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## Examining the Antecedents of the Persuasiveness of Social Media Posts by Celebrity Muslim Preachers in Malaysia

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Aini Maznina A. Manaf\*\*

### Abstract

As communication technology continues to evolve, this has also revolutionized how religious messages are presented on social media, particularly for celebrity Muslim preachers. They can easily connect with their followers and create *da'wah* messages using various social media tools, such as reels, stories, and live streams. In Malaysia, some preachers have become instant celebrities, with millions of followers who are willing to like, reshare and repost their messages. What factors though contribute to the persuasiveness of religious messages posted on social media by celebrity Muslim preachers? Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) examines the persuasiveness of messages based on how they are processed by the recipient. Accordingly, hypotheses were tested based on ELM. This quantitative study employed a cross-sectional survey design with 423 university students in Malaysia. The research instrument was constructed using Google Form and distributed online among the survey respondents. They must follow at least one celebrity Muslim preacher on social media to participate in the study. Mediation and moderated mediation models (model 4 and 7) were tested using the PROCESS macro. Overall, this study provided some support for ELM; argument quality predicted both belief in *da'wah* messages and sharing intent. Belief mediated the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent. However, personal involvement did not moderate the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent, through belief. Implications of these findings on ELM and the persuasiveness of religious messages on social media will be deliberated.

**Keywords:** Celebrity Muslim Preachers, Da'wah, Elaboration Likelihood Model, Persuasion, Social Media

## Malezya'daki Ünlü Müslüman Vaizlerin Sosyal Medya Paylaşımlarında İkna Ediciliğinin Öncüllerinin İncelenmesi

### Öz

İletişim teknolojisinin sürekli olarak gelişmesi, dini mesajların sosyal medyada sunulma biçimini de dönüştürmüştür. Özellikle ünlü Müslüman vaizler, çeşitli sosyal medya araçlarını (reels, hikayeler ve canlı yayınlar gibi) kullanarak takipçileriyle kolayca etkileşim kurabilir ve davet (tebliğ) içerikleri üretebilir hale gelmiştir. Malezya'da bazı vaizler, milyonlarca takipçisi bulunan ve mesajlarının beğenildiği, paylaşıldığı ve yeniden gönderildiği ünlü kişiler haline gelmiştir. Ancak, ünlü Müslüman vaizlerin sosyal medyada paylaştıkları dini mesajların ikna ediciliğine katkıda bulunan faktörler nelerdir? Elaboration Likelihood Modeli (ELM), mesajların ikna ediciliğini alıcı tarafından nasıl işlendiğine bağlı olarak incelemektedir. Bu doğrultuda, ELM'ye dayalı hipotezler test edilmiştir. Bu nicel çalışma, Malezya'da 423 üniversite öğrencisiyle yapılan kesitsel bir anket tasarımı kullanmıştır. Araştırma aracı Google Form ile oluşturulmuş ve çevrimiçi olarak katılımcılara dağıtılmıştır. Ankete katılabilmek için katılımcıların en az bir ünlü Müslüman vaizi sosyal medyada takip etmesi gerekmektedir. Aracılama ve düzenlenmiş aracılama modelleri (model 4 ve 7), PROCESS makrosu kullanılarak test edilmiştir. Bu çalışma genel olarak ELM'yi destekleyen bazı bulgular sunmuştur; argüman kalitesi hem davet mesajlarına inanmayı hem de paylaşım niyetini öngörmüştür. İnanma, argüman kalitesi ile paylaşım niyeti arasındaki ilişkiyi aracı bir değişken olarak etkilemiştir. Ancak, kişisel katılım, argüman

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kalitesi ile inanma aracılığıyla paylaşım niyeti arasındaki ilişkiyi düzenleyici bir faktör olarak etkilememiştir. Bu bulguların ELM ve sosyal medyada dini mesajların ikna ediciliği üzerindeki etkileri tartışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ünlü Müslüman Vaizler, Davet, Detaylandırma Olasılık Modeli, İkna, Sosyal Medya

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## Introduction

Social media is widely used for many reasons, including for entertainment and to seek information. Kemp (2024) highlights that TikTok has 28.7 million users in Malaysia, and comparatively, 24.1 million YouTube users. Additionally, Instagram boasts up to 15.67 million users in August 2024 (NapoleanCat, 2024). Due to its immense popularity, social media platforms can reach a wide range of audience. Celebrity Muslim preachers or *dai'* can use social media platforms to disseminate *da'wah* messages, particularly to attract younger users (Abdullah et al., 2018). In Malaysia, some preachers have become instant celebrities, with millions of followers who are willing to like, share and repost their content. Their views on religion are even more popular than those given by religious authority figures. For instance, according to Saat and Mohd Taufeq (2021), the emergence of popular preachers in Malaysia has led to a declining interest in Malaysian Muftis.

As celebrity Muslim preachers have a large following, their messages may have persuasive appeal and can influence their follower's attitudes and perception on religious issues. Tools such as reels, stories and live streaming allows for celebrity Muslim preachers to have direct interaction with their followers, inviting more discussions on religious issues. However, instead of presenting accurate information on Islam, some celebrity preachers in Malaysia may comment on religious issues using controversial or unsubstantiated comments, rendering their messages as less credible (e.g., Jefri, 2020). Furthermore, although preachers are attractive to the younger audience due to their savvy use of social media platforms, their depth of religious training may not be as extensive or in-depth as a traditional mufti or religious officer (Saat & Mohd Taufeq, 2021).

However, since they are highly influential and popular, their followers may not stop to consider the authenticity of their messages and may simply disseminate their social media posts by liking, sharing, or reposting these messages without considering the consequences. For example, PU Azman, a Malaysian celebrity preacher who boasts 2.5 million followers on Instagram has not been granted a license to preach about religion but is highly influential and is deemed as an authoritative figure by netizens to speak on religious issues (Saat & Mohd Taufeq, 2021). With influential celebrity preachers, this may likely lead to a barrage of inaccurate, inauthentic, or misleading religious messages that become viral simply because it was posted by a celebrity Muslim preachers and shared by their loyal followers. Thus, although social media offers many advantages for those who wish to share their thoughts on religious issues, it can also create negative consequences when these messages are not filtered or presented properly. Authority figures, such as the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Religious Affairs) in Malaysia, has been quoted as saying that when giving views on Islamic laws, Muslim preachers should be honest, and admit what they do not know as they are not as knowledgeable as authoritative scholars (BERNAMA, 2024).

To what extent though, are *da'wah* on social media persuasive, and how do followers of celebrity Muslim preachers process religious messages on social media? For instance, are they more persuaded by message content, such as argument quality, or characteristics of the source, such as physical attractiveness? Communication scholars have often used the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) to understand the persuasiveness of traditional media messages, and most recently on social

media (Li & Suh, 2015; Teng et al., 2014; Zha et al., 2018). According to ELM, persuasive messages can be processed via central or peripheral route, which are at two opposite ends of a continuum (Dillard & Lijiang, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Schumann et al., 2011). In the central route, message recipients will scrutinize the message by examining argument quality, and message processing depends on personal involvement. Due to its high elaboration likelihood, messages processed by the central route tend to result in attitude change and are persistent over time due to the scrutinization of the message arguments (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1989). On the other hand, the peripheral route is also important and maybe considered in examining persuasive messages. It occurs when elaboration likelihood is low, and processing of message requires minimal cognitive effort and therefore, recipient relies on peripheral cues such as source attractiveness (Kitchen et al., 2014).

Previous studies that have employed the use of ELM has mostly focused on advertising, marketing or consumer behavior (e. g., Gao & Syed Muhammad, 2021; Homer & Kahle, 2013; Teng et al., 2014), and health care (Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Chua & Banerjee, 2018). There are fewer studies though that have examined the use of ELM to understand the persuasiveness of religious messages, although it can be argued that religious messages can be considered as a powerful form of persuasive communication. Therefore, in this study, we will attempt to fill the research gap by applying ELM in the social media context, where ELM variables are assumed to influence the processing of religious messages posted by celebrity Muslim preachers on social media. In this study context, those who find religious messages personally relevant, are likelier to share these messages if it contains high argument quality, and if they believe in the truthfulness of the message. The source characteristics, such as source attractiveness, may also be given due consideration.

Specifically, the main research objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify the antecedents of sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers
- To analyze the mediating role of belief in the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers
- To identify if the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, through belief in truthfulness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, is moderated by personal involvement of *da'wah* messages (moderated mediation)

By extending the study context in examining religious messages, this study is expected to enhance understanding of the ELM framework in highlighting how social media users in Malaysia process religious messages using both the central and peripheral routes. Further, the study findings are also expected to have practical significance to religious authorities, institutions and agencies in Malaysia; where it will illuminate how religious messages can be designed to attract social media users to disseminate and spread religious messages.

