

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon's geographical relations and geopolitics are indeed very complex issues. Bordered by just two nations, Lebanon has at least four foreign powers involved in its internal politics, including Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran and the U.S. (Yee and Saad, 2019). With an area of 10,452km² and a population of approximately six million (which includes almost two million Palestinian and Syrian refugees) (Human Rights Watch, 2019), Lebanon has more than double the number of Canadian federal political parties and almost as many religious groups in the nation (U.S. Department of State, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2013). As a result, for decades Lebanon has been home to much political unrest (The Economist, 2018; International Center for Transitional Justice, 2013). In addition, the combination of geopolitics, diverse populations, and systemic corruption has contributed to the politically, religiously and oftentimes militarily turbulent climate in Lebanon (Al Jazeera, 2018; International Center for Transitional Justice, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

CORPUS-ASSISTED CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CACDA)

Corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CACDA) was used to uncover linguistic patterns in online conversations relating to the discussions about geographical regions and Lebanon (for more on CACDA, see Thomas, 2015).

CACDA combines conventional quantitative corpus linguistic techniques with conventional qualitative critical discourse analytic methods. It provides an effective way of mapping out frequency information and association patterns related to linguistic phenomena that appear within large volumes of electronically encoded text.

CACDA can be used to identify word pairings that appear frequently within a data set and their statistical significance. It also allows for an analysis of how statistically significant word pairs are used in context.ⁱ

YOUTUBE

Included in this research brief is an analysis of online conversations that appear on [YouTube](#), which is an open source, a publicly available video-sharing website.

As of January 2019, YouTube counted over 1.9 billion active monthly users, as well as over 30 million daily active users, over 50 million users creating and sharing content on the platform.ⁱⁱ YouTube was recently ranked as the second most visited site in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

YouTube users are able to search for and watch an array of videos, as well as like/comment/share other videos, create their own personalized YouTube channel and upload videos to their channel, create playlists to organize videos, and customize what they see on their personal account pages by subscribing to YouTube channels and users. In addition, YouTube users can play video games, tune into live video and music streams, explore family-friendly videos and playlists, or download a virtual reality app, as but a few examples.^{iv}

REDDIT

This research brief also included an analysis of the online conversations appearing on [reddit](#), and an open source, publicly available website that is largely understood as a hybrid forum-based social network/news aggregator site.

As of November 2017, reddit counted over 330 million active monthly users, 138 thousand active communities (subreddits), and was ranked as the fifth most visited site in the United States.^v

Registered reddit users are able to customize what they see on their personal account pages by subscribing to ‘subreddits’. Any registered user may create a subreddit on any topic and under such categories as: educational subreddits, entertainment subreddits, discussion subreddits, and humour and image-sharing subreddits.

Registered reddit users are also able to submit content to the site in the form of a link (e.g., link to a news article, photo, video) or as a text (“self”) post. Once content has been submitted, registered users can then vote it ‘up’ or ‘down’, which moves this content to a different rank on the website’s pages. Users are encouraged to ‘upvote’ content if they think that it contributes to the conversation and to ‘downvote’ content if they think that it is off-topic; in short, “the popularity and prominence of material on the site are determined by voting from the reddit community” (Duggan & Smith, 2013, p. 2).

Registered users are equally able to comment on one another’s content and to vote on these comments, thus enabling discussion and accentuation of issues that users themselves deem relevant and meaningful.

FACEBOOK

Also included in this research brief is an analysis of online conversations appearing on [Facebook](#), an open source, publicly available online social media and social networking website.

As of December 2018, Facebook counted over 2.32 billion active monthly users, with an average of 1.52 billion users logging onto Facebook daily and five new profiles created every second.^{vi} Facebook was recently ranked as the third most visited site in the world.^{vii}

Facebook users are able to maintain a list of friends who – depending on the privacy settings – may see the content on a users’ profile, as well as upload photos and maintain photo albums that friends can view and engage in interactive online chats. In addition, Facebook users can support group/fan/business pages, stream live videos, download apps to play video games, and engage in social media marketing campaigns, as but a few examples.

DATA SETS

Four data sets were used to uncover linguistic patterns in online conversations pertaining to geographical regions and Lebanon:

- (1) YouTube data (English)
- (2) Reddit data (English)
- (3) YouTube data (Arabic)
- (4) Facebook data (Arabic)

English conversations that covered topics about geographical regions and Lebanon were sampled using a combination of the following search terms: region, regions.

Arabic conversations that covered topics about geographical regions and Lebanon were sampled using combinations of the following search terms: المنطقة, المناطق, مناطق, مناطق.

All English and Arabic content within the data sets were created in 2018.

