

## The Visual Side of Islamophobia: A Social-Semiotic Analysis

**Authors :** Carmen Aguilera-Carnerero

**Abstract :** Islamophobia, the unfounded hostility towards Muslims and Islam, has been deeply studied in the last decades from different perspectives ranging from anthropology, sociology, media studies, and linguistics. In the past few years, we have witnessed how the birth of social media has transformed formerly passive audiences into an active group that not only receives and digests information but also creates and comments publicly on any event of their interest. In this way, average citizens now have been entitled with the power of becoming potential opinion leaders. This rise of social media in the last years gave way to a different way of Islamophobia, the so called 'cyberIslamophobia'. Considerably less attention, however, has been given to the study of islamophobic images that accompany the texts in social media. This paper attempts to analyse a corpus of 300 images of islamophobic nature taken from social media (from Twitter and Facebook) from the years 2014-2017 to see: a) how hate speech is visually constructed, b) how cyberislamophobia is articulated through images and whether there are differences/similarities between the textual and the visual elements, c) the impact of those images in the audience and their reaction to it and d) whether visual cyberislamophobia has undergone any process of permeating popular culture (for example, through memes) and its real impact. To carry out this task, we have used Critical Discourse Analysis as the most suitable theoretical framework that analyses and criticizes the dominant discourses that affect inequality, injustice, and oppression. The analysis of images was studied according to the theoretical framework provided by the visual framing theory and the visual design grammar to conclude that memes are subtle but very powerful tools to spread Islamophobia and foster hate speech under the guise of humour within popular culture.

**Keywords :** cyberIslamophobia, visual grammar, social media, popular culture

**Conference Title :** ICI 2018 : International Conference on Islamophobia

**Conference Location :** Dublin, Ireland

**Conference Dates :** October 22-23, 2018