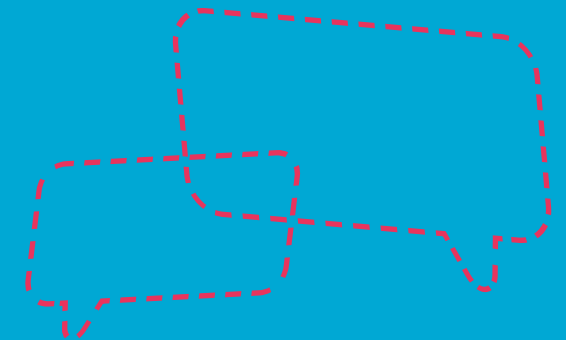




BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Covid-19: What are the Drivers of the Islamophobic Infodemic Communications on Social Media?

Study 3 Key Findings



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Study 3: Key findings

This element of the research project utilised a selection of previously collected Twitter data from users who disseminated Covid-19 miscommunication, fake news narratives and Islamophobia. As previously explored, significant linguistic features were found in the language of Twitter users who displayed this type of content on Twitter, going forward it was imperative to further this analysis to look deeper into the messages and behaviours of these Twitter users. This data was therefore used to provide a comprehensive qualitative analysis to illustrate important and reoccurring themes that were present in the data set.

Design

A content analysis was conducted to produce important themes associated with the selected data set. This study utilised Tweets that were collected which represented extremist content relating to Covid-19 misinformation, fake news, and Islamophobia. This ranged from general Covid-19 conspiracies, such as 5G towers and government corruption, as well as misinformation and fake news around Covid-19, vaccines, and its origins which in turn had produced a stark increase in Covid-19 related Islamophobia online.

Participants

The data set used for this study was derived from previous tweets collected for study 1. For research designs such as this the number of participants is based on the level of data saturation. Data saturation commonly indicates that based on data that has already been collected, any further data collection would be unnecessary (Saunders et al, 2018), and would fail to produce any distinguishable new data (Sargeant, 2012). For this study, a total of 1,000 tweets were utilised, this was the point at which the data was saturated.

Materials

The comments for this thematic analysis were systematically selected from data collection for study 1, this was conducted utilising the word lists and previous criteria used during initial data collection for study 1.

Procedure

For this study, a selection of tweets from the original data set was collected. This was done using previous operationalisation methods used when collecting the original data set. This was done to ensure that the tweets collected for the case study was specifically related to content around to Covid-19 misinformation, fake news, and Islamophobia. This finalised data set was then utilised to perform a content analysis by employing thematic analysis methods to elucidate major themes that were evident in the data.

Data analysis

The chosen data analysis method for this study was thematic analysis. This was conducted using the Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2014) guidelines and stages. A thematic analysis was appropriate for this study as it provided a highly flexible approach that could be altered to suit the needs of the research, whilst providing rich and detailed as well as trustworthy and insightful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



Study 3: Key findings

Key Findings

Islam and Covid-19

1. Muslims are Covid Super Spreaders

Evident in the comments were strong messages explicating that Muslims are Covid super spreaders. References were made suggesting that the origin and subsequent spread of Covid can clearly be traced back to Muslims. One of the key targets of blame amongst Muslims was the Tablighi Jamaat.

“Bro, to see him you need to open your eyes first and instead of wasting time here why can't you ask question to the maulana of #NizamuddinMarkaz Just because of #TabhleegiJamaat 189 people came covid-19 positive and few reports r yet to come. #TablighJamaat #TablighSuperSpreader”

Related to this dominant theme were an abundance of references to the tactics that Muslims have used to spread Covid-19. This includes the spitting on food, produce and people including medical staff and equipment. Comments have also elucidated how Islamic celebrations have been hotspots in furthering the spread of Covid-19.

“This Mu\$lim was caught spitting water from his mouth on fresh vegetables And thereafter police made him apologize <https://t.co/CxsFr6nggi2>”

“: They spit, they pee, they beat doctors, police.... but they are not guilty... but someone called them jahil..he is guilty and arrested... #थूक_मत_जाहलil #थूक_मत_जाहलil”

“Can't you see the PEOPLE CELEBRATING?This event celebrated the success of #CoronaJehad .And yes, they really deserve it. Afterall, much effort was put behind the same like Tablighi congregation, tablighi's spitting and urinating, stone pelting, Killing Corona warriors etc.”

“It's not “Ramadan”, this time it's “CORONADAN”, by the way these people are distributing the corona virus across social groups by spitting, defecating and urinating on edibles.”

In addition to this, narratives online have depicted Muslims as poisonous. This depiction forms the basis of general blame in stating that Muslims are poisoning society through the spread of Islam. However, during the pandemic, it is clear how this portrayal has developed to describe them as poisonous by spreading the virus. This is evident within messages that make references to Muslims as poisonous creatures. Statements were provided to distinguish Muslims and Covid-19 suggesting that Islam is a virus and that it is worse than Covid-19.

“I'm not an animal protection nut but I am appalled the UK Government has knowingly allowed Halal slaughter to become commonplace in the UK. It is patently cruel and only panders to the medieval religious Muslims who are poisoning our society. IT MUST BE BANNED. <https://t.co/SwEkhFnw4G>”

“I request jahils not to spit.Please, keep your venom away from our corona warriors#थूक_मत_जाहलil <https://t.co/BqnM0wDVbi>”

“#IslamicVirus is worst than #coronavirus Decent Scandinavians did not realize what they are bringing to their homes & their country. You don't keep “Cobra as pet” #swedenriots #Norwayriots two example from #Sweden & #Norway <https://t.co/4cw0iTcmxe>”

Linked to this are attempts to dehumanise Muslims. An important element of this theme is the effort to strip Muslims of their human identity, to cast them out as others and in particular present them as animals and vermin. This behaviour online has been used to demonstrate the living standards of Muslims, describing them as unhygienic and how their way of living inhibits social distancing. This content is an effort to further promote how Muslims are spreading coronavirus.

