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Stereotyping Arabs and Muslims in Australian Media
The Role of Australian Media in Forming Public Opinion on Middle
Eastern Issues

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Introduction

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the compliance of Australian media coverage with the professional Codes of Ethics post September 11, particularly on issues related to Australian Arabs and Muslims and its impact on their social, psychological, cultural and economical conditions.

Background

Recent global events have taken a devastating toll on Australia's Arabic and Muslim communities. Since September 11, media coverage of events around the world particularly those related to Arabs and Muslims has played a significant role in forming public opinion in Australia which proliferated tremendous impact on this segment of the Australian society.

Media can do some major damage, especially in a multicultural society where by the composition of the population is made up of different ethnic and cultural groups. While Australia's government invested heavily in promoting cultural harmony and diversity through laws, policies and regulations; media coverage on the other hand can diminish and debilitate these long and tedious efforts which incite racial and religious vilification and collective panic (Cantril, Gaudet & Hertzog, 1940).

The link between vilification and media content has never been clearer as seen in the past four years, while the media continues to tell the Australian public they merely publishing "what the people think", and they have no responsibility for inciting racial abuse, evidence tells a different story. After a Melbourne newspaper published a comment stating that Australia should "Nuke all the Arabs", the next day the same phrase was repeated in graffiti at a train station. Media failure to take responsibility of such views feed and legitimises racist sentiments. (Krippendorff, 1980)

The Australian Arabic Council (AAC) has reported that the racial vilification is not isolated, but rather widespread and on the rise. The AAC had a 20 fold increase in report of seen vilification following September 11. The AAC has comprehensively documented attacks on individuals, on places of worship and on businesses, as well as verbal and physical attacks on individuals.

Jabour (2002) observes “..we have seen in the past that event in or involving the Middle East, result in the incident rate peaking in Australia. Teachers, students, workers and families are targeted with verbal attacks, are subjected to discrimination in the workplace, discrimination in the playground and as I have explained, discrimination in the public sphere through media stereotypes and a lack of government concern’s. Racial vilifications against the Arabic community is widespread and on the rise. The Australian media role continues to anger and frustrate Arabic and Muslim Australians as it is considered directly responsible to the increase of hostility, racial animosity and rejection by some sectors of the Australian society by stirring up issues of difference and fear, downplaying the integrity of the social Australian fabric.

Paper Question

1. What is the impact of the mainstream media coverage of events involving Arabs and Muslims.
2. What is the role played by Australian Arabic media in perpetuating racism towards Arabs and providing alternative views and perspectives to world events concerning Arabs and Muslims
3. What is the level of Australian media compliance with Media Codes of Ethics when reporting news and events
4. How the above impact on the Arabic and Muslim ethnic groups and their integration in the Australian society