## Literature Review

### Celebrity Muslim Preachers and *Da'wah* on Social Media

*Da'wah* or preaching can be defined as the process of conveying information about Islam by a Muslim to reach the aim of complying with Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah (Alimuddin, 2007). *Da'wah* refers to a call for individuals to return to the correct path to build a morally good community (Alimuddin, 2007). Conveying *da'wah* or religious messages to others are a duty and responsibility of every Muslim. This is emphasized numerous times in the Holy Quran such as in Surah An-Nahl, verse 125. Celebrity Muslim preachers, however, have the persuasive powers and the necessary platform to convey religious messages to millions of followers, through their social media accounts.



Due to the development of information and technology, various social media tools are available to craft, design and share religious messages, such as reels, videos, live streams, hashtags and stories. According to Tatar and Abdul Rohman (2019), this will provide opportunities for anyone in expressing their *da'wah* activities, by spreading religious teachings and for celebrity Muslim preachers to demonstrate their competence in preaching through social media. Younger audiences may also gravitate towards *da'wah* content featured on social media as it can be more contemporary, interesting and expressive. Accordingly, many Muslim preachers are transformed into instant celebrities due to their use of social media. Thus, in this digital era, social media is becoming a new channel for expressing *da'wah* activities for celebrity Muslim preachers, and they have their own niche audience. In Malaysia, some celebrity Muslim preachers such as *Imam Muda Ashraf* (@imammudaasyraf) became popular with the masses after winning Islamic reality television shows, such as *Imam Muda*, and continued their efforts to spread *da'wah* through their personal social media accounts on TikTok, Facebook, YouTube or Instagram (Abdullah et al., 2018; Abdul Karim, 2013; Tengku Mohd Azzman & A. Manaf, 2018; Tengku Mohd Azzman & A. Manaf, 2017).

Further, these celebrity Muslim preachers or *da'i* on social media are especially well-known among the younger generation, such as young adults and university students (Tengku Mohd Azzman & A. Manaf, 2018; Tengku Mohd Azzman & A. Manaf, 2017). They have many following and their posts/tweets/videos are often liked, commented on, shared, or reposted by their followers. For instance, a popular celebrity Muslim preacher, *Ustaz Wadi Anuar* (@Ustazwadianuar) has 811,000 followers on Instagram and 1.2 billion viewers on his TikTok account. Furthermore, all these preachers or *da'i* are actively creating *da'wah* content that easily attracts the younger audience. Hence, preaching through social media platforms such as Tik Tok, Instagram, YouTube or Facebook provides some advantages, including high interactivity, easy accessibility, increased ability to attract a broader range of audience, and easy dissemination, notwithstanding the barrier of time and space (Abdullah et al., 2018; Rustan et al., 2020; Tatar & Abdul Rohman, 2019).

However, not all celebrity Muslim preachers rely on using wisdom, good words and conveying truthful and credible information on social media, as befitting the recommended Islamic preaching style practiced by the Holy Prophet (Shehu, 2017). The Holy Prophet uses a communication style that is direct and succinct, but still respectful (Kasmani, Yusoff & Kanaker, 2019). On the other hand, celebrity Muslim preachers may rely on commenting on controversial issues to become viral or use emotionally laden responses to preach to their audience, to win arguments and increase followers. In one incident, a celebrity Muslim preacher openly rebuked and shamed a Malaysian celebrity for uploading a video that contained allegedly defamatory images (Jefri, 2020). Thus, when celebrity Muslim preachers are too critical, sarcastic, harsh, or argumentative, this may turn people off in *da'wah* content, and lead to a reluctance to share these messages, no matter how beneficial they are. Messages that are more emotionally laden, rather than fact-based, may also be perceived as less credible and in turn, be perceived as less persuasive. The next section will examine possible factors that may influence the persuasiveness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers based on the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) perspective, specifically through the message content and source characteristics.

#### **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Religious Posts on Social Media**

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and it provides a framework for understanding how individuals process and respond to persuasive messages based on their motivation and ability to engage in critical thinking. The theory focuses on communication related factors that can lead to attitude change. It stresses the importance of both the content of the message and context in which it is received in determining the effectiveness of

persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Motivation to process messages involve personal involvement or importance of the message to the individual and ability to process involves factors such as cognitive resources, knowledge, and distraction. When motivation and ability is factored into information processing, individuals will then decide on the modes of information processing. Further, ELM assumes that individuals engage in two different modes of information processing when evaluating persuasive messages (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).

First is the central route, where it involves deep, systematic thinking about the message content and occurs when individuals are motivated and able to process information critically and carefully (Dillard & Lijiang, 2013; McNeill & Stoltenberg, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Central route involves high elaboration of the issue, where arguments are critically evaluated and considered in terms of implications. The second route, which is the peripheral route, requires a more superficial-heuristic based processing and happens when individuals lack the motivation or ability to examine message deeply, and would therefore resort to peripheral cues such as perceived attractiveness of the source, or message length (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Low elaboration occurs on the peripheral route, where individuals focus more on simple cues rather than message content. ELM also posits that attitude change is more likely when messages are processed via central route, where it requires deeper consideration and understanding of the arguments presented.

ELM has been applied in various context to understand information processing, including in advertising, marketing and political campaigns, or tourism, and most recently in examining the persuasiveness of messages in social media platforms such as Facebook etc. (Li & Suh, 2015; Teng et al., 2014; Zha et al., 2018). Some have found that both central and peripheral route can influence perceived persuasiveness of marketing messages presented via social media features, such as live streaming commerce (Gao et. al., 2021). Other studies found that the persuasiveness of social influencers in word of mouth (WOM) marketing, can lead to purchase decision of food products among consumers (Erkli, 2022). Thus, in this study context, celebrity Muslim preachers can be regarded as religious influencers who are largely followed due to their thoughts on religious issues, and their messages have the power to influence the attitude and perception of their followers on religious issues.

Specifically, we will examine how religious messages by celebrity Muslim preachers are perceived and processed based on the ELM model. ELM has predicted that in using the central route, higher argument quality can influence attitude towards messages and lead to behavioral change (i.e., Angst & Agarwal, 2009). Specifically, when followers of celebrity Muslim preachers are motivated to process religious messages by celebrity Muslim preachers, argument quality can influence their perception of religious messages. For those with high motivation, they will consider the argument quality when processing message using the central route and are likelier to share social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers as they are convinced by the persuasiveness of these messages. As predicted in previous research (i.e., Bhattacharjee & Sandford, 2006) heuristic cues such as source attractiveness, will also influence the processing of messages in the online context. Thus, in this study, perceived attractiveness of the celebrity Muslim preacher is entered as a co-variate. Thus, the following hypothesis are posed:

H1: Argument quality is positively related to sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers

In using the central route to process messages, those who are convinced with the argument quality of the message are motivated to process the message and will take the time to consider other aspects of the message content (i.e. believability in the truthfulness of these messages), before deciding to share these messages with others (Chen et al., 2021). It is predicted thus, there is a positive relationship between high argument quality and intention to share, and it is mediated by belief in the truthfulness of the message presented by celebrity Muslim preachers. Therefore,

the following two hypotheses are suggested:

H2: Argument quality is positively related to belief in social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers

H3: Belief in social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers will mediate the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers

Further, if messages presented on social media are interactive (i.e., features such as comments, discussions threads, or polls), it can promote deeper understanding of the message, particularly if users are motivated. In this study context, celebrity Muslim preachers often personalize the religious messages they share on social media and encourage discussions on the posts that they initiate. Thus, followers may find these messages highly relevant to them and would use high elaboration to process these messages via the central route when processing these messages, as predicted by ELM (Chen et al., 2021; Kitchen et al., 2014). If arguments quality and belief in the truthfulness of the message is high, the central route is chosen to process these messages and may lead to them having a deeper understanding of religious messages. Thus, persuasion is salient with higher intention to share these messages with others so they can also benefit from it. On the other hand, for those with low motivation (i.e., have low personal involvement with the message), they may rely on source characteristics, such as source attractiveness, to process these messages, instead of critically evaluating social media posts on religious issues. Thus, those who do not find these messages highly relevant, will not engage in the central route to process these messages. In sum, the following hypothesis is presented:

H4: When personal involvement is high, the indirect effect of argument quality on sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, mediated by belief in social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, will be stronger.

Overall, based on the discussion of the literature and the theoretical framework, a conceptual framework of ELM from the context of *da'wah* messages on social media by celebrity Muslim preachers is depicted in Figure 1. This conceptual framework depicts the variables and constructs of ELM in the social media and *da'wah* context. Antecedents of persuasive religious message are displayed in the framework. Sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers is integrated into the conceptual framework.