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“Omg!! These filthy people live like rats! And what social distancing are they doing? They have no loyalty towards India! Islam means #terrorism #muslimvirus #muslimliars #muslims_are_terrorist #antiindia #muslimsspreadingcorona #Terrorist #lockdownindia #coronavirus #hindustan <https://t.co/XTyG447HEr>”

“She’s just another filthy #Muslim cult member who wants to wipe of the white race. She’s an evil genocidal manic that should be sent to a #muslims cesspit to live. #Satan is strong in that one and her kind. #PureEvil”

“They can not be human, They are Psycho killer .. Treat them the same... #CrushTablighiSpitters <https://t.co/tzY586vZ95>”

“Convert all the mosques to quarantine centres for these #TablighiJamaat animals”

Content found online demonstrated a similarity amongst users in relation to how to deal with Muslims who are described as super spreaders. A significant rhetoric here is that Muslims need to be punished for their behaviour during the pandemic, many accounts encourage the use of deadly force against the so called super spreaders.

“Why govt doesn’t declare that all Jamaatis who are still hiding are potential corona bombs and they will be shot at if they don’t come out in next 2 days?I am sure, all Jamaatis will be standing in a line before end of day”

“Shoot these bastard who are attacking on medical staff...#CrushTablighiSpitters <https://t.co/54hBkDZIJb>”

The rhetoric found in this theme around the dehumanisation of Muslims online concurs with research that has previously found similar behaviour online, showing how a key characteristic of hate speech online targeted towards Muslim is the tactic of dehumanisation (Awan, 2016). Research has outlined the effects of dehumanisation, whereby the persecutor experiences a reduced capacity for empathy, which can see the denial of human rights and encouragement of violence towards the dehumanised individual/group (Murrow & Murrow, 2015).



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Key Findings

Islam and Covid-19

2. Muslims are Receiving Special Treatment during Covid-19

This theme embodies the rhetoric that during the pandemic Muslims have received special treatment, whereby they have been able to ignore Covid-19 rules and continue normal life without any restrictions that are in place for others.

“Muslim COVID spreaders get off while other Aussies are fined. Muslims seem to be a protected species in □ @DanielAndrewsMP □ CCP State VicDanistan. #BanIslam #BanDan - Q Society should be running #Victoria ! <https://t.co/MMJyHngJbY>”

Key Behaviours that signify this rhetoric includes the lack of social distancing amongst Muslims, large gatherings and still being able to attend mosques. Content suggests that there has been special rules and relaxation for Muslims, this is specifically relevant during the Holy month of Ramadan, where Muslims have been able to ignore Covid-19 and are immune to punishment from the police.

“Hundreds of Muslims seen leaving a mosque in Dublin today, Ireland remains in level 5 lockdown. It certainly seems that different rules apply to different people as when people gathered at the grave of Michael Collins to say the rosary they were dispersed <https://t.co/yc3WDXlGtZ> <https://t.co/tX9SPKfeoX>”

“But Muslims still go 300 to a mosque and taxi drivers are supper spreaders along with police.. ever muslim area has been hit the worse. So don't you think you should stop them.. no because its do as I say not as I do..!!!!”

“It's not “Ramadan”, this time it's “CORONADAN”, by the way these people are distributing the corona virus across social groups by spitting, defecating and urinating on edibles.”

“And why relaxation is given during Ramzan, Sambit ji? Is #LockdownForHindusOnly ? We sacrificed our festivals for greater good of nation and now we see PIECEFULS mocking us while they shop in herds for Ramzan.Why #StayHomeStaySafe not for them?”

Attempts to portray the disparity of treatment during Covid is reflected in comments that state that it is one rule for Muslims and another for everyone else. In addition, efforts have been made to highlight evident discrimination to Christian communities during Covid, where they are bearing the brunt of Covid-19 restrictions and punishments. Calls have been made for the government to do more and take actions against Muslims disobeying lockdown rules.

“@LeoVaradkar No Beatings For BLM OR Full mosques with 100s in attendance while christian churches remain closed. Racisim is being perpetrated against Irish people their own country. LEO you have opened the floodgates yesterday promising houses for all asylum seekers. its the last Straw.”

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Islam and Covid-19

3.Hindus are Corona Warriors against Islam

This theme refers to messages that represent a collective force in India attempting to expose how Muslims are causing Covid chaos in India. This theme symbolises Hindus as corona warriors who are trying to control the virus and produce vaccines, whilst fighting against Muslims who are spreading the virus.

“Nobody hates Muslims in india, Muslims are playing the minority card because they know that they have broken rules in Delhi and caused so much chaos with corona in india and nothing else”

“I request jahils not to spit. Please, keep your venom away from our corona warriors #थूक_मत_जाहलil <https://t.co/BqnM0wDVbi>”

Hashtags such as Covid 786 have been used to signify a gathering of the Tablighi Jamaat, an event which has been blamed for the spread of Covid-19 in India. References to this have included messages that state that the behaviour of the Tablighi Jamaat is equivalent to terrorist behaviour. There have been attempts to demonstrate how India have been enduring more suffering during the pandemic. This relates to comments which state that the rest of the world are only suffering from Covid-19 whereas India is also dealing with an internal attack from corona jihad who are spreading the virus.

“Can't you see the PEOPLE CELEBRATING? This event celebrated the success of #CoronaJehad . And yes, they really deserve it. After all, much effort was put behind the same like Tablighi congregation, tablighi's spitting and urinating, stone pelting, Killing Corona warriors etc.”

“1,445 cases linked to Tablighi Jamaat event, total crosses 4,000 - India News <https://t.co/XjbpiUv0Zt>”

Messages suggest that there has been a vendetta against Hindus in India during pandemic. This is evident in comments that depict that Muslims are purposely infecting Hindus. References have been made to suggest they are experiencing a Hindu lockdown, whereby only their livelihood has been threatened by the pandemic compared to Muslims who have been above the law and ignored Covid guidelines.

“First they do #biojihad then 50 Peacefuls attacked law abiding hindu family who expressed their concerns about safety of society. This is pure terrorism. #CoronaJihad #IslamicCoronaJehad <https://t.co/uNJV8aKqHW>”

“Nothing new it's the hate which most of muslims living in india have against hindus, he was praying for 50 crore hindus to get killed by corona virus & they will make this country an islamic country.”

“Absolutely true, However, the problem is that our govt has also inclined towards appeasement. That is why, PIECEFULS are wreaking havoc on this country. #CoronaJehad #LockdownForHindusOnly”

“#islamicvirus <https://t.co/hq4NnFltcp>”

“#Islamophobia #victimCard #jihadagainsthindus #Hinduphobic #IslamicVirus #IslamicState #IslamicVictimCard Peaceful religion peaceful talks @UN <https://t.co/oqq8IBXJCF>”



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Islam and Covid-19

4. Covid-19 Originated from the Quran

Throughout many of the comments there were efforts to demonstrate a link between the involvement of Islam and Covid-19. This theme underpins ideas that suggest that Covid-19 originated from the Quran.

