the negative media discourse, this may also suggest an increase in positive media coverage in relation to Muslims in recent years.

Suggestions have been made as to why certain content and sources might be shared by the groups, but the remaining consideration refers to the groups themselves, and their specific motivations. Research surrounding social media users, especially Facebook, provided reasons as to why users post some material, but avoid others. It is suggested that some users might alter their content to comply with social groups that promote a certain social role (Farnham & Churchill 2011, in Sleeper et al. 2013, p. 794). As groups were categorised in this study, those promoting different identities can be considered. For example, education-affiliated groups and mosques largely omitted the posting of general news, especially in regards to terrorism, politics, and anti-Islamic content. However, the media groups had a major focus on news events and media. As each group has identified to represent something, it may be a reason why the users decide what to post based on what that social role promotes. This extends to the action of self-censorship (Lampien et al. 2011, in Sleeper et al 2013, p. 793), suggesting that it can assist in avoiding confrontation and ensure group co-existence. In this vein,



'coping mechanisms' are also suggested, as they allowed compliance with social boundaries (Wisniewski et al. 2012, in Sleeper et al. 2013, p. 794). This might also be attributed to an attempt to disassociate oneself, and those around the group, from negative or perceived-false information. Within the scope of this research, this might provide further reasoning as to why content on terrorism was limited.

With the impacts of labels and media discourse of great importance within this the Muslim groups, it is significant to understand first what is being paid attention to before attributing suggested reasons. As such, discourse that is not being heard or viewed will limit the impact on the targeted audience.

To the knowledge of this researcher, this is the first study to examine which Australian media sources are being shared by select Facebook groups in regard to specific content. As discussed above and within Chapter Two, social media is a growing platform for news consumption, with media framing and content having the ability to impact both social and individual perceptions on race, religion, and identity. Collecting and examining the specific media sources being most shared and viewed is important to assist in determining audience consumption patterns and preferences.

## **5.5 Limitations:**

This thesis has attempted to provide updated data regarding the media sources and content shared by Muslim groups on the platform of Facebook. It additionally attempted to apply existing theories as to why content was shared or omitted, but also encountered several limitations.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the initial major limitations identified were regarding the accessibility of some groups, and the omission of others based on language, or the overlooking of some due to a lack of identifiable key words. This questioned whether the sample was a true representation of the Muslim population in Australia.

As the results were collated and examined, further limitations were identified, including identity management, self-censorship, and a lack of qualitative research in regard to surveying individuals directly. Despite the groups being screened for specified key words to suggest an affiliation, identity of group administrators and their followers could not be confirmed. This must be acknowledged as the research is making suggestions on religious affiliation, though has not directly confirmed with the users of their beliefs. In addition, with online presences, some individuals may have numerous identities and accounts. This is also a factor regarding group followers, as even though the total of individuals for the groups examined exceeded 4.8 million, it is assumed that many users follow more than one group, presumably reducing those numbers substantially.

The issue of self-censorship, though previously discussed, is reconsidered here. This may provide reason why content was omitted or shared, opposed to what is actually being viewed or agreed with. The sharing of content in ways does suggest interest through response, though the reasons behind this can also be varied. For example, the almost entire omission of Australian terrorism-related content might indicate the groups' active disassociation with the topic, which further provides varying motivations. However, it might also suggest that the content is simply not of interest. It is a difference between active and passive omission, and can only be addressed by the qualitative method of directly asking individuals who posted the content.

As such, this study makes limited claims of generalisability, as a wider and more comprehensive sample would be required to make this statement. However, as foundational research, the results can provide some data to suggest the media sources and content being consumed and responded to by the Muslim groups. In acknowledging these limitations, as well as the benefits, considerations for future research can be suggested.

## **5.6 Recommendations:**

As suggested, a major limitation of this research was the omission of direct interaction with the sample that shared the media and content. Consequences of labelling, and the appraisal of individuals involved in unbalanced relationships, have been a common theme in research (Quayle & Sonn, 2009). This is considered as the only method to confirm individual motivations for behaviours. Future research expanding the methodological abilities to address interaction would be of great benefit to the conclusions drawn with compiled data. Previously applied theories might still be applied, but confirmed or denied by the sample, also potentially offering motivations previously not considered.