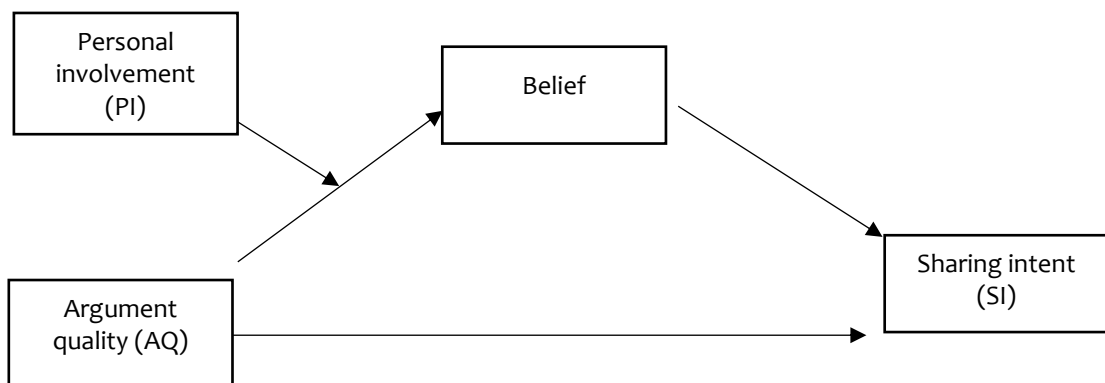


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

## Methodology

### Participants and Data Collection Procedures

This study used a cross-sectional online survey design, and a Google form to construct the survey questionnaire. The data was collected from October to December 2022. The target

respondents consisted of undergraduate students in an international Islamic university in Selangor, Malaysia. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents prior to completing the survey questionnaire. All respondents must follow at least one celebrity Muslim preacher on YouTube, TikTok or Instagram, to participate in the study. The final sample size totaled to 423. To ensure that the sample size is suitable for data analysis, the minimum sample size calculated by G\*power software based on the number of predictor variables was 193, and this criterion was met in this study. The research instrument was in the English language as all participants were fluent in English, and there was no need to translate the instrument into the local language.

Descriptive analysis was carried out to examine the background of the respondents. Based on the analyses, the respondents in this study were relatively young ( $M = 22.93, SD = 7.11$ ) and mostly female (73%). They were active social media users ( $M = 4.18, SD = .73$ ). Interest in religious content on social media was high; based on the search for *da'wah* content ( $M = 3.14, SD = .80$ ). A little more than half of the survey respondents had formal religious educational background (52%). Preachers followed on social media were popular celebrity Muslim preachers, both locally and globally such as Ustazah Asma Harun, Ustaz Firdaus Wong, Zakir Naik, Omer Sulaiman, and Mufti Menk. The survey respondents reported that these celebrity Muslim preachers almost always posted on religious content on their social media accounts (89%).

### Measurements

The scale for argument quality, sharing intent, and belief was adapted from a previous study by Chen, Kearney and Chang (2021). A sample item for argument quality is: *“The information presented by the Muslim celebrity preacher I follow on social media, is informative”*. An example of the item for sharing intent is *“I will share Islamic da'wah content presented by a celebrity Muslim preacher on social media”* while a sample item for belief is *“I believe the information presented by the celebrity Muslim preacher I follow on social media, is truthful”*. Personal involvement is the individual's perceived relevance to the religious content posted by the celebrity Muslim preacher. The items for personal involvement were adapted also from a previous study by Chua and Banerjee (2018), and a sample item reads: *“The Islamic da'wah content posted by the celebrity Muslim preachers I follow on social media is important to me”*. The items for source attractiveness were adapted from a previous study by Ohanion (1990), and a sample item is as follows: *“The celebrity Muslim preacher I follow on social media, are attractive”*.

Finally, to measure belief in the truthfulness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, 1 item from Chen, Kearney and Chang (2021) and the item reads: *I believe the information presented by the celebrity Muslim preacher I follow on social media, is truthful*. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with response items that ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Table 1 displays specific details related to the scale employed in the study.

**Table 1.** Scales used in the study

No	Scale	Total items	M	SD	Source
1	Personal involvement (PI)	2	4.17	.84	Chua & Banerjee, 2018
2	Argument quality (AQ)	4	4.44	.69	Chen, Kearney & Chang, 2021
3	Belief in the truthfulness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers (Belief)	1	4.26	-	Chen, Kearney & Chang, 2021
4	Source Attractiveness (SA)	5	4.09	.78	Ohanion, 1990
5	Frequency of searching for da'wah content (FS)	1	3.14	-	Self-constructed
6	Sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers (SI)	2	3.76	.92	Chen, Kearney & Chang, 2021

Before conducting data analysis, the value of the dependent variable was examined, and it was within the range of -2 and +2 (Siddiqi, 2014). Thus, this shows that the data was normally distributed, and the multiple regression as well as the moderated mediation analysis can be conducted.

## Findings

### Model Fit, Reliability and Validity

All scales used in this study achieved good internal consistency ranging from .84 to .97, which was above the cut-off value of .70 (Hair et al., 2013). This indicates that all scales demonstrate acceptable reliability scores. Further, to establish the measurement model, the JAMOVI software was used run the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). To establish convergent validity, several fit indices was examined. The model fit indices suggest an acceptable fit. The chi-square value for the default model was significant,  $X^2(59) = 454, p < .001$ . The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.903 and 0.892 respectively, both indicating an acceptable model fit. Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was .084 suggesting that the model fit quite well in terms of error approximation. Overall, these indices support the convergent validity of the factors in explaining the underlying factors that influence sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers.

In evaluating the measurement model, as suggested by the literature (i.e., Hair et al., 2011; Gefen & Staub, 2005), items with low factor loadings (i.e., values should be at least above .50) should be removed. All items loaded based on their respective construct and were above the cut-off values. The composite reliability should also be above .70 according to Hair et al. (2011) and all values were above the cut off value. Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) should be above the cut-off value of .50 (Hair et al., 2011), and this was also met in this study. Table 2 displays the factor loadings, reliability and validity of each of the construct

**Table 2.** Factor loadings, reliability and validity

Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Frequency of searching for da'wah content (FS)		NA	NA	NA
Belief		NA	NA	NA
Source Attractiveness (SA)		<b>0.884</b>	<b>0.933</b>	<b>0.614</b>
SA1	0.866			
SA2	0.800			
SA3	0.831			
SA4	0.717			
SA5	0.691			
Personal involvement (PI)		<b>0.840</b>	<b>0.908</b>	<b>0.727</b>
PI1	0.862			
PI2	0.843			
Argument Quality (AQ)		<b>0.897</b>	<b>0.946</b>	<b>0.711</b>
AQ1	0.836			
AQ2	0.906			
AQ3	0.899			
AQ4	0.717			
Sharing Intent (SI)		<b>0.887</b>	<b>0.937</b>	<b>0.799</b>
SI1	0.932			
SI2	0.855			

Note: CA = Cronbach Alpha, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

To examine discriminant validity, the value of the square root of AVE is compared with the

correlation coefficient with each construct, where the value of the square root of AVE should be higher than the correlation coefficient value between the constructs (Hair et al., 2011). This criterion was met in this study, and thus good discriminant validity was established. Table 3 displays the discriminant validity in this study.

**Table 3.** Discriminant validity

Factor	SA	PR	AQ	SI
SA	<b>0.781</b>			
PI	0.673	<b>0.853</b>		
AQ	0.639	0.812	<b>0.843</b>	
SI	0.497	0.644	0.514	<b>0.894</b>

Note: SA = source attractiveness, PR = personal involvement, AQ = argument quality and SI = sharing intent. Bolded values in the diagonal are the square root of the AVE

**Hypotheses testing**

The next step is to establish the structural model and to test the hypotheses of the study. Prior to all other analysis, the zero-order correlations analysis established significant relationships between the co-variates, the independent variables, the mediator, the moderator and the dependent variable in the study. Correlational values for all variables ranged from .22 to .74. PROCESS macro by Hayes was used to test the hypotheses of the study (model 4 and model 7). According to Hayes (2018), PROCESS models are suitable to examine mediation and moderating relationships.