“The origin of #Covid_19 is from Quran :- #ShaheenaBagh #protestor #CoronavirusOutbreakindia #JantaCurfewVsShaheenBagh #CoronaStopKaroNa <https://t.co/FGfqMf6eJr>”

This perspective explores the characteristics of Islam addressing the fundamental links it has to terrorism. This view has developed during the pandemic to promote ideas that suggest that Covid-19 is part of Islam’s agenda to spread hate and terror.

“@Asshole get out of India with your entire filthy community! Infesting every country and spreading hate and terror! You are intolerant of every other religion and are murderers #muslims_are_terrorist #muslims_are_hinduphobic #muslimsspreadingcorona #muslimvirus #muslimliars”

Key words such as Quran corona demonstrate the attempts to link the two. Commentators stated that Allah has guided Muslims in the spread of the virus. Metaphors have been used to further the link between Islam and Covid, in suggesting that Covid grew a beard.

“Muslim man wipes his nose and mucous on currency notes to spread #coronavirus pandemic. He claims there is no cure for #COVID19 because it is disease sent by Allah to destroy infidels. <https://t.co/g0TRIOgklf>”

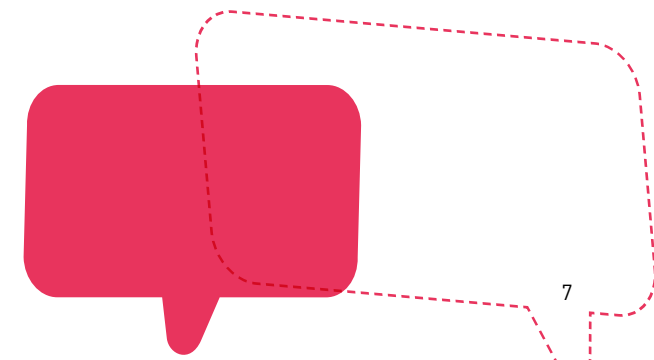
“Why are the muslims here in India acting so rudely Pelting stones on Doctors and abusing them and being distributor of Corona and stating Corona as Allah’s blessing. #IslamicCoronaJehad”

Commentators have signified the integral role mosques have played in helping the spread of the virus. Mosques have been described as a breeding ground to spread hate and terror and now Covid, through teaching radicals how to spread the virus. References have suggested how mosques are being used to hide the disease bombs. Terms such as a corona bomb have been used to further symbolise a link between Covid-19 and terrorism.

“Patna, Meerut, Nizamuddin Mosque, Sudan, Kenya, China, Indonesia, Malaysia? Clerics of Kyrgyzstan are hiding? First hide foreign disease-bombs in mosques, then spread the disease, drop dead bodies and then send the government to full vigor. #CoronaJihad”

“Why govt doesn’t declare that all Jamaatis who are still hiding are potential corona bombs and they will be shot at if they don’t come out in next 2 days? I am sure, all Jamaatis will be standing in a line before end of day”

“#CrushTablighiSpitters They act like using biological weapons like corona This Is The Serious Act of Terrorism. They Are Acting Like Suicide Attackers. <https://t.co/JUYEdfQkSs>”



Study 3: Key findings

PRO-SOCIAL ELEMENTS:

1. The epidemic of Islamophobia during Covid-19

This theme refers to pro social comments which demonstrate that there has been an epidemic of islamophobia during Covid-19. This theme highlights how the pandemic has seen a widespread influx of anti-Muslim hate, including attacks and abuse (online and offline) which has been fuelled by the media who have perpetuated Islamophobia through peddling fake news stories. Commentators have attempted to expose the failures of social media companies in adhering to their responsibility of tackling online hate.

“UP Muslim woman attacked, tonsured for marrying Dalit #UttarPradesh #India #Covid_19 #CoronaVirusUpdates <https://t.co/GdC8a5lqo0>”

“Indian Media ran 24x7 propaganda against Muslims because few cases of Covid-19 were found at Nizamuddin Markaz. Same Indian Media is silent on #ArnabGate . No outrage over Arnab and Pulwama-Balakot?? WHO was leaking state secrets to Arnab?? #AntiNationalBJPArbab”

“Modi govt wants lakhs of students to attend exams during pandemic. Same govt and its lapdog media had demonized Tablighi Jamaat for holding a meet when India had few Covid cases. Hypocrisy ki seema hoti hai. #SATYAGRAH_AgainstExamsInCovid”

This theme demonstrates a double standard in the treatment of Muslims compared to Hindus during the pandemic. This is evident in content related to Covid masks and Islamic face coverings as well as the disparity in the reactions to Hindu and Muslim celebrations that have occurred during the pandemic.

“Indian Media on Muslims: Tablighi jamaat is a “Covid Hotspot”. Muslims are “Super spreaders jihadi” Indian Media on Hindus: Kumbh Mela is a “Festival”. Hindus are “Devotees”.? #KumbhMela_CoronaHotSpot #KumbhCorona #KumbhMela2021 Indian Media is War-Monger Threat for India. <https://t.co/K1oOG0YZJZ>”

“A day before #WomensDay, Switzerland attacked the religious freedom of Muslim women by banning Islamic face covering in public spaces. Cover your face for COVID = good. Cover your face for Islam = bad. <https://t.co/9E6IHVSjYE>”



Study 3: Key findings

India chose to blame and dehumanise Muslims rather than fight Covid-19

The epidemic of Islamophobia that has been outlined by commentators has demonstrated the treatment of Muslims in India. This perspective indicates how India chose to focus on blaming and dehumanising Muslims as the expense of fighting the virus.