This research focused on Australian mainstream media and Australian Facebook groups. In order to provide a comparison, future research might also address other nations. This could alter the data substantially with differences in domestic content or cultural assumptions. This would be especially relevant in the coverage of certain domestic topics, including terrorism (Powell 2011, 108).

These results presented a vast variety of media sources outside of the Australian mainstream media. This increase in reach and influence of smaller and local sources (Gilboa 2016, p. 663) must also be considered in future research, as their impact may also increase due to algorithms and user control. This feature of Facebook combined with audience reception theories, presents as a major component in what might be consumed, and must be taken into account for other similar research.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

The aim of this research was to determine whether, and to what degree, Muslim groups in Australia responded to media containing characteristics of labelling. This was accomplished by reviewing media shared by Muslim groups on Facebook, examining the media sources and the type of content that was focused on. The acquisition and analysis of this data assisted in the understanding of whether characteristics of labelling theory were conformed to by this audience.

The Western media's representation of Islam, including its association with terrorism, has been a continuing phenomenon since 9/11. This labelling of a religion and people has had numerous deleterious impacts on individuals, from the shaping of identity, cases of radicalisation, and contributing to a decline of social cohesion. The media has been a significant contributor to this rhetoric, using its influence to dictate narratives and agendas on the topic. This persuasiveness has been further impacted by the increased online potential created by developing technology. Social media has evolved from personal accounts to a major source of information and news for individuals. This has not only increased the reach of the traditional media, but also allowed for a plethora of sources to be available for consumers. This range, and the control associated with new media, has allowed audiences to be active in their consumption of desired media, but also enhanced by algorithms directing content. Despite the complexities associated with online content, effects of labelling and negative media discourse remain. However, the level of exposure does influence how much these labels might impact an individual.

This project expanded on past research to examine what media sources and content were shared by Muslim groups from a social media platform, and provided reasons

why this might have occurred. As the initial aim was to examine media containing characteristics of labelling by Muslim groups, the research project selected the key words of Muslim and Islam, as well a prominent label used for this audience, terrorism. Additional labels were identified, both within direct content about Islamophobia and racism, as well as groups, such as Australian politicians and the media.

## **6.1 Summary of Findings**

It was shown that Muslim groups on Facebook reacted less to the Australian mainstream media overall, especially in regard to terrorism-related content, which was instead contained within media sources outside of the Australian mainstream media. Australian-based terrorist incidents or investigations only received one article share from the entire sample, being 71 groups with a combined total of over 4.8 million followers over a six-month period. In addition, Australia laws and policies pertaining to counter terrorism or national security were excluded entirely. Numerous other international terrorism incidents, however, did receive responses, though focused on incidents that had Muslim and child victims. There was also a focus on Islamophobic and racist content from all media sources, and a minor focus on anti-media content. As the Australian mainstream media was collected in full, regardless of content, it also included positive and neutral articles pertaining to Muslims and Islam. Due to this type content also receiving a high amount of shares, it provided a balance against the negative content of Islamophobia and racism.

## **6.2 Implications of findings**

The findings of this research are novel and significant in several ways. In terms of the volume of data, it has been shown that the Australian mainstream media did not hold

significant influence on the platform of Facebook. This can be suggested for both overall media sources, as well as for specific content relating to the targeted audience. The collation of all relevant media sources also provides the enormity of media available for a range of topics, as well as the fact that they are being actively responded to by way of sharing. It also highlights the audience as an active consumer with the power to share and promote desired content, largely assisted by the control users have within social media.

In terms of the content shared, the major findings of significance related to terrorism. Of 71 Australian groups with a combined total of over 4.8 million followers, only one article was shared regarding an Australian-based terrorist attack. In addition, Australian terrorism investigations or arrests, and counter terrorism policies, laws, or national security was excluded entirely. The terrorist attacks that were responded to focused heavily on those that had Muslim or child victims. There are several reasons for these focuses, or omissions.

The Australian media has been shown to provide an association between terrorism and Islam. By omitting Australian-based media regarding terrorist attacks or investigations, the Muslim groups are suggested to be disassociating themselves from the topic. In addition, the omission of national security-related content may be to avoid offering a public opinion on a sensitive topic that might cause backlash from the community, or have them further labelled extremist or terrorist sympathisers. Similarly, when emphasising terrorist attacks with Muslim victims, another form of disassociation is suggested, as the Muslim groups are showing that they are also the victims.