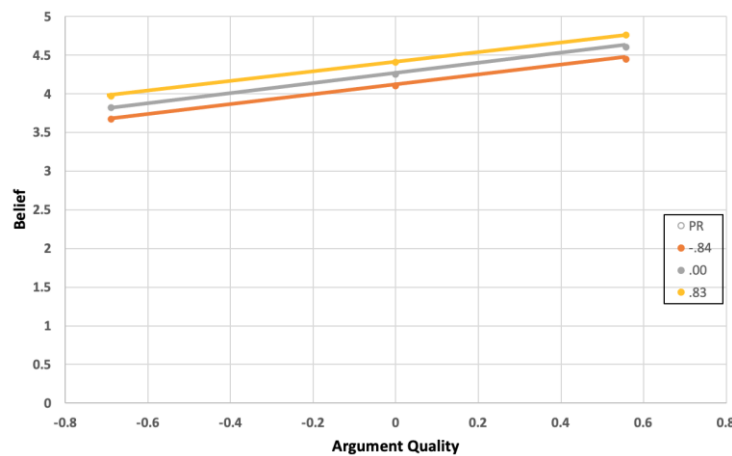
The mediation analysis (model 4) was performed to test main association analyses (H1-H3). In this model, frequency of searching for *da'wah* content and source attractiveness was entered as co-variates. Both co-variates were significant predictors to SI, where frequency of searching for *da'wah* content on social media had a significant relationship with SI ( $b = .260, SE = .047, t = 5.429, p < .001$ ). Similarly, source attractiveness of celebrity Muslim preachers has a significant relationship with SI ( $b = .228, SE = .063, t = 3.621, p < .001$ ). Further, H1 predicts that AQ will be positively associated with SI; results exhibit a significant relationship between AQ and SI ( $b = .262, SE = .084, t = 3.08, p < .05, 95\% CI = [.095/.429]$ ), where approximately 31.8% of the variance explained for SI were accounted for by all predictors. Next, H2 posits that AQ is positively associated with belief; results indicate a significant link between AQ and belief ( $b = .746, SE = .053, t = 13.942, p < .001, 95\% CI = [.641/.852]$ ). Therefore, both H1 and H2 is supported.

Further, the study examined the mediating role of belief on the relationship between AQ and SI. The results revealed a significant indirect effect of the impact of AQ on SI ( $b = .198, t = 2.896$ ), supporting H3 and indicating a significant indirect effect. Further, the direct effect of AQ on SI in the presence of the mediator is also significant ( $b = 0.430, t = 5.21$ ). Therefore, H3 is also supported. Table 4 displays a summary of the mediation analysis results.

**Table 4.** Mediation analysis summary

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t-statistics
				Lower bound	Upper bound	
AQ -> Belief -> SI	.628 (.000)	.430 (.002)	(.198)	-.052	.321	2.896

Finally, the moderated mediation analysis was performed (model 7) to test the moderated mediation, where it is predicted that when personal involvement is high, the indirect effect of argument quality on sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, mediated by belief in social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, will be stronger (H4). In examining the results, the initial interaction between AQ and PI on belief is not significant ( $b = .000$ ,  $SE = .0346$ ,  $t = .003$ ,  $p = .997$ ,  $95\% CI = [-.0679/.068]$ ). The analysis also indicates that the index for moderated mediation (index = .001,  $95\% CI = [-.013/.017]$ ) is not significant since the 95% CI does include a 'zero'. Simple slopes show insignificant indirect effect when the moderator is low, moderate, or high (refer to Figure 2). Generally, the finding implies that PI do not moderate the relationship between AQ and SI, through belief. Therefore, H4 is not supported.



**Figure 2.** Interaction between argument quality and belief, on sharing intent.

Table 5 Displays a summary of the moderated mediation analysis.

**Table 5.** Moderated mediation summary

Direct relationship	Unstandardized Coefficient	T statistics
AQ -> Belief	.707	10.185
Belief -> SI	.215	3.292
AQ -> SI	.430	5.219
AQ * PI -> Belief	.000	.003

Indirect Relationship	Direct effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval Low/High	T statistics
AQ -> Belief -> SI	.430	.152 (.050)	.046/.246	3.031
Probing moderated indirect relationships	Effect	SE	Confidence Interval Low/High	T statistics
Low level of PI	.152	.049	.046/.246	3.102
High level of PI	.152	.051	.046/.250	2.984
Index of Moderated Mediation	.001	.007	-.013/.017	.142

Note: AQ = argument quality, belief = belief in truthfulness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, SI = sharing intent, PI = personal involvement

## Discussion

The main objective of this research was to identify antecedents of sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers. Four hypotheses were proposed to examine predictors to sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, including the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent (H1), the relationship between argument quality and belief (H2) and the mediating role of belief in the truthfulness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, in the relationship between argument quality and intention to share (H3). Finally, we examined the moderating role of personal involvement, in the relationship between argument quality and sharing intent, through belief in the truthfulness of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers (H4). Out of the four hypotheses, three was supported (H1-H3). The following paragraphs will analyze in detail the results of the study based on the hypotheses that was proposed, and in relation to the theoretical contributions, practical implications, research limitations, and suggestions for future research.

### Theoretical Contributions

First, consistent with the predictions by ELM in previous studies (i.e., Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Chen et al., 2021), for those who are highly motivated, they will use central cues such as argument quality to process messages by scrutinizing them more closely. They are also likelier to share these messages as they are persuaded by the high argument quality. H1 posits that AQ would be significantly related to SI, and it was supported. Thus, for social media users who are motivated to process religious messages by celebrity Muslim preachers, high argument quality in creating religious content is important in persuading others to share it, after discounting for the effect of peripheral cues such as source attractiveness. For celebrity Muslim preachers disseminating religious messages, this has important implications. For example, when designing religious content on social media, it is important that celebrity Muslim preachers support the content with evidence from *Quranic* verse and verified Hadith. Additionally, argument quality can also be increased by being unbiased and presenting informative and helpful messages that consider the context and arguments from all sides in the issue being presented. On the other hand, celebrity Muslim preachers should avoid flimsy, inflammatory, divisive or inaccurate content not reflecting Islamic principles, such as arguments based on emotions, or arguments that lack evidence or proper justification from the Quran or Hadith, which may lead to information that mislead the public.

Further, consistent with previous research (i.e., Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Chen, et al., 2021; Meng & Choi, 2019) H2 is also supported; highlighting a positive relationship between AQ and belief; when users are highly motivated to process religious message via central route, they will take the time to consider other aspects of the message besides argument quality, which is truthfulness of the message. Therefore, especially for those who are predisposed and inclined to search for religious posts on social media, celebrity Muslim preachers can reach a wider social media audience who will reshare and disseminate their message with others, but they must consider how the tone in which the message is being designed and presented on social media. For example, celebrity Muslim preachers should present their opinions based on honesty and truth, and avoid exaggeration, even when it may veer from public opinion.

The significance of heuristic cues (via the significance of source attractiveness as a co-variate) in this study cannot be discounted; although message that are of importance to social media users may be examined critically in terms of message content (argument quality and believability), social media users may be overwhelmed by information overload that may occur judging by the sheer number of messages posted by social media users. When that occurs, heuristic cues available on social media platforms can be utilized to grab their attention and to persuade them to further analyze the message content via the central route.



For example, celebrity Muslim preachers should ensure that they are professionally dressed and presentable when appearing on videos, stories, or reels and use the interactivity function on social media (i.e. votes or polls, quizzes, asking for comments on feedback on posts, encouraging users to use share button on stories) that can encourage further discussion on religious posts, to enhance the persuasiveness of their messages. Appropriate music background or playing Quranic verse can also be considered as part of their social media strategy to attract attention using heuristic cues. This is reiterated in a study by Abdullah et al. (2018); Islamic celebrity preachers are expected to be good looking and presentable online, as this is an especially important criteria in attracting the younger Muslim audience. The initial attraction to watch their content may invite further scrutiny of their message content and encourage the audience to carefully consider their arguments instead of mindlessly sharing unsubstantiated or unverified posts.

Next, H3 posited that belief will mediate the relationship between AG and INT, which was in line with ELM's predictions on the pathway of central route when processing persuasive messages (Chen, et al., 2021; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) The results demonstrate the mediating role of belief; messages with high argument quality will lead to stronger belief in the message truthfulness, leading to higher likelihood of sharing intent. ELM has predicted attitude change (i.e., intention to share the message) is likelier to occur for those who have critically examined a message, and find the message to be believable and credible, and this attitude change may persist over time. Thus, for social media users who are not aware of certain religious issues, when the message is presented in a believable and trustworthy manner, this may lead to stronger sharing intent. As social media has the capability of making a message 'viral' and reaching the masses, it is important that consideration is given to the message content as well as the argument presented, to ensure that the message will be shared by social media users who are convinced of its truthfulness and authenticity.