“The necropolitics of neoliberal state response to the Covid-19 pandemic in India: “The state enacted a violent discourse of Hindu nationalism to blame Muslims for the spread of the pandemic and to deflect attention from its abdication of responsibility.” <https://t.co/EN4jhW56HD> <https://t.co/5WzxLx7HP0>”

“Read how #Modi #BJP’s focus of exlns let the virus run rampant. BJP forgot virus doesn’t knoll only Muslims, Christians but kills Hindus equally devastatingly. Why is India seeing such a huge surge in Covid-19 cases? @BJP4India #NewIndia @AamAadmiParty <https://t.co/GSz8wWfxsD>”

Commentators express how Covid-19 has been an opportunity for the prime minister and government of India to promote their agenda. These actions have been blamed for creating a larger divide in India between muslims and Hindus

“#coronavirus is an opportunity for MODI :- 🗣️ To Jail #AntiCAA protesters, 🗣️ To increase fuel price, 🗣️ To raise propaganda against Muslim, 🗣️ To blame Tablighi jamaat for corona. #Islamophobia #MuslimTwitter <https://t.co/5WnZGus26d>”

2. Importance of creating a counter narrative to fight Islamophobia during Covid-19

A significant message amongst the pro social comments online is the need to provide a counter narrative when fighting Islamophobia online. This has particularly been expressed due to the increase in Islamophobia online during Covid-19.

“\$225 million dollars is spent in the west to spread hatred against Muslims and Islam. Therefore we need to consistently post positive stories. There are other factors to consider. Such as calling to Tawheed. Debating enemies. Dispelling myths.”

“2. Spreaders of hatred say Muslims are backwards and ignorant. Oppose this with regular content on how Muslims are benefiting humanity with knowledge and science. 3. They say Islam oppresses women. Post regular content by women on how Islam has liberated them.”

These pro social comments are promoting the dissemination of good and kind behaviour of Muslims during the pandemic. This is evident in numerous comments that highlight the good will and the help that Muslims have provided during the pandemic.

“At a time when BJP regime was hounding and scapegoating Tablighi Jamaat members, a unique work for humanity by constructing a hospital was being silently done for the people of the country by Muslims in Bengaluru.”

“#MuslimTwitter <https://t.co/mDsBdeyiVY> Branded as Cow killers, Virus Spreaders, etc., In reality Muslims save cows, conducts rituals of patients died of COVID, donate plasma after recovery. What a ungrateful people, never come to muslims aide, huh !!”

Study 3: Key findings

Islamophobia themes on social media

1. Islam is incompatible with modern day society

This theme presents arguments stating that Islam is incompatible with modern day society. Comments refer to Islam as an outdated and medieval religion, which is incompatible with modern day western societies.

“Only RT if you agree that Islam is a shite, controlling and outdated religion. <https://t.co/G0m424mmzT> <https://t.co/ESv02DWNHp>”

“@phl43 What else can we expect from Muslim ideology, stuck permanently in the 6th century”

“@pritipatel This is what happens when we pretend that Islam has a place in a civilised country”

Emphasis is placed on presenting Muslims as animals and making clear comparisons between humanity and Islam, demonstrating a continued effort to dehumanise Muslims. In addition to this, commentators also question the mentality and sanity of Muslims, presenting them as being unable to be logical, coherent, and rational beings.

“#IslamicVirus is worst than #coronavirus Decent Scandinavians did not realize what they are bringing to their homes & their country. You don't keep “Cobra as pet” #swedenriots #Norwayriots two example from #Sweden & #Norway <https://t.co/4cw0iTcmxe>”

There are many references to Islam being dangerous, describing it as a Cult that has demonic links. Additionally, Comments highlight that Islam is characterised by oppression and control, where men own women and how the burqa is a symbol of oppression.

“I dont understand y any christian nation and U.N is not intervening into this matters of centuries old churches being converted into mosques ...and what is d pope doing #Putin ... i pray this church could be saved frm deamons 😊 <https://t.co/OHgzVeVGfQ>”

“Islam is not a religion. It is a land grabbing agency/cult started by a desert dacoit named Mohammed. “Islam is path to terrorism” I am not saying this. Muslim's themselves are proving it 🇸🇦 <https://t.co/gqAxpz4SEG>”



Study 3: Key findings

2. Muslim agenda to take over

This theme discusses what many commentators refer to as the embodiment, or more simply the reality of Islam. Significant elements which underpin this theme are related to comments that suggest that Islam has an agenda, which is characterised by a drive for power and takeover.

“Exactly so why allow in those who have zero intention of integrating but instead have an openly published agenda to force compliance to their regressive and barbaric ways, ie Islam! Sheer lunacy.”

“They respect no state, this is the 4th REICH different agenda, but the same narrative. MERKEL is the leader and the architect of it all.. If she ever steps down she has achieved her plan to Islamise Europe by 2050. She has a prize from the KALEGI PLAN big wigs. <https://t.co/eL7l78wBMr>”

Comments state that Muslims strive to achieve positions of power, within government and intelligence agencies in the pursuit of Islamic dominance and takeover. Links have been made to suggest that the Quran is guiding Muslims in this pursuit of an Islamic takeover, whereby mosques are integral to the plan as this signifies Islamic territory.

“Muslim Brotherhood taking over our intelligence agencies! Hillary sold it all to Huma! They are coming after Larvita’s friends! MB owns Antifa!”

“Many feeling Britain is changing into an Islamist nation too. >Churches torched >Machete justice >Gov’t shutdown over half the UK’s pubs, most permanently. What’s next! Covid alcohol bans? >Muslim councillors allowing Mosques to blast out calls to payer at 140+db Britain is lost <https://t.co/tHojidLe2M>”

With this theme is a concern for Muslims achieving places of power within governments particularly in western countries, arguing that there is an evident conflict of interest. Whereby Muslims are ‘surely’ unable to follow and promote democracy whilst following the Quran. Further demonstrating elements of perceived incompatibility of Islam related to the previous theme.

“Just a query...how can any Muslim who follows the Koran to the letter inc Sharia, able to be a politician in a modern democracy? Surely, he is constantly at odds with what his Book tells him & the laws, customs & traditions of the country he is supposed to serve before all else?”



Study 3: Key findings

Covid-19 themes on social media:

1. The origin of Covid-19

Many of the perspectives online have provided a discussion around the origins of covid-19. Many comments have made references to the origin of Covid-19 in China, labelling it the Chinese virus.

"@KaurNimish @RedmiIndia I understand. But originally it's from China. And now, the world doesn't have trust on China because of hiding and cheating #ChineseVirus #worldfightscorona #coronavirus"

"#WuhanVirus #ChineseVirus"

A dominant element to this theme is the presence of paranoia and suspicion. This is evident in the attempts to question information that governments, the world health organisation and the media have provided, suggesting that they are concealing the truth around Covid-19.