In addition, the exclusion of response to any terrorist organisation aside from ISIS is of significance. This may also reinforce some victimisation, though instead of being from the dominant society, it is toward a terrorist organisation. It may also confirm the popularity in the media of ISIS, as well as their comprehensive media strategy.

With the high response to Islamophobic and racist content by the Muslim groups, characteristics of labelling theory must be considered, such as victimisation, marginalisation and a reduction in social cohesion. This, in part, suggests that the audience is reinforcing a victim identity and fragile social cohesion. By further focusing on individuals that hold status within Australia, such as Pauline Hanson, it is reinforcing the label from the dominant society, promoting increased division. This can be similarly accounted for regarding the response to anti-media content. Despite this, the sharing of positive or neutral content relating to Muslims and Islam also provides a counter narrative, both in a constructive sense, and as a means of normalisation.

Up until now the collation and examination of media sources gathered from a labelled sample has not, to the knowledge of this researcher, been previously undertaken. This research has then provided new empirical data as to what media sources are being viewed, the content of importance, and that the sort of content that was omitted. As it was conducted through an analysis of social media, this research has also provided a new perspective on media consumption and applied existing theories of labelling and media discourse to consider the effects and reasons. The data were collated contemporarily, providing up-to-date information, and focused on the volume data of media and content shared opposed to the reasons provided by individuals themselves.



### 6.3 Limitations

Limitations previously identified in the previous chapter include restrictions in gaining access to certain Muslim groups, as well as the inability to confirm identities or liaise directly with individuals to validate assumptions. These however do provide opportunities for future research in this field.

### 6.4 Recommendations for future research

The limitations of this research offer recommendations for future studies. Qualitative research focusing on direct interaction with individuals, both online and in person, would offer clarity on the sample, and motivations surrounding media content. As this research also related to Australian-based Facebook groups, a widening of the sample could incorporate other nations, categories of groups, social media platforms, and languages to provide a comparison.

Aside from addressing the limitations of this research, the provided results may also be extended upon. The results suggested the media sources and content actively consumed and shared by the Muslim groups on social media. This information can be used by government programs and policies that promote social cohesion, such as counter narratives within Countering Violent Extremism programs. In addition, the media can use this data to better understand assumptions around Muslim audiences and their preferences and responses to certain content.

Labelling is a destructive process that ruptures social cohesion. This 'us versus them' mentality can lead to an intensification of suspicion and marginalisation in the context of fears of terrorism. It has been shown that Muslims in Australia have been the target

of labelling regarding terrorism due to its association with Islam. It is important to ascertain the degree to which these communities unwittingly participate in this process through their consumption of media, both online and not. This research contributes to this and offers suggestions that Muslim communities are concerned about Islamophobia, but not engaged with discussions around terrorism incidents, investigations, or counter terrorism policies or laws in Australia.

## Appendix A:

### Group Titles, Location & Followers / Members

<b>No.</b>	<b>Source / Group</b>	<b>State / National</b>	<b>No. Followers (F) / Members (M)</b>
<b>1</b>	Albanian Australian Islamic Society (AAIS)	VIC	F. 1,395
<b>2</b>	Al-Hidayah Islamic School	WA	F. 1,168
<b>3</b>	AlMaghrib Institute Melbourne	VIC	F. 1,171
<b>4</b>	Al Wasat Newspaper	National	F. 4,523
<b>5</b>	Al-Zahra Mosque	NSW	F. 5,261
<b>6</b>	ASWJ Australia	NSW	F. 8,209
<b>7</b>	Auburn Gallipoli Mosque	NSW	F. 5,259
<b>8</b>	Australian Islamic Centre	VIC	F. 3,160
<b>9</b>	Australian Islamic College	WA	L. 2,727
<b>10</b>	Australian Islamic Mission (NSW)	NSW	F. 4,825
<b>11</b>	Australian Islamic Mission (Victoria)	VIC	F. 2,115
<b>12</b>	Australian Islamic Youth Center	VIC	F. 2,626
<b>13</b>	The Australian Muslim	National	F. 1,793,538
<b>14</b>	Australasian Muslim Times (AMUST)	National	F. 2,548
<b>15</b>	Muslim Students' Association, Australian National University	National	F. 1,555
<b>16</b>	AYCC Australian Youth Community Centre	VIC	F. 1,522
<b>17</b>	Coburg Islamic Centre – CIC Fatih Mosque	VIC	F. 1,845
<b>18</b>	Cumberland Muslim Society	NSW	F. 580
<b>19</b>	Cyprus Turkish Islamic Community	NSW	F. 808