Finally, H4 examined the moderated mediation role of personal involvement; where it is predicted that users who are more personally involved with religious content, are more motivated and will critically examine religious messages via the central route. Consequently, when personal involvement is high, the indirect effect of argument quality on sharing intent of social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, mediated by belief in social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers, will be stronger. Although ELM has predicted that personal involvement matters in the central route (i.e. Chen et al., 2021; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), in this study, it was not significant, and results did not indicate a moderated mediation model. This can perhaps be attributed to the nature of religious posts by celebrity Muslim preachers; most religious posts made popular by them are arguably perhaps everyday issues that are relevant to most Muslim Malaysians, such as issue concerning marital relationships, *halal* food, and parenting issues. Further, respondents in this study were dominantly Muslim students studying in an Islamic environment. The homogeneity of the respondent's background in terms of religion has perhaps led to similar attitudes when it comes to evaluating the personal relevance of religion or religious issues. Consequently, personal involvement is not dictating how respondents in this study process religious messages. Overall, from this study, there is no doubt that religious posts that are credible, informative and supported by facts, have the potential to be a highly persuasive form of communication on social media.

### **Practical Implications**

For Malaysian religious institutions, agencies and the governmental department over-seeing religious affairs, this study has several practical implications. It is very important for them to monitor religious messages that are spread through social media, particularly ones that are shared by celebrity Muslim preachers, considering their mass appeal and their influence over the public. Religious authorities such as Muftis, should also utilize the interactive features on social media

platforms, such as discussion threads, or quizzes and polls, to increase their persuasive appeal. To increase argument quality and belief in religious content, any fatwas or decrees by religious authorities should also be clear, supported by facts, and neutral, to avoid misleading their audience. Consequently, this may also lead to higher likelihood of sharing, posting and dissemination of these messages by the public.

### Limitations and Future Research

Generally, there is some support for ELM and the usage of the central route to process *da'wah* messages on social media. However, in this study context, a major finding is that personal involvement to social media posts by celebrity Muslim preachers did not matter too much to the recipient in processing religious messages. As the respondents in this study came from an Islamic university, interest in religious is perhaps already built in due to the environment they are in. Future studies could employ a different sample in comparing those studying in a different type of higher educational system that do not highlight or emphasis on Islamic values in the environment, and this could perhaps yield a different result on the role of personal involvement in processing religious messages on social media, and how it affects the relationship between belief, argument quality and sharing intent.

As cross-sectional studies only provide information on specific variables but does not establish causal relationships or analyze behavior over time, future studies could utilize the experimental method, to isolate cues that influence the central processing route, and examine its effect on the persuasiveness of *da'wah* messages or use the longitudinal approach to understand how social media audience process religious message over time. Also, using qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews can lead to a deeper and in-depth understanding of the meaning of personal involvement in the religious context, and to examine diverse motivations to process religious messages on social media. Finally, other peripheral cues, such as source credibility or expertise, could also yield additional information in terms of how social media audience process religious messages. It could be interesting for example, to compare the role of formal religious training of the source, in examining the persuasive appeal of religious messages among social media audiences.

### Conclusion

In sum, based on this study findings, celebrity Muslim preachers who are active on social media platforms and intend to use it to spread the messages of Islam must consider both the message content and the source characteristics in designing religious messages that are both credible and persuasive. To attract the younger audience using social media, interactive tools can be used to invite further discussion on religious issues, but celebrity Muslim preachers should be cognizant of the credibility of such messages and employ social media platforms carefully to avoid from misleading the public and sharing information that is false, inflammatory or inaccurate. They should also emulate the Prophetic *da'wah* style to ensure that the message of Islam receives positive response from the Muslim ummah, that could potentially lead to the adoption and incorporation of Islamic values in their everyday life.

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#### **Çalışmanın Etik İzin Bilgileri / Ethics Committee Approval**

International Islamic University Malaysia Abdulhamid Abusulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, 08/11/2024 tarihli yazısı çerçevesinde çalışma etik açıdan bir sakınca içermemektedir.

*The study has no ethical concerns within the framework of the letter dated 08/11/2024 from the Abdulhamid Abusulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia.*

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Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları yazar sırasına göre %90 ve %10 şeklindedir.  
The contributions of the authors to the study are as follows: 90% and 10% in order of authorship.  
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Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.  
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## Religious Commodification in Social Experiments on Zavilda TV's YouTube Channel<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Social media, including YouTube, has emerged as a significant aspect of contemporary lifestyles in society. Youtubers need to be able to present interesting content ideas in order to attract more viewers and advertisers. Zavilda TV YouTube Channel turns Islam into a content idea and commodifies it to attract more viewers. Religion and spirituality are no longer something exclusive, but have become a commodity and a public broadcast, used as an object and capital in the political economy of the media. Thus, this study aims to uncover realities that reflect the practice of commodification of religion in the Islamic social experiment targeting women. This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review. Dialogue manuscripts, titles, video descriptions and thumbnails for Zavilda TV are research objects that are studied using observation and documentation methods. The study of the political economy of media and critical discourse analysis are used to uncover and explain commodification in a more critical and in-depth way. The results found in this study are forms of religious commodification in the form of religious symbols and Islamic songs, as well as religious reflections that are given to the target to make them willing to wear the headscarf. The issue of religious tolerance is also included in the content by targeting women of religions other than Islam to try wearing the headscarf. There is a relationship that is lamely built through the clothing of talent and targets like preachers and mad'u. Zavilda TV attempts to disseminate its understanding of religion. The channel asserts that its interpretation of religious doctrine is accurate and obligatory for all Muslim women, even if some of the remarks given tend to discriminate.

**Keywords:** Commodification of Religion, YouTube, Islamic Social Experiments

## Zavilda TV YouTube Kanalındaki Sosyal Deneylerde Dinin Metalařtırılması

### Öz

Sosyal medya, YouTube da dâhil olmak üzere, günümüz yaşam tarzlarının önemli bir unsuru olarak ortaya çıkmıřtır. YouTuber'ların, daha fazla izleyici ve reklam veren çekebilmek için ilgi çekici içerik fikirleri sunmaları gerekmektedir. Zavilda TV adlı YouTube kanalı, İslam'ı bir içerik fikri olarak ele alarak daha fazla izleyici çekmek amacıyla metalařtırmaktadır. Din ve maneviyat, artık yalnızca bireylere özgü bir olgu olmaktan çıkarak medyanın politik

<sup>1</sup> The data in the examined accounts was constantly update and took its final form on May 2023. Data taken via YouTube platform.

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ekonomisinin bir nesnesi ve sermayesi hâline gelmiş, kamuya açık bir yayın ve ticari bir metaya dönüşmüştür. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, özellikle kadınlara yönelik İslami sosyal deneylerde dinin metalaştırılmasını yansıtan gerçeklikleri ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, nitel bir yaklaşım benimseyerek bir literatür taraması ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın nesnesi olarak Zavilda TV'nin diyalog metinleri, başlıkları, video açıklamaları ve küçük resimleri, gözlem ve dokümantasyon yöntemleri kullanılarak incelenmiştir. Medyanın politik ekonomisi ve eleştirel söylem analizi, metalaştırma pratiklerini daha eleştirel ve derinlemesine ortaya çıkarmak ve açıklamak için kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, dinî metalaştırmanın; dinî semboller ve İslami ilahiler, hedef kitleye başörtüsü takmayı kabul ettirme çabası ile iletilen dinî yansımalar gibi biçimlerde ortaya çıktığını göstermektedir. İçeriklerde, başörtüsü takma denemesine katılmaları için İslam dışındaki dinlere mensup kadınlar hedef alınarak dinî hoşgörü meselesine de yer verilmektedir. Ancak, hedef kitle ile içerik üreticisi arasındaki ilişki, vaiz ve muhatap arasındaki geleneksel ilişkiyi zayıf bir şekilde yansıtmaktadır. Zavilda TV, ortaya koyduğu dinî anlayışını yayma girişiminde bulunarak, bu anlayışın doğru ve tüm Müslüman kadınlar için bağlayıcı olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu yorumların bazı durumlarda ayrımcılığa yol açtığı gözlemlenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dinin Metalaştırılması, YouTube, İslami Sosyal Deneyler

**ATIF:** Nurfudiniyah, Hakim, L., & Fonny, J. S. (2024). Commodification of religion in social experiment Zavilda TV's content YouTube channel. *Medya ve Din Araştırmaları Dergisi (MEDIAD)*, Special Issue 1, p. 17-33.

## Introduction

Social media, including YouTube, has emerged as a significant aspect of contemporary lifestyles in society. The changes in the way people communicate are also driven by social media, which is available thanks to the Internet. This social media is a means of interacting with each other by sharing and exchanging information and ideas, words, pictures and videos in a virtual space (Setiadi, 2020).

Social media is also a means of self-expression; even now, social media has become a lifestyle for the community. According to a survey conducted by We Are Social, the number of active social media users in Indonesia reached 167 million in January 2023, or 60.4% of the Indonesian population (Meltwater, 2023). The average use of social media is 3 hours and 18 minutes per day (Widi, 2023). Along with many social media users, YouTube is one of the social networks used by Indonesia, after Facebook, which has reached 2.29 billion active users (Saputra, 2019).