"They are also influential in spreading the virus and being china's puppet. The world needs to stand together and overthrow this monster! World hoax organisation! <https://t.co/NZGkOoqpfV>"



"<https://t.co/coijl5dHRA> MSM is CORRUPT From cronyism to China ties, to an unending web of lies and half-truths... Media bias doesn't begin to describe how media giants have weaponized fake news to the benefit of the left, the globalists, and the multi-national corporations!"

This theme has highlighted how commentators have attempted to demonstrate how there is more to the origin of Covid-19 than once first thought. Comments suggest that corruption has played a role in the so called 'unleashing' of the virus. Suggesting that the virus is part of an agenda, such as the push for communism.

"Right, that's it!! Can you see all the left wing narratives? Everything we stand for is simply being exterminated, everywhere with democracy ideologys, and everything democracy created. Covid-19 is just how communism spreads, but it's now part Islamic, part China!. Invasion"

"Designer virus to destabilise the world communism at it's best"

"COVID-19 could have emerged as part of China's military program to develop a universal antidote to bio-weapons. He believes that China already had a vaccine and were figuring out ways to "weaponize" coronavirus and make it more lethal. We know!"

This presence of suspicion and paranoia is also evident in discussion around the Covid-19 vaccine. Commentators question the efficacy and purpose of the vaccine. As well as demonstrating the failures that have been present during the vaccine rollout.

"Is that the vaccine with the tracking and sterilisation gene ?"

"Bill Gates: "The world is over-populated." Also Bill Gates: "Everyone should have this injection I've helped develop."

Study 3: Key findings

Covid-19 themes on social media:

2. Covid-19 social control

Many of the messages around the pandemic suggest that Covid-19 is a hoax. Prevailing messages question the reality of the Covid-19, calling into question the validity of testing methods and suggesting that infection rates and significant developments regarding the virus are false.

“The fact is we have NO idea what’s going on. WE CAN NOT TRUST OUR HEALTH EXPERTS OR THE GOVERNMENT OR THE FAKE NEWS TO TELL US THE TRUTH.”

“Just putting this here 😊😊 Top Pathologist Claims Coronavirus is “The Greatest Hoax Ever Perpetrated on an Unsuspecting Public” – Summit News <https://t.co/rCpCe0Dpim>”

These questions of validity appear to stem from a consensus of paranoia and scepticism around the government. Many claims suggest that the pandemic has exposed lies and corruption that is entrenched within the government. This had led to the beliefs that Covid-19 is being used as a form of social control, whereby the government is forcing medical coercion through techniques such as vaccine passports.

“New #VaccinePassport is not based on science or any clinical evidence. It is 100% about social control, tracking and medical coercion. All in the name of “#COVID safety.” 🗨️#EU Vaccine Passport Scheme Rejected by Some Member States, WHO Skeptical... <https://t.co/nGwDNeiGod> <https://t.co/GhoUql3q0V>”

“RT @davidkurten: Vaccine passports are the latest manifestation of medical fascism. A critical mass of people must resist now: No mask. No test. No track. No trace. No vaxx. Choose your future.”

This theme embodies concerns of an attack on free will, where choice and autonomy are being constrained. This has led to people exerting a clear defiance online to rebel from the so-called social control in which they face. Attempts to invalidate information around Covid as well as dispute the need for Covid restrictions has played a key role in this defiance. This type of behaviour online during the pandemic has become entangled with misinformation and conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories around politics are becoming more and more common. The degree of individual agency in the dissemination of conspiracy theories on social media, has meant that during a time of decline in political trust, participation is easier to access and provides a more engaging alternative to mainstream forms of participation in political discussion (Dacombe, 2021). Therefore, resulting in more diverse and ‘seemingly’ plausible political ideas and theories, which ultimately form conspiracy theories.



Study 3: Key findings

YouTube Thematic Analysis

This stage of the research project utilised a subset of data from the previously collected YouTube comments detailed in Study 1. A more detailed analysis of linguistic features was to be conducted on this subset of data, primarily to reveal commenter attitudes and perceptions on Covid-19, Islam and the Muslim community, and the dissemination of misinformation. As such, the present analysis was to provide a comprehensive summary and illustration of the significant and reoccurring themes, attitudes, and commenter perspectives present in the data set. Furthermore, the output of this analysis would assist in the forthcoming analysis of how the circulation of online content and attitudes corresponded to offline behaviour.

Design

A small sub-set of YouTube comments were extracted from the main data set to provide a representative sample that could be qualitatively analysed for insight into themes, perspectives, and attitudes expressed by commenters towards a range of topics, such as those which focused on Covid-19, misinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories, and Islamophobia.

Participants

The number of participants used in the present study was a smaller representative subset of comments from the main data set, which was based on acceptable levels of data saturation. Saunders et al (2018) note that collection of data beyond a given point may fail to produce any additional insights, thus may result in negligible data collection and management (Sargeant, 2012), As such, 1000 YouTube comments from the larger 112850 were extracted and considered the point at which data was acceptably saturated.

Materials

The description of materials used in the present study can be categorised as relating to comment scraping or data analysis. In terms of comment scraping, YouTube comments were scraped using a YouTube API open-source software called YouTube Comment Suite (version 1.4.5), developed by GitHub user Mattwright324. The software enables users to download all comments for a selected video, as well as other key data metrics, such as number of comments, and video likes and dislikes. In terms of data analysis, the Microsoft Office package was used, within which software such as Word and Excel were used for a range of different processes (such as data cleaning and comment filtering by keywords).

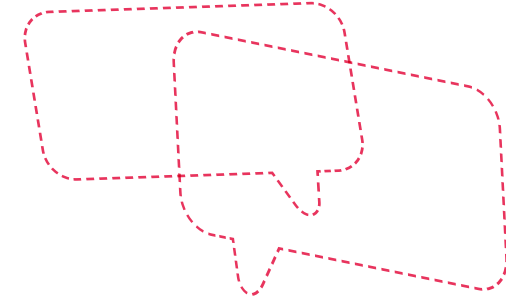
Procedure

Considering the concept of data saturation and data management, the subset of data analysed in the present study totalled 1000 comments. As detailed in Study 1, all 46 videos were sorted into one of five video categories (see Table 1). A total of 200 comments were then extracted from each video category (thereby equally fulfilling the 1000 comment quota). However, as each category varied in the number of videos they were comprised of, the number of comments to be extracted from each video differed. The formula used to calculate the number of comments to be extracted from each video was to divide 200 by the total number of videos in each category. Table 1 details the average number of comments that were extracted from each video (as per the broader category in which the video was sorted).