<b>20</b>	Deakin University Islamic Society - DUIS	VIC	F. 615
<b>21</b>	Famsy Victoria	VIC	F. 1,084
<b>22</b>	Gold Coast Islamic Society – GC Mosque	QLD	F. 938
<b>23</b>	HIYC	VIC	F. 9,160
<b>24</b>	HIYC Gym & Fight Club	VIC	F. 1,248
<b>25</b>	HIYC Sisters	VIC	F. 2,631
<b>26</b>	Holland Park Mosque	QLD	F. 2,184
<b>27</b>	ICV – Islamic Council of Victoria	VIC	F. 6,544
<b>28</b>	Ilim College	VIC	F. 2,766
<b>29</b>	IMAA - Indian Muslim Association of Australia	National	F. 2,478
<b>30</b>	Imam Ali Islamic Centre	VIC	F. 1,879
<b>31</b>	IMCV (Indonesian Muslim Community of Victoria, Australia)	VIC	F.1,684
<b>32</b>	Islamic Centre of WA	WA	F. 2,427
<b>33</b>	Lakemba Mosque	NSW	F. 17,095
<b>34</b>	Progress for Islamic College of South Australia	SA	F. 912
<b>35</b>	IREA	VIC	F. 41,486
<b>36</b>	Islamic Information Centre of SA	SA	F. 2,487
<b>37</b>	Islamic Legacy	VIC	F. 1,718
<b>38</b>	Islamic Society of Belconnen – Spence Mosque	NSW (Canberra)	F. 787
<b>39</b>	Islamic Society of Darwin	NT	F. 954
<b>40</b>	Islamic Society of South Australia	SA	F. 4,249
<b>41</b>	Islam in Focus Australia - IFA	National	F. 10,491
<b>42</b>	Islamophobia Watch Australia	National	F. 3,694
<b>43</b>	La Trobe University Islamic Society	VIC	F. 3,023

<b>44</b>	Lebanese Muslim Association	NSW	F. 8,556
<b>45</b>	Masjid al-Farooq (Kuraby Mosque)	QLD	F. 1,417
<b>46</b>	Melbourne Islamic Lectures, Classes & Events	VIC	F. 2,722
<b>47</b>	Melbourne Madinah	VIC	F.9,387
<b>48</b>	Monash Indonesian Islamic Society (MIIS)	VIC	M. 707
<b>49</b>	Monash University Islamic Society	VIC	F. 3,060
<b>50</b>	Muslim Association of Wollongong University - MAWU	NSW	F. 718
<b>51</b>	Muslims in Australia Since the 1600s	National	F. 39,142
<b>52</b>	Muslim Legal Network	National	F. 1,991
<b>53</b>	Muslims in Australia	NSW	M. 2,120
<b>54</b>	Muslims in Victoria and Tasmania	VIC and TAS	M. 710
<b>55</b>	Muslim Support Group Australia	National	M. 3,261
<b>56</b>	Nabi Akram Islamic Centre	NSW	F. 3,791
<b>57</b>	One Path Network	NSW	F. 653,247
<b>58</b>	Preston Mosque	VIC	F. 3,526
<b>59</b>	RMIT Islamic Society (RMITIS)	VIC	F. 2,285
<b>60</b>	Sunshine Mosque	VIC	F. 2,197
<b>61</b>	Sydney University Muslim Students' Association (SUMSA)	NSW	F. 4,945
<b>62</b>	Talk Islam	NSW	F. 2,057,888
<b>63</b>	The Muslim Women's Support Centre of WA (Inc)	WA	F. 1,435
<b>64</b>	United Muslims of Australia (UMA)	NSW	F. 50,143
<b>65</b>	University of Melbourne Islamic Society	VIC	F. 3,747