Meanwhile, Indonesia is ranked as the fourth-highest YouTube user in the world after India, the United States, and Brazil, with 139 million users (Sadya, 2023). Digital creators, especially YouTubers, are beginning to emerge along with many social media users, not only because they want to work in cyberspace, but also because they want to make a living from content creation.

YouTubers need to be highly creative and able to present content with exciting ideas to keep viewers interested. Youtubers are busy competing to create content with creativity in a way that attracts the public's attention; creative Youtubers will get more responses from viewers and have a high probability of increasing AdSense on their channels, so Youtubers will benefit in the form of salaries from YouTube AdSense. This is why more and more people are turning YouTube into a career. Youtubers use YouTube to earn income, either directly from YouTube or from other parties (Habibi, 2021).

A variety of techniques are available for YouTubers to earn income, namely by joining the YouTube Partner Program, which will later give them AdSense, provided they already have 10,000 views, by promoting other people's services or products (endorsements), by promoting their own services or products, and a combination of several of these things. (Helianthusonfri, 2018). There are several ways to make money on YouTube, and many Youtubers are now competing to make their content as attractive as possible to attract viewers. One way is to include elements of the Islamic religion in their content. In the era of YouTuber competition, the phenomenon of business using religion is currently emerging, especially in Indonesia, a country with the highest Muslim majority population in the world. Of course, it is interesting for YouTubers to identify their target

market. Business actors are commodifying Islam as an object of content and goods with a saleable value, so the delivery is changing (Firasikha, 2019).

Commodification seeks to provide goods or services with material and commercial value. Thus, commodification is a way of transforming a relationship that was initially free of commercial elements into one that is commercial in nature (Kitiarsa, 2008). In its development, objects of consumption have also penetrated areas considered sacred, such as religious practices (Rizqa Ahmadi, Lilik Rofiqoh, 2022). Currently, Youtubers in Indonesia have also commodified religion in their content. This commodification aims to make religious content in the content so that it is watched a lot and gets clicks on ads or likes so that Youtubers can make a profit. Meanwhile, the purpose of commodifying religion is to bring religious elements into the marketplace and turn something sacred into something tradable (Saiful Hakam, Cahyo Pamungkas, 2017). Not all commodification of religion in content has a harmful purpose that violates the Shari'a. Still, the commodification of religion will make the sacred Islamic religion as a way of life into a commodity that has a sale or commercial value.

One of the YouTube channels that includes religion as content and commodifies it is the Zavilda TV channel. This channel has 211 thousand subscribers with the slogan "Islamic Social Experiment." this channel has received 13,118,132 views from June 2020 to October 2022 (<https://youtube.com/@zavildatv?si=5zD27zs7odTgdBZG>). Zavilda TV specifically creates content about Islamic social-religious experiments. Zavilda TV conducted a social experiment by visiting openly dressed women on the side of the road and talking about religion. Zavilda asked about several things related to the target's worship activities and her clothes. Apart from that, the most important thing is to invite the target to try using the hijab, veil, and closed clothing. Instead of preaching, Zavilda TV is considered to have commodified Islam because they exploit women.

In all of their content, the target of the social experiment is women by giving "bombastic" titles such as Viral! Dua Cewe S3xy Tatoan Insyaf Karena Takut Mati & Memilih Hijrah! ([https://youtu.be/\\_2jNUotoyDA](https://youtu.be/_2jNUotoyDA)) and all of the video titles contain elements of sexist language even though many use the words "Hijrah," "Insyaf," "Taubat," "Hijab" and words that are synonymous with other Islamic religions. Zavilda TV made the title, included elements of the Islamic faith, and made the idea of social experiment content considered a way to increase viewers, which would also increase their profits as a Youtuber.

**Figure 1.** Footage of religious symbols in Zavilda TV content (Zavilda TV, 2022c, 2022d, 2022f, 2022g)





The commodification of religion in the media can occur in any media, both mass media and social media (new media), because according to communication studies, all communication products can become commodification media (Jerry Indrawan, Efriza, 2020). Desika Fiorentina previously researched the commodification of religion on YouTube social media under the title *Commodification of Religion in Ukhti Mega Official YouTube Content*, the findings of commodification in Ukhti Mega's vlog content are religious elements that are used as content in the form of ta'aruf, young marriage, veils, etc (Fiorentina, 2022).

The commodification of religion in other social media was also raised by Farhan and Faisal Islamiyah, who reveal the commodification of religion with the headscarf on social media seen from the point of view of netizens and the role of netizens in it (Farhan, 2019). Meanwhile, Muhamad Fahrudin Yusuf presented research on the commodification of religion in the mass media under the title *Commodification: Mirrors of Fractured Religion on Television: Perspectives on the Political Economy of the Media*. This research led to the conclusion that almost all content in TV programmes is transformed into 'religion'. The entire process of television broadcasting cannot be separated from commodification at the levels of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption (Yusuf, 2017).

However, from the research on commodification in different media and perspectives. As in the mainstream media with a political economy perspective or on social media platforms such as Instagram with a virtual ethnographic perspective, and so on. The commodification of religion in YouTube social media from the perspective of media political economy and gender paradigm has not been raised. Therefore, this study seeks to see how the commodification of religion exists in the social experiment content of Zavilda TV's YouTube channel from the perspective of media political economy and gender paradigm.

### **Methodology**

This study used a qualitative method with a literature review or literature study approach. This study focuses on the hidden reality in the form of the commodification of religion in social experiments on YouTube content. So, the objects of this research are all Zavilda TV's visual objects in the form of manuscripts, titles, descriptions, thumbnails of video content in August, and some other viral content on other social media. These videos are collected as primary research data using observation and documentation techniques, while clarification Zavilda TV targets YouTube channels and other social media as supporting data (secondary research data).

The data analysis used in this study is based on the leading theory of the study of Media Political Economy by Vincent Mosco and content analysis in the form of Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) by Norman Fairclough as a supporting theory to uncover hidden realities that reflect the practice of commodification of religion in the content of Zavilda TV's Islamic Social Experiment. The use of these two theories to expose and explain commodification in a more critical and in-depth manner is because the paradigm used is a gender perspective. Thus, the commodification of religion will be exposed through the study of Vincent Mosco's Media Political Economy in the *Commodification of Content*, the *Commodification of Audiences* and the *Commodification of Labour*. The use of these two theories to expose and explain commodification in a more critical and in-depth manner because the paradigm used is a gender perspective. Thus, the commodification of religion will be revealed through the study of Vincent Mosco's Media Political Economy in *Commodification of Content*, *Audiences*, and *Labour* (Mosco, 2009). These commodification findings will be criticized in more depth using AWK Norman Fairclough in the form of text analysis, Discourse Practice Analysis, and socio-cultural analysis (Haryatmoko, 2019).

**Results and Discussions**

Commodification is converting any use value initially without selling value into a commodity or traded. Everything can become a commodity as long as it brings profit, including religion, which is used as a commodity in content and changed to advertisers to bring in profits, as Zavilda TV did (Santi, 2004). The Islamic religion has been commodified through social media, a product of the contemporary capitalist era where media has evolved from a mass industry into a profit-driven enterprise. Content creators exploit public engagement and user-generated content to generate revenue. In the end, not much different from mainstream media, social media became a for-profit corporation. Content creators take advantage of public participation, content creation, and various kinds of photos and videos to become media content commodities (Yoetadi, 2020). According to Vincent Mosco, several things are used as commodities in communication. They are often the target of commodification, including the commodification of content, the commodification of audiences, and the commodification of labor (Mosco, 2009).

**A. Commodification of Content**

Content commodification transforms the content of the message, from the construction of the message to the design of the message's meaning system, until the message is ready to be marketed. The media's message is designed to be liked by the public, even though it is unnecessary. The focus of this commodification is the commodity and its meaning (Haryono, 2020). The commodification of news is a form of media management exploitation of issues that are liked, desired or attract public attention. Alternative media with social media platforms such as YouTube allow audiences to become content producers (publishers). In social media, YouTube allows audiences to produce, develop and distribute their content (Yoetadi, 2020).

Zavilda TV makes Islam the content of its messages because most Indonesians are Muslim. All the programmes on the social experiment Zavilda TV contain content about the Islamic religion and are spiked with sensationalism to attract attention as indicated by the title “Cewe S3xy Bertato Tidak Percaya Adanya Tuhan, Menangis Ingin Insyaf!”, “Cewe S3xy Malu Pakai Hijab Seketika Dikasih Renungan Ingin Hijrah Malah Nangis”, “Cewe S3xy Nangis, Renungan Dosa Buka Aurat Bikin Dia Ingin Hijrah”, etc. The commodification of faith in the YouTube content of Zavilda TV The relationship between the commodification of religious symbols and the differences in the escalation of spiritual life from earlier times in Indonesia is powerful (Fealy, 2008). This content makes the commodification of Islam the commercialization of Islam or the exploitation of piety and its symbols as commodities (Zulfa Makiah, Noorhaidi Hasan, Ali Sodiqin, 2022).