YouTube



Study 3: Key findings



YouTube Thematic Analysis

Table 18: Number of videos per category

Category	Number of videos	Average number of comments per video
Covid + Islam / Muslims / BAME (Europe)	18	11
Covid + Islam / Muslims (India)	3	65
General Islam	7	29
Covid-19 Conspiracy	3	65
Anti-Vaxx	15	13

Determining which comments were to be extracted from each video was based on filtering comments which contained a given keyword (based on the video category and general focus), to ensure that comments analysed were relevant to the scope and interest of the project. Table 2 outlines which keywords were used for comment filtering as per video category and title. Instances where the number of filtered comments exceeded the number of comments required to be extracted from each video (Table 1), an additional formula of total number of filtered comments divided by number of comments to be extracted was used. For example, with the “Anti-Vaxx” category requiring 13 comments per video, following the filtering of keywords outlined in Table 2, approximately 130 comments were identified for a given video. In this case, 130 was divided by 13, reaching the number 10, therefore every 10th comment was extracted. The finalised subset of comments was then subject to a content analysing using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Table 19: Keywords used for comment extraction

Category	Example keywords used for comment extraction*
Covid + Islam / Muslims / BAME (Europe)	Muslim + Islam + Britain + BAME + Racist
	Mosque + Jihad + Covid + Coronavirus + Ethnic
Covid + Islam / Muslims (India)	Muslim + Virus + Islam + Spit + Jihad
General Islam	Mosque + Islam + Jihad + Racism + Cancer + Evil + Radical
Covid-19 Conspiracy	Depopulation + Government + 5G
Anti-Vaxx	Conspiracy + Government + 5G + Vaccine + Anti + Depopulation + Trust + Plandemic + Fake

*Note: each keyword is separated by a + sign.

Study 3: Key findings

Data analysis

The subset of data was analysed using thematic analysis using the Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2014) guidelines and stages.

Findings and discussion

An overwhelming majority of the YouTube comments were negative, with the analysis revealing six key themes, each of which were distinct in topic focus but possessed clear links and relationships between them. Given the revolving nature of the comments to the YouTube videos, each of the themes encapsulated an array of attitudes towards six key areas: Attitudes towards government and state authorities, Attitudes towards conspiracies, Attitudes towards Covid, Attitudes towards BAME, Attitudes towards Muslims and Attitudes towards Islam.

Theme 1: Attitudes towards government and state authorities

Commenters tended to adopt a critical attitude towards state authorities, and often called into question the agenda or motive behind many of the decisions taken by the government during the pandemic.

Sub-Theme: Mistrust

A strong emphasis of most comments conveyed mistrust in the government, health authorities, and mainstream and social media. One such example was the alleged governmental signing of non-liability clauses that suggested a double standard of advocacy for vaccination, but also doubt on whether the vaccine was safe:

“... they are asking people to Trust Vaccines, which none of Manufactures Governments Trust hence agreeing signing non Liability Clauses in case of Deaths or Injuries in order to avoid any responsibilities...”

Similar attitudes were expressed, where one commenter called into question the confidence the government possess towards the vaccines, by alleging that the government had exempted all vaccine manufacturers from any vaccine-related litigation:

“The government is so confident that vaccines do not hurt people, that they made all vaccine company's exempt from lawsuits!!”

Comments also indicated mistrust for health authorities, such as the World Health Organisation, with reference being made to unspecified previous instances where the organisations were sued for lying and spreading misinformation:

“...the W.H.O. (World Health Organization) as well as the C.D.C. (Center for Disease Control) have both already been proven sued for lying about Covid-19, the actual tests to test for Covid when created was never created to even test for infectious diseases, to the true fact that 99% of true covid cases recover completely on thier own without any medicine (I myself being on of those cases)”

Significant mistrust was also expressed towards mainstream media outlets, with comments ranging from historical examples of inaccurate or unsubstantiated reporting, to cover-ups, internal corruption, and misdirection of public attention. For example, one commenter referred to the role of mainstream media in the reporting of the 2003 Iraq war, with reference to weapons of mass destruction:

“... The last three decades of lies has eroded any trust that I have in any mainstream media. Im still waiting for the WMDs to be found...”

Similar attitudes of mistrust were expressed with reference made to the 9/11 terrorist attack:

“How about how the BBC reported the collapse of World Trade Center Building Seven fell a half hour before it actually did on 9/11. Talk about fake news.”

Study 3: Key findings

Sub-Theme: Misinformation

A key concern of commenters that comprised their mistrust for mainstream and social media was the presence of misinformation and misleading reporting, characterised by perceived propaganda and fake news. For example, the mainstream media coverage of the Covid-19 vaccine rollout was interpreted as propaganda:

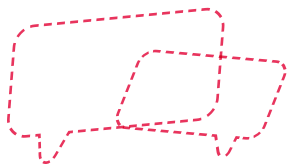
"...Why do the BBC keep pushing propaganda.. This fake news outlet should be taken down.. Tell the people the truth .. These vaccines are killing people thats why they've stopped the roll out People please do your own research..."

The coverage of the NHS's ability to withstand the toll of the pandemic and rise in cases was also regarded as misleading:

"My job entails speaking with NHS staffing departments and they told me the government covid deaths must be wrong. Also they confirmed the hospital have only been at a maximum capacity of 40%."

Commenters expressed similar attitudes towards social media, however in contrast to the general attitude towards mainstream media (a corrupt institution that reports an official narrative that is misleading), the attitude towards social media was that misinformation took the form of contrarian and anti-establishment perspectives:

"The problem with anti vaccination believers is they will believe Joe bloggs (with no scientific background) peddling unbelievable conspiracy theories on social media"



Study 3: Key findings

Sub-Theme: Perceptions of conspiracy proponents

At a closer look, the data also revealed both support and rejection for conspiracy proponents, with supporting comments drawing attention to the discrediting of alternative perspectives, while rejecting comments focusing on the characteristics of conspiracy proponents:

Supporting

Comments which conveyed support or sympathy for proponents of conspiracy theories tended to focus on the way in which alternative perspectives are criticised or derided by mainstream society, which in some cases was interpreted as mainstream society's attempt at covering the conspiracy up, or evidence for the conspiracy to be real:

“Any legitimate questions which they refuse to answer they call conspiracy theories.”