<b>66</b>	University of Newcastle Islamic Society (UNIS)	NSW	F. 929
<b>67</b>	UQ Muslimah Society	QLD	F. 658
<b>68</b>	UTSMS - UTS Muslim Society	NSW	F. 1,238
<b>69</b>	Victorian Muslimah	VIC	F. 624
<b>70</b>	Western Sydney University MSA Campbelltown	NSW	F. 904
<b>71</b>	YIMSA	VIC	F. 697
			4,815,946

## Appendix B: Media Sources

No.	Australian Mainstream	Australian Other	International Mainstream	Media Other
1	ABC	2GB	6ABC	AMUST
2	Channel 7	3AW	ABC	ANIC
3	Channel 9	Adelaidenow.com.au	Al Jazeera	Anonymous
4	Channel 10	Blue Mountains Gazette	BBC (US and UK)	Buzzfeed
5	Daily Telegraph	Canberra Times	Channel 4	Change.org
6	Herald Sun	Courier Mail	City News (US TV)	European Court of Justice
7	News.com.au	Gold Coast Bulletin	CBC	Facebook Users
8	SBS	Politicians	CBS	Globalresearch.ca
9	Sky News	Star Weekly	CNN	Global News (Canada)
10	Sydney Morning Herald	The Chronicle	Daily Mail UK	Go Fund Me
11	The Age		Express UK	ICV
12	The Australian		Foreignpolicy.com	Ilmfeed.com
13	The Guardian		Huffington Post	Indy100.com
14	Yahoo.com.au		Independent UK	IREA
15			La Presse Canada	iShare
16			NBC	Junkee.com
17			News.com	Manchester Evenings UK
18			New York Daily News	Media Watch
19			New York Times	MIC
20			PBS	No Reference

21			Standard UK	One Path Network
22			Steve Harvey Show	On The Ground News
23			Telegraph UK	Orlando Sentinel
24			The Daily Show	Patheos.com
25			The Dean Show	Revolutionist2040.com
26			The Sun UK	Telesur.tv.net
27			The Times	The Hill
28			This Morning	The Irish Times
29			Time	United Nations
30			Yahoo.com	Upworthy
31			Yahoo (NZ)	Vice.com
32				Youtube.com
Total	14	10	31	32



## Appendix C:

### Content Category Explanation, Primacy & Selection of Media

Category	Explanation	Category Primacy Explanation	Relevance for Media Source
<b>Media Focused</b>	All content focusing on the methods, truth and transparency of the media as a whole, including the topic of 'fake news'.	Selected unless containing content relevant to the Terrorism or Pauline Hanson & Once Nation category.	All media
<b>Muslim General</b>	Any reference to Muslims or Islam. Examples include 'feel good' stories relating to Muslim individuals.	Content that does not fit into any other content category.	Australian mainstream media only
<b>Other (no key words)</b>	Content that does not contain key words or applicable to any other content categories. Examples include the weather and education.	Content that does not fit into any other content category.	Australian mainstream media only
<b>Pauline Hanson &amp; One Nation</b>	One Nation is a right-wing political party in Australia. Pauline Hanson is an Australian Senator, and founder and leader of the One Nation party. Any politician associated with the One Nation party will also be placed in this category.	Selected unless containing content relevant to the Terrorism category.	All media

<b>Politics (Australian)</b>	Any reference to Australian politics, political parties or politicians.	Selected unless containing content relevant to the Terrorism, Pauline Hanson & One Nation, or Media Focused categories.	All media
<b>Racism &amp; Islamophobia</b>	Any content deemed to be prejudicial or discriminative against any race or religion.	Selected unless containing content relevant to the Terrorism, Pauline Hanson & One Nation, Politics (Australian) or Media Focused categories.	All media
<b>Terrorism</b>	Any content relating to acts of terrorism, terrorist organisations, and arrests or investigations into terrorism offences. Also includes suggestions of terrorism, including content that does not specify the word 'terrorism', such as 'attack'. In these instances, content is reviewed to ensure relevance to terrorism.	Selected above any other category.	All media

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