Zavilda TV uses religious symbols in highlights in the form of Islamic sentences and songs, which become background music to support their Islamic social experiment content. Apart from that, another spiritual element that Zavilda TV includes in its content is death. In all its videos, Zavilda TV always contains a message to remember death as presented in Table 1. However, 3 of the statements about the end labeled the target. This message is a form of religious commodification carried out by Zavilda TV.

**Table 1.** Zavilda TV’s Reflection Message to Remember Death

Message Contents	Content Title
<p><i>Kakak selama 20 tahun telah ingkar sama kewajiban kakak, seandainya Allah bukan Maha Penyayang, seandainya Allah itu jahat sudah dari dulu Allah murka sudah ambil nyawa kakak, sudah ambil kesehatan kakak.</i></p> <p>(Sis, you’ve been denying your responsibilities for two decades. If God wasn’t so loving, if God was cruel, He</p>	<p>Cewe S3xy Nangis, Renungan Dosa Buka Aurat Bikin Dia Ingin Hijrah</p>

would have punished you a long time ago, taken away your life and health.)	
Kita merasa satu tahun lagi kita masih hidup, satu minggu lagi saya masih bisa hidup, padahal kan yang namanya kematian nggak ada yang tahu sedangkan kakak sudah sekian lama ingkar sama Allah, meninggalkan kewajiban gitu kan.  (We think we'll still be alive a year from now or even a week from now. But the truth is, none of us know when death will come. And for so long, you've been denying God and neglecting your religious duties)	Must be assigned to the main title of the article. Tutupin Aurat Artis S3xy Adeknya Celine Evangelista, Seketika Nangis Ingin Hijrah
Nggak pernah punya rasa takut? Kalau gimana seandainya tiba-tiba Allah panggil kita?  (Have you ever felt afraid? What if Allah calls us suddenly?)	Viral! Dua Cewe S3xy Tatoan Insyaf Karena Takut Mati & Memilih Hijrah!

Source: Author's analysis

### 1. Text Analysis

In this analysis, we will see how the vocabulary and use of terms in Zavilda TV's social experiment content footage commodifies religion, as well as the text construction of statements made by Vilda when persuading her targets to wear the hijab by providing religious messages and reflections on death. Religious symbols in words with Islamic nuances are inserted in the content outside of the dialogue being delivered. Some of the words inserted are "Alhamdulillah," "Masha Allah," "Hijrah," etc.

Figure 2. Footage of religious symbols in Zavilda TV content (Zavilda TV, 2022c, 2022d, 2022f, 2022g)



"Alhamdulillah" was the most frequently mentioned word in its content in August by 10x (total of all content). Tahmid, or "Alhamdulillah," means All Praise to Allah. Tahmid expresses a servant's gratitude to Allah SWT (Maesyaroh, 2021). According to the data obtained in this way, they also added a sentence of praise, namely "Masya Allah," which is in two of Zavilda TV's Islamic social experiment content, the word "Hijrah" to invite the target to change like a Muslim woman,

the word "Menutup aurat" (covering the awrah or practicing Islamic dress codes) which is mentioned up to 13x in the content is used as a substitute word for "Menggunakan Hijab" (wearing hijab) even though the word "Hijab" is still inserted in other content.

The use of religious symbols in Arabic terms and Islamic nuances supports the content of Zavilda TV's social experiment called the Islamic Social Experiment and strengthens its representation. Vilda is also referred to as "Ukhty." "Ukhty" itself has experienced a narrowing of its meaning from what was originally just a greeting and had the essence of my sister. She is now seen as a woman who wears Islamic clothing or covers her private parts completely (Irawati, 2014).

Islamic nuanced songs were also included to support Zavilda TV's Islamic social experiment, such as "Rasulallah ya Habiballah" and "Betapa IndahNya" sung by Ustadz. Jefri, as well as Syaikhona's song, is precisely the same as the YouTube video entitled "Sholawat Tersedih-Sholla Alaikallohu Robbi Daiman (Syaikhona)." The choice of this song implies that Zavilda TV wants to explore the emotions of its audience by including Islamic songs with lilting rhythms and deep lyrics.

**Table 2.** Zavilda TV's Reflection

Message Contents	Content Title
<p><i>Kakak selama 20 tahun telah ingkar sama kewajiban kakak, seandainya Allah bukan Maha Penyayang, seandainya Allah itu jahat sudah dari dulu Allah murka sudah ambil nyawa kakak, sudah ambil kesehatan kakak.</i></p> <p>(Sis, you've been denying your responsibilities for two decades. If God wasn't so loving, if God was cruel, He would have punished you a long time ago, taken away your life and health.)</p>	<p>Cewe S3xy Nangis, Renungan Dosa Buka Aurat Bikin Dia Ingin Hijrah</p>
<p><i>Kita merasa satu tahun lagi kita masih hidup, satu minggu lagi saya masih bisa hidup, padahal kan yang namanya kematian nggak ada yang tahu sedangkan kakak sudah sekian lama ingkar sama Allah, meninggalkan kewajiban gitu kan.</i></p> <p>(We think we'll still be alive a year from now or even a week from now. But the truth is, none of us known when death will come. And far so long, you've been denying God and neglecting your religious duties)</p>	<p>Must be assigned to the main title of the article. Tutupin Aurat Artis S3xy Adeknya Celine Evangelista, Seketika Nangis Ingin Hijrah</p>
<p><i>Nggak pernah punya rasa takut? Kalau gimana seandainya tiba-tiba Allah panggil kita?.</i></p> <p>(Have you ever felt afraid? What if Allah calls us suddenly?)</p>	<p>Viral! Dua Cewe S3xy Tatoan Insyaf Karena Takut Mati &amp; Memilih Hijrah!</p>

In its dialogue, Zavilda TV tends to label its targets even though Vilda intends to reflect. It can be seen from the use of the word "ingkar" (denying) which is mentioned in the two contents, the term "ingkar" (denying) is used in the sentence "Kakak selama 20 tahun telah ingkar sama kewajiban kakak,..." and "...padahal kan yang namanya kematian nggak ada yang tahu sedangkan kakak sudah sekian lama ingkar sama Allah,..." Meanwhile, the meaning of the word "ingkar" (denying) in Indonesian is not to acknowledge, reject, and not accept either verbally or in the heart, both physically and mentally. The word "ingkar" can support Vilda's appearance and image, which is described as someone who understands religion. The word "ingkar" has Arabic roots: Ankara,

yunkiru, and inkaran, synonymous with the Islamic faith. Arabic cannot be separated from Islam because the source of the religion of Muslims is the Al-Quran and Hadith, which are in Arabic (Junaid, 2018). Vilda's other labeling can be seen in the sentence, "Nggak pernah punya rasa takut? Kalau gimana seandainya tiba-tiba Allah panggil kita?." Vilda seemed to label that her target was not afraid of God.

The use of the terms "ambil nyawa" (taken away your life) and "ambil kesehatan" (taken away your health) in the sentence "Seandainya Allah itu jahat sudah dari dulu Allah murka sudah ambil nyawa kakak, sudah ambil kesehatan kakak." It is a metaphor to imply a specific picture of the meaning of death (Nugraha, 2021)

Dialog 1:

Vilda : "Kalau kewajiban-kewajiban lain meskipun jarang-jarang masih nggak, kak?. Kaya sholat gitu masih nggak, sih?. Atau memang sudah nggak pernah sama sekali?." (even the less frequent obligation, like praying, have you been neglecting those too? Or have you completely stopped doing them?)

Target : "Nggak pernah sama sekali." (completely stopped)

Vilda : "Terakhir kapan nih?. Nggakpapa, kak. Kita sharing-sharing saja." (when was the last time? Its okay, we can talk about it)

Target : "Waktu sekolah aja." (when I was still in school)

Dialog 2:

Vilda : "Menjalankan perintah agama tuh terakhir kali kapan, kak?." (when was the last time you obeyed a religious command?)

Target : "Nggak tahu, satu tahun yang lalu mungkin." (I don't know, maybe a year ago)

Vilda : "Udah lama banget, ya?." (that was a long time ago, wasn't it?)

Target : "Udah lama banget." (yeah, really long time)

The dialogue between Vilda and the target implies that Vilda wants to know the intensity of the target's worship, as can be seen from the choice of the words "jarang-jarang" (less frequent obligation) and "nggak pernah" (completely stopped) as well as the question with the sentence "Terakhir kali kapan?" (when was the last time?) that Vilda mentioned. Besides that, In several other videos about tolerance as indicated in Figur 3, almost all the titles contain the word "NONIS," which refers to the term non-Islamic. Non-Islamic is the term for someone who is not or is not Muslim. Unfortunately, this term is still being debated in society because it is considered to have a negative connotation and refers to the meaning of "Kafir" (non-believer) (Rakhmatulloh, 2019).