“nothing is a conspiracy theory. people who say that are hiding something.....”

The recognition and ridicule of conspiracy theory was also interpreted as evidence of existence:

“Such conspiracy theory but isnt it funny how they all keep bringing it up? Think if this way see if the conspiracy theories were jst tht why do they feel the need to keep addressing it would it not be more effective to jst ignore the crazy conspiracy theorists instead of feeding into their crazy conspiracies? Ud think so wudnt u?...”

Rejecting

Compared with supporting comments for proponents of conspiracy theories, rejecting attitudes were much more frequently expressed within the data. Mainly, rejection for conspiracy focused on attacking the personal characteristics of proponents, the harm conspiracy proponents cause to broader society, and that they are paid to spread disinformation.

The public harm caused by proponents was also discussed, with commenters highlighting the danger associated with the spread of misinformation during the pandemic:

“...hasn't to take responsibility for the deaths they cause...”

“...The deniers are virus enablers need arresting for the part they play in the deaths of so many 😞”

Speculation on the motives of conspiracy proponents also emerged in the data, with commenters often citing individual pleasure or gratification, and monetary reward as the reasons for why conspiracy misinformation was maintained and shared:

“...Some are doing it deliberately and are getting off on the fear they are causing. Conspiracy theorists are conspiring to create fear and confusion...”

“...Maybe those trolls are paid to spread disinformation.”



Study 3: Key findings

Theme 2: Attitudes towards BAME

Theme 4 was the first theme wherein specific reference and observation was made on how the Black, Asian and minority ethnic UK demographic responded to the pandemic, with specific focus targeted towards perceptions of the BAME community, health inequalities, and potential health priority.

Sub-Theme: Perceptions of BAME community

Several comments expressed disapproval for the term BAME, citing it was offensive, divisive, and regressive:

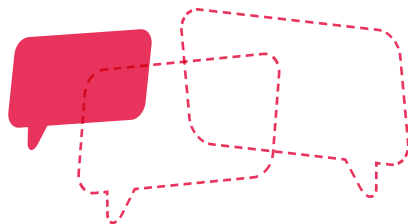
“BAME is so offensive. We should not be using that acronym it's going backwards”

“BAME PEOPLE??? WE ARE ALL HUMAN BEINGS STOP HIGHLIGHTING THE FACT PEOPLE AREN'T WHITE!!! DO YOU EVER INTRODUCE PEOPLE AS WHITE PEOPLE???? NO, YOU DON'T! WE ARE ALL ONE RACE. SICK OF IT.”

There were some negative perceptions of the BAME community expressed in the comments that cited BAME crime or a lack of gratitude for entitlement:

“How on earth can Lammy mouth on about BAME victims of Covid-19 when BAME people have been kicking the shite out of white people all over London...”

“We are all sick of the fabulously ungrateful and entitled BAME”



Sub-Theme: BAME health inequalities

Significant attention has been drawn towards the health inequalities between different ethnic groups. The Covid-19 pandemic provided another instance in which ethnic health inequalities were to be discussed, with the topic receiving significant media attention. Comments tended to focus on providing explanations for why the BAME community experienced inequity in health outcomes.

Commenters cited that the disproportionate health outcomes present in the BAME community was a product of their own behaviour, such as an aversion to vaccination or adherence to lockdown measures:

“It's not the fact that the police had to fine 4 times more bame for breaking lock down rules. Funny how the greater death rate is the exact same percentage. What a coincidence... it can't be that thought, it must be racist because it's never your own fault.”

Other explanations for why BAME health inequity existed pointed towards differences in socio-economic status and employment:

“...It's probably because minority groups represent a huge part of medical/nursing/carer workers. You can see this on any ward, especially within care-homes...”

“...the differences were more likely to be caused by demographic and socio-economic factors, such as where people live and the kind of jobs they do....and as Newcastle is mostly white and urban and suffers similar rates as the Bame areas that clearly demonstrates its geography and jobs not ethnicity that are the defining factors in who gets covid19.... population density and public facing jobs.”

There was also mention of biological factors as being a reason for why BAME health inequity existed:

“unbelievable.... yeah, covid is racist - Nothing to do with vitamin D levels in people with darker skin. Nope. it's WAAAAAACCISM...”

Study 3: Key findings

Sub-Theme: BAME health priorities

The potential for Black, Asian and minority ethnicities to receive health priority in response to the growing public awareness to existing health inequalities was also discussed in the data. Generally, the attitude towards this potential health strategy was widely condemned and labelled as racists:

“...but to prioritise people based on Race/Ethnicity is Racist, like do people really want to go down this path?”

“...But this should never be a question of colour, race, ethnic background! I am so sick of normalisation of this reverse discrimination. Discrimination is discrimination - no matter what the form.”

In contrast, some commenters argued that prioritisation should be based on risk and not ethnicity per se (though if those from the BAME community are at more risk on the basis of health and not ethnicity alone, then priority would be acceptable):

“People with underlying health issues should be prioritised, black and Asian people are more likely genetically to have underlying health conditions, so in that way yes, more as a percentage will be prioritised but no one should be at the front of the queue on ethnicity alone.”

“i dont even know why this is even a question ? i thought the government told us not so long ago that this virus affects ethnic people more well if thats the case then yes you should be prioritising them along with those that are at the highest risk”

Sub-Theme: Perceptions of BAME community

While there were comments within the data set which expressed attitudes and perceptions of BAME, several comments focused specifically on the behaviour of the Muslim community. A portion of comments focused on the behaviour of Muslims during the pandemic, while most expressed heavy criticism of Muslims as a community.

Sub-Theme: Covid-19

In relation to Covid-19, discussion focused on how Muslims adhered to lockdown measures. Several comments accused Muslims of flouting lockdown measures, or purposefully spreading the virus:

“They will all go mosque, catch covid and die. plus give it to their families”

“...Some of the peaceful deliberately spits on the road or spit on the food delivered to you .For them, this is CoRona Jihad...”

Some comments also included speculation on the motives or reasons for why Muslims would not cooperate with the Covid-19 response strategy, such as adhering to lockdown or taking the vaccine:

“...yet when they become ill with covid they are then a poor minority victim and the virus is racist...”

“What if Coronavirus Vaccine content is Porchine (PIG)...”

There were some supporting comments however, with users noting that Muslims are adhering to lockdown measures as per religious guidelines, and in some cases better than those of other religious communities:

“Islam strictly prohibits leaving the country that has the plague or going to a country that has a plague and going outside of your house during a plague and meeting people during a plague and going to a mosque during a plague...”

“...Now we are in Ramadan (half way through actually) and ALL mosques in US are shut down and following the social distancing guidelines...unlike several churches in midwest where the virus is still being preached as a liberal hoax.”

This was also evident in discussions on the use of mosques during the pandemic, with a majority of comments making mention that mosques were closed as per state guidelines:

“Stupid ignorant fools don't even know that mosques are close even in Muslim countries. Most Islamic countries closed mosque and asking for to pray at home...”

Study 3: Key findings

Sub-Theme: Taking over

Beyond highlighting Muslim behaviour in relation to the pandemic, the data revealed several other areas of commenter focus on other issues. For instance, the perception that the Muslim community is taking over or invading. This view was expressed from three main countries: India, the UK, and the US:

“...You will have sleepless nights by learning the brutal truth of Muslims invasions in India...”

“England will soon become islamic Nation.”

“islam will rule england and rest India”

Sub-Theme: Not welcome

Following the general perspective that the Muslim community is taking over or invading, the rhetoric of Muslims not being welcome or desirable was strongly expressed in numerous comments. A variety of aversive views were expressed, such as the arrival of Muslims as being the gateway to social problems:

“i don't understand why western countries allowing muslims in their country.. you guys are creating trouble for yourself”

“...to open the door of terror prone people in Poland.... Very good replies by Polish person... Keep this jihads out”

It was also thought that if Muslims arrive to any country, it would lead to the imposition of Sharia law:

“If he removes ban..Radical Islam will be here..where they practice sharia law..”

“1. Muslim ask for home2. Muslim ask for mosque3. Muslim ask for madrasah (islamic school).4. Muslim ask for muslim leader (governor/ PM)5. Muslim ask for sharia law (islamic law)6. Finnally, muslim ask for your country...”

Some commenters asserted that Muslims do not integrate into society, which is why they are not welcomed:

“...This isnt a war, this isnt Muslims and or Islam taking over. This is simply a main problem with integration.”

Specific references were made to the involvement of Muslims in attacking healthcare workers (in India):

“Dirty violent community who beats doctors and spit on them, I dont know why doctors still treat them, hate these people.”

“Even animals wont bite there saviours...how can some human beings spit on medical staff..out of my mind.”

Commenters also suggested ways in which the problem with Muslims “taking over” could be addressed and mitigated. Mainly, this was with the criminalisation of believing in Islam, deportation, or denying Muslims :

“The cure would be for the British Government to criminalise being a Muslim and supporting Islam and we all know their too gutless and spineless to do the right thing for the British people!”

Suggestions were also corroborated with reference to how other countries have responded to the “Muslim takeover”, particularly from China:

Study 3: Key findings

Sub-Theme: Negative perceptions of Muslims

Insight into some reasons for why users expressed aversion to Muslims entering their countries might be found in more general attitudes and perceptions held towards the Muslim community. Negative perceptions of Muslims were expressed frequently, ranging from personal attacks to speculation on how Muslim presence will negative effect society.

For example, users commented on Muslim's lack of intelligence:

"...But hey, can't blame them they've been brainwashed by their fake prophet and their stupid book."

Other assertions focused on the viewpoint of Muslims towards a range of different social issues usually under the tone of being regressive, or that of their beliefs:

"Other people are going forward--- only muslims go backwards"

"Politically correct liberal idiots have caused this disaster with intolerant muslims."

The perception of how Muslims rely upon state support was also clear, with most comments tending to paint the Muslim community as taking advantage:

"...Tell lies get single mum benefits . Fake divorces. Big big mosques . They will never say enough..."

"Most of the council houses are occupied by muslims"

Closely related to this, comments also referenced Muslim crime:

"How nice of the lib dems to show solidarity in grooming, oops, I mean fasting with muslims."

The perceived between Muslims and terrorism also emerged, with comments making reference to real life examples of terrorist events, or the potential for Muslims to commits acts of terror:

"...what about sri Lanka church bomb blast same year it happened on DEC 25 that is carried out well trained jihad group stupid baised journalists never mentioned about it"



Study 3: Key findings

Theme 3: Attitudes towards Islam

Although closely related, the data indicated that several comments focused on the critiquing or expressing attitudes towards the doctrine of Islam exclusively, as opposed to the followers of Islam. Whereas the previous theme (Theme 5) comprised of comments which focused on the behaviour of who adopt Islam as their practicing religion, the present theme (Theme 6) comprised of comments which focused on the underling religion and philosophy itself. Furthermore, the present theme was also similar to the previous theme in that a vast majority of comments were negative or hyper critical of Islam, but there were some comments which defended or drew attention to the positive impact of Islam in the world. Main focuses included Islam's place in the modern world, negative perceptions of the religion and the principles or guidance it espouses, the cause of Islamophobia, and the positive impact of Islam.

Sub-Theme: Islamophobia

Overall sentiment was that of dismissal, such that Islamophobia does not exist, is not a significant issue, or is not a concept in its own right and instead is a method of protecting from criticism:

“Islamophobia is merely a construct of radical Muslims to validate their own paranoia.”

In line with the dismissal of Islamophobia, other users argued it is only a mechanism to repress to repress free speech and prevent the criticism of Islam

“...Islamophobia is invented to silence others from saying the truth about Islam !”

Or to portray Islam as the victim:

“Islamophobia is a neologism coined by a Muslim Brotherhood front group involved in the Holy Land terror funding scandal exposed in FBI raids. Its a logical fallacy victim tactic. Fraudulently seeking sympathy...”

Users also expressed their view that Islamophobia is a self-creating problem, such that it is a product of the behaviour of Islam's adherents:

“Pat you got it all wrong! There is a cure of Islamophobia! It requires all Muslims to stop being racist, sexist, violent and start accepting the society they now live in instead whining like four year olds because someone crossed their paths wrong...”

Sub-Theme: Negative perceptions of Islam

Insight into why the majority of user comments rejected the existence of Islamophobia, or lacked sympathy for Muslims who might encounter Islamophobia, can be found when assessing the overall anti-Islam sentiment. A variety of negative perceptions were expressed in comments which were characterised by hate speech, criticisms of the Quran, perceptions of what the religion teaches, Islam teaches immorality, and attacks on the prophet Muhammad.