Table 1. English YouTube data set overview

Videos	Number of Words	Primary Language
25	274,184	English

The data sets used for the present analysis contained 25 English videos, which were drawn primarily from BBC News, Al Jazeera English, and RT.

Table 2. English Reddit data set overview

Conversation Threads	Number of Words	Primary Language
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27	477,404	English
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The data set used for the present analysis contained 27 conversation threads written in English, which were drawn primarily from the r/worldnews, r/news, and r/nrl subreddits.

Table 3. Arabic YouTube data set overview

Videos	Number of Words	Primary Language
35	720,087	Arabic

The data sets also contained 35 Arabic videos, which were drawn primarily from Aljazeera Programs, Al Arabiya, and Future TV News.

Table 4. Arabic Facebook data set overview

Conversation Threads	Number of Words	Primary Language
5	63,972	Arabic

The data set used for the present analysis contained 5 conversation threads written in Arabic.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the discussions within the four data sets revealed that most of the hateful discourse that was associated with geographic regions related to countries in the Middle East, with the addition of powerful allies outside the Middle East, including the U.S. and Russia, being discussed in detail. Several salient terms emerged from these discussions. Of these, the following terms held associations that reveal particularly interesting discursive patterns: Iran, إيران; Israel, إسرائيل; KSA, السعودية; Lebanon, لبنان; Palestine, فلسطين; Russia, روسيا; Syria, سورية; US/America, أمريكا/ولايات المتحدة.

In what follows, key themes that emerged from the hateful discussions about geopolitical relationships will be discussed.

العلاقات الجيوسياسية GEOPOLITICAL RELATIONSHIPS;

A predominant theme that was uncovered in the data sets related to how the online contributors perceived the relationships between various nations. Here, contributors expressed their support for, as well as hatred towards, different countries based on geopolitical relationships. Such relationships were seen on a time continuum, and relationships between how they acted in the past versus how they act now were constantly discussed in the data. Israel by itself, as well as in conjunction with U.S., was seen as a major cause of conflict, violence, hatred and negative atmosphere in the region. Iran, with its links to Hezbollah, Syria with its issues of refugees and violence, and Saudi Arabia with its shaky relationship with non-Arab Muslims were other fiercely contested topics of discussion in the data. Similarly, contributors fiercely debated the similarities and differences between people, cultures, values of different countries. To illustrate, contributors outlined the similarities in an effort to show the commonality of a problem across countries, while the differences were presented as a means of emphasizing identity and associated national pride.

Representative comments include:

We Arab Muslims are proud of our values get the fuck out of the middle east stop instilling your fucked up western values you ugly scums of the earth.

Death to the US Empire and the House of Saud and Israel! No nation who's people and government have sworn the shahada can, in good conscience, work with the Zionists. If the choice is, by Allah, between Paradise or hellfire it's clear where the House of Saud should begin investing... asbestos clothes!

Lebanon is at war with Israel still. And varying anti-Israel hatred and indifference exists among them (especially since the 2006 War) the same was hatred and indifference exists among all countries.

ضد اي ران ه ان مصدق بين هم ال عقليية ن ف ت ماما ال شديعة حمير مثل ان توي اسعودي بين مصدق بين ال وقت ن ف ب و اسرا ن يل ل ال داعمين اك بر اي ران ال حقيقة في ب ينما اسرا ن يل دولة ه ان ان توي مصدق بين اي ران ل ال عراق سلموا وصددا مب غدرو ال لي سعود ال ه ان ان توي ال سعودية تصديق بشارضد هي ال لي ال سورية ال ثورة ت دعم ه اب د سعود ال دولة مثل

In the online discussions involving geographic regions, a recurring theme in the data was “who is to blame” for a given situation or problem in Lebanon. This ranged from somewhat nuanced approaches to illogical accusations. But in both cases, a number of contributors were concerned with pinning blame on any nation except for Lebanon.

Representative comments include:

You can thank israel for the refugees, they created isis to kill arabs and steal theyre land its been going on for 70 years. They even murder children and snipe babies. The synyogue of satan theyre evil to the core.

كم علي انضك مكاف ال عرب ناي اهل ان تو ا ه اسم هدا كم علي اء داك مضكوا و بعض ك ل و ا ه بل اخرت ي امه اب يل ا ه يهودي ت مويل ب غتكم ل ي تكلمون و كم ب ين من ه عايش ه مرتزق من كل و ال تلاحم ل فخر ب لادي و ام ارت يه ي ان اف تخر ان ا و ي ام غفلين كم ب يستعمرون كم ي تفوق مر ا

و ام ري كا و اسراء يل عملاء .. اذا ر 14 ك لاب و ال قوات حزب ك لاب ه دول مشردي ا ب ل بنان ا م كس اب و ي لعن درزي انت لاي ك ل بنان علي الله عفت ل ال خنزير ال سعودي ال مسلمانين من يخلصو حاب ين و ال عضريه بين هم ال مسحين هم ي حرق الله م ناي كوب شراب يطو و عاهرات هم نساء عام لين هم و الاروب يين و ال خلجين ل م لهي ه ا ي عمل و ل بنان من ال ل بنان يين ال شرفاء ل احترامي مع م ثلايين ناس الله و ال خليج يوس عدد غلمان

Fourteen countries were discussed in the data sets, which can be grouped into four categories based on the relationships between each:

- (1) U.S., KSA, Russia, Israel, and Iran;
- (2) The Levant (i.e., Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria);
- (3) Countries that were not significantly impacted from the Syrian War (i.e., Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), and;
- (4) Countries that were negatively impacted by their own civil war (i.e., Iraq and Yemen).

Discussions about the U.S., KSA, Russia, Israel and Iran were largely negative, with most contributors blaming one or all of these countries for the tensions and violence in the Middle East. Most contributors also agreed that the U.S. and Israel had a stake in shaping the region, claiming that they funded a number of media channels (e.g., Al Jazeera, Arabia, Orient, etc.) that broadcast controversial issues in an effort to promote violence. Iranians were called the “USA and Israeli dogs” and Iran was referred to as the “true terrorism of the region.” Jews and Israel were often referred to as the root of all evil, while KSA – who were described as collaborating with Iran, Israel and the U.S. - was referred to as the supporter of terrorism and funding terrorism acts in Syria and Yemen specifically.

Representative comments include:

Saudi is part of un council of human rights... Its absurd. They behead people with no trial with sword, woman have no rights, and they are proven to be a major sponsor and producer of terrorist groups.

RUSSIA IRAN AMERICA IS A NUCLEAR SUPPLIER TO TERRORIST LIKE ISREAL AND ARAB LEAGUE AND AMERICA IS A TERROR ORGONIZATION ISREALI IS A NUCLEAR ARMED TERRORIST ORGONIZATION.

ن ا حارة ب قاسوريا و ال يمن ب الار ه اب دعم و ر ا ه يي اي ال سعودي ة دخل شو ي قول عم لي م نعرف و ضيقة

في حرب جرائم ارتكبت ووسوري افي ال فتنة اثاره ولا يبديا على تخاذلات ال سعودي تمف لو اما افلسطين اعتب ال سعودي تمف عالاقصى قلدك لو وفساد ال عربوية بلادعت وال يمن تخاف بلو وال مسلمين ضد اسرائيل وام يركامع تحالقات ال سعودي تمف الاسلام تحب انذ ال سعودي تمف ال مذاهب احد من كت اذ او الا سدلا بصورة شوهت ال سعودي تمف ك اسلام على فالارهاب هتكركت اذ او ك مذهب بتعترف ماو (ال وهابية) هاوحدل مذهب عملت ال مسلمين على قلدك ان ويهود سعود في ال عربي كت ان وداعش وال قاعد تصدعت ال سعودية يهملك كان ان و... الصوماليين وال بورمييين وال افغان المسلمين عن تخذت ال سعودي تمف مع انذ اذ او ال حرمين ارض ال امريكية قواعدا دخلت ال سعودي تمف ال عربي الامن عبرية هاجعت ال سعودي تمف ال عربية ال جامعة

When discussing the Levant, contributors often grouped Syrians and Palestinians together and referred to them as refugees or marginalized people who are frequently attacked or mistreated in Lebanon. Hatred between Syrians and Lebanese was largely apparent in these discussions, but hateful sentiment was not limited to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon; it was instead based on sectarian hate.

Representative comments include:

16140 is the total number of crimes committed by Syrians supposedly Refugees in Lebanon since they started fleeing to Lebanon.this gives you an idea of the kind of barbarians these syrians are.. not to forget that all the terrorist groups who attacked Lebanon are syrians and led by syrians...and yet this is not enough syrians filled youtube with 1000s of videos insulting and attacking and threatening Lebanese.

ل وبحث طائفي كرهنا ما دولة ل دول كرهنا بين عربي اهل ال وال سوري ل ل بناني كرهنا و ب مش ان وزن مع هونيكب علسوري بين يسبو عم ال مانيما و باوربايلي ل بناني بين دل يل علسوري اارجعوا هم قولا ول ب لدون

ه خليف ماياق دوت وشعب من يطلع رح شششو ال دعارة بل دل بنان ششششششرف يلعن الله كل ب هم من افضل ال سوري شفاف وطبيعي كسول شعب ال ل بنان بين ه ال مشكل سسسب وت فوووو و حرب وقت مصلحي بل دل بنان هم بدم ال طائفية.. الا ضراب غير هم اي دب ما يطلع شي هم علي الا سف لسوري اولادم تل هم عام لو وال هم هادواب فتحت سوري ال بنان يفرجها الله اول متل سوري اترجع ومات فرجال ال معروف هم في ما يدين

Online contributors were supportive of Syrians, Palestinians and Iraqis during their discussions about Egypt and Algeria. On the other hand, contributors posted hateful content about Syrians during their discussions about Morocco and Tunisia, referring to them as the source of violence and terror, while some contributors posted hateful content about the Lebanese during their discussions about Morocco. Other users grouped Morocco, Algeria, and Lebanon together as licentious societies where prostitution, immortality and homosexuality is rampant.

Representative comments include:

ال عربي ال وطن في ال لواطو ه ال دعار وال فجر اساس ال جزائر وال مغرب ول بنان

عن نبذة هيدي . السوريين من اصبحو ال لبنان الة سجون في ال مساجين من % 60 من ثر من بريتاند يا خرجت وفرنسا و ال مانيها طردت و هكل ال عالم ه بي نبالا الذي الشعب سكر و ه طردب مطال بين الات راك تظاهر ال الذي الشعب هو هذا ه سبب الاروب ي الات حاد وداعش ... ه الي ه دخول منع بقرار ال جزائر و ال مغرب اصدرو ه امام ال حدود ال خليج ي جدا الم ال تنظي مين هذين ان ل .. سوريا في كبروا ونجوا , تونس في ينجوا الم ال ضرة عموما ... ال سوري الشعب ال اار ه اب مخزن وجدوا بل .. ال راق ي تونس شعب ل دى قبول لا كل ن نقل ان ال يوم قرارا انذلك ل اليوم بعد نسكت ال ال سابقه تجاربنا من ننا تعلم (ه نشر وهان ترجم وال مسيئة كم تعليقا

During their discussions about the people of Yemen and Iraq, online contributors were supportive of the Syrians and Palestinians who were suffering from violence and terror similar to them. Within these discussions, the people of Syria, Yemen, and Iraq were oftentimes portrayed as victims of poverty, injustice, and aggression, while other Arabs were distracted with trivial issues and not giving them proper attention. One representative comment includes:

تجاه الحيوان و نسيوا الانسان يلي هو من نفس طينتون طرد اليودي كارد ول ك يمتتلوا و رفضت ميريام كلينك و قطع الجو و لم يقل ل ها اطلي انك كمان - يا صاحب الفيديو يا كاش
عبد الصليب يتحدثون عن حقوق الحيوان و لا يتحدثون عن حقوق المسلمون في تايلاند و لا سوريا و فلسطين ابري ب اسلام ك بدي نبيبيك لحيه محمد راعي الجمال النجس ؟؟؟ الله يقرفك ب تتكلمو
عن الكلاب و حقوق ها و الاطفال و النساء و بني الانسان يقتلون في سوريا و في فلسطين حسب نا الله و نعم
Une chienne a le droit le plus absolu de defendre ses compatriotes . Brigitte Bardot en plus bête”
من اللي مزعل ها الكلب .

CONCLUSION

Online discussions that were analyzed as part of this research brief highlight the extent to which hateful sentiment was intertwined in much of the discussions about geographical regions and Lebanon as well as geographical relationships between Middle East countries and powerful allies. In the online space, issues relating to geographical regions and Lebanon mirror the tensions that are found in the public domain in the offline world, especially those linked to religion. By and large, the hateful discourse associated with geographic regions related to countries of the Middle East as well as the U.S. and Russia and Lebanon's relationship with each. But depending on users' origins and affiliations, the intensity of their discussions took two main forms: support or blame. To illustrate, self-identified Shias were pro-Iran and pro-Hezbollah while hatred towards the U.S, Israel and Russia was unanimous across these users. Saudi Arabia, the world's main Sunni power, was also the recipient of much online hatred across all users.

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URLS

YouTube [<http://www.youtube.com/>]

Reddit [<http://www.reddit.com/>]

Facebook [<http://www.reddit.com/>]

SUGGESTED READING

Marcus, J. (2017, November 18). Why Saudi Arabia and Iran are bitter rivals. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42008809>

ENDNOTES

ⁱ For a full discussion of CACDA methodology, see the resources on the [Project Someone: Prejudice du jour web page](https://projectsomeone.ca/prejudicedujour). [https://projectsomeone.ca/prejudicedujour]

ⁱⁱ See <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/youtube-statistics/>

ⁱⁱⁱ See <https://www.alexa.com/topsites>

^{iv} See <https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/experiences/>

^v <https://www.redditinc.com/press>

^{vi} See <https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>

^{vii} See <https://www.alexa.com/topsites>