The representation of worship can also be seen from the different terms used by Vilda. In the first content, Vilda uses the time "kewajiban-kewajiban lain" which refers to Muslim worship, namely prayer, which is confirmed by the following question sentence, namely, "Kaya sholat gitu masih nggak, sih?" (like praying, have you been neglecting those too?). Meanwhile, in the second content, Vilda uses the term "perintah agama" (religious command), This term represents religion in general, not just Islam because the target in the second content is someone who does not believe in the existence of God even though he claims to be Muslim.

**Figure 3.** Thumbnail of Zavilda TV content with target "Nonis" (2045 TV, 2022; Zavilda TV, 2022; Zavilda TV, 2022a)



The video thumbnail about "Nonis" also implies the existence of a binary mindset or Binary Thinking, which is a way of thinking based on binary logic and just seeing things in this world as two categories without any gradations or deep thinking (Admin, 2022). Zavilda TV only looks at Islamic and non-Islamic religions without caring about non-Islamic faiths, namely Christianity, Catholicism, Confucianism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Zavilda TV's social experiment also implies a bias in the meaning of tolerance in its videos. This dialog can be seen in the last video clip dialogue:

Vilda: "Sebelumnya boleh nanya nggak, kak? Agamanya apa, ya?" (may I ask you something? What religion do you follow?)

Target: "Aku Nonmuslim" (I'm not Muslim)

Vilda: "Nah gini, kak. Saya mau ngajakin, ini kalau mau sih, tanpa ada paksaan, kalau mau aja sebagai rasa toleransi aja seandainya kakak memang nonmuslim cobain coba pakai hijab. It's okay, nanti dilepas lagi nggakpapa, kak. Gimana? (Okay, so here's what I want to suggest. If you're willing, and there's no pressure at all, I'd like you try wearing hijab. It's okay, you can take it off later. What do you think?)

Target: "Nyoba doang?" (just try it?)

Vilda: "Iya nyoba doang, saya nggak paksa kakaknya yang 24 jam enggak, hanya sebagai rasa toleransi mungkin sesama agama lain gitu" (yes, just try it. I'm not forcing you to wear it 24/7, just a sign of tolerance between different religions)

Tolerance is an attitude that is manifested in a willingness to accept various views and opinions (Bahari, 2010). In this sense, tolerance describes the absence of discrimination and coercion against followers of other faiths. Meanwhile, the 6th verse of the Qur'an, Surah Al-Kafirun, also explains how to have an attitude of tolerance, especially as a guideline for Muslims to behave and not to impose their religious attributes on other people.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

Sahih International Meaning: For you is your religion, and for me is my religion

Vilda's sudden arrival, asking for the target's time and asking about his religion implies that the construction of the relationship is unequal. This behaviour is because Vilda dresses in sharia and conveys religious messages as if she is someone who has the right to ask about other people's

worship and makes her target not shy away when she is asked to wear the hijab, even when she is given words that tend to label her target. Religion (all actions related to religion) is one of the sensitive personal data related to individual freedom and self-respect (Nasional, 2011).

Eza and Vilda are a married couple who own the Zavilda TV channel, Vilda as the talent and Eza as the editor. Eza has also strengthened Vilda's character by adding the term "ukhty" to the content. Zavilda TV describes itself as someone who understands religion, questions the worship activities of its targets and discusses religion and tolerance. The target in this content seemed to be someone who was far from faith, often dressed openly, and did not even believe in the existence of God, the visualisation of which looked very different between the two. Women of other nationalities (Caucasian) were also targeted by Zavilda TV by adding the words "Nonis" to the title, which further clarified the identity of the target.

Zavilda TV exploits the religiosity of its target audience by asking questions about the continuity of worship. In addition, Zavilda TV also uses women from religions other than Islam. This does not show religious tolerance, but is seen as a form of imposing spiritual attributes on people of different faiths. Below are questions about worship and thumbnail images that illustrate the issue of tolerance.

## 2. Discourse Practice Analysis

A content analysis will be conducted on Zavilda TV, a prominent YouTube channel specializing in Islamic social experiments, which boasts the highest number of subscribers and views that appear on YouTube searches when compared to similar content on other channel, such as Rohis Online, Jamal Palopo, Prawira Dijaya, Kelas Sarjana, and Aswad Atta. In August, Zavilda TV uploaded eight social experiment content. Of these eight contents, the last upload was with the title "Viral! Dua Cewe S3xy Tatoan Insyaf Karena Takut Mati & Memilih Hijrah!" received the highest number of views, namely 356 thousand views, 1.6 thousand likes, up to 12 thousand comments which also contained messages about death..

The channel further explores the theme of repentance and religious conversion through two additional videos titled 'Cewe S3xy Nangis, Renungan Dosa Buka Aurat Bikin Dia Ingin Hijrah' and 'Tutupin Aurat Artis S3xy Adeknya Celine Evangelista, Seketika Nangis Ingin Hijrah'. To increase viewership, the channel employs sensationalized titles and relevant hashtags such as #islam, #viral, and #trending. The use of hashtags also influences the number of viewers and insights gained because of the ease of searching (Mustofa, 2019). Some hashtags included are #tranding #islam and #viral, which are most often added to their uploads. Meanwhile, the content entitled "Cewe S3xy Bertato Tidak Percaya Adanya Tuhan, Menangis Ingin Insyaf!" uploaded on August 22, 2022, with 520 likes and 70,160 views, did not add any hashtags, so the number of likes and views obtained was not as high as content with hashtags.

The production of the discourse on religious symbols by inserting phrases and songs with Islamic overtones into the content was done by Eza as the editor. The choice of terms and phrases added to the content were all decisions made by Eza, who also played a role in creating the concept, negotiating with targets, tapping and the video uploading process (Wawan, 2022).

The Zavilda TV social experiment does not use hidden cameras like other social experiments. However, the target was openly recorded and had previously received a briefing, as stated by Vilda in her clarification "Kita udah ada izin upload, kita briefing, masih kita izin dulu mau buat konten, enggak?" (VR, 2022).

Zavilda TV's content is indeed inseparable from the audience's response. Many comments from netizens filled in the comments column, and even the last video reached 12 thousand comments, both pros and con. One of the contents became public discussion because the

understanding of tolerance was considered wrong. There were additional clickbait articles such as “Gimana reaksi cewe sexy nonis mirip bulan sutena saat ditawarkan coba pakai hijab!” (“How does a sexy non-nis girl who looks like Bulan Sutena react when she is offered to try wearing a hijab!”)

**Figure 4.** Zavilda TV Social Experiment Footage (2045 TV, 2022)



Unfortunately, this video is no longer available on the Zavilda TV channel. However, it has been re-uploaded by the YouTube channel or discussed in other media. Of all the videos, Zavilda TV viewers have given mixed reactions. Whether for or against the shows in it, the reactions come in different forms, one of which is through comments. However, the majority of comments highlighted the way Vilda asked her targets to wear the hijab, such as the comment from the account of bigoreseller wa1: "BUKAN BEGINI CARANYA DONG... masih banyak cara menyampaikan dengan baik tanpa harus melukai perasaan seseorang... pentingnya rasa menghargai dan menghormati seseorang... pentingnya berakhlak dan berakal".

### 3. Sociocultural Analysis

This dimension looks at how factors outside of Zavilda TV's YouTube account influence the discourse of the content being analysed, in terms of the form of religious commodification included in the content. Eza created religious symbols by inserting phrases with Islamic overtones as a response from the target and to emphasise the purpose of her social experiment. The sacred symbols inserted were based on the current state of the target, such as being confused, refusing or agreeing to wear the hijab. Songs with Islamic overtones are also included when the target is seen to be sad, crying or seemingly repentant. At such times it also helps Vilda to reflect on death. Contemplating death is certainly not lost on Zavilda TV, which commodifies it as reinforcement when it asks its targets to wear the hijab.

The life story of her target, which lies behind the decision not to wear the hijab and to dress openly, further supports the discourse in the form of questions about religious activities that are openly communicated. Dark personal life stories, her story of the loss of parental love that caused the target to lose faith in God, are explored more deeply by Vilda as support and appeal for the content of her social experiments. The dialogue between the two further reinforces the situation they wish to portray in their content.

Eza is a graduate of Mataram Tourism College, majoring in hospitality. This institution certainly influences the way Eza treats his targets. The discourse in the form of phrases with Islamic overtones that he inserted as a distraction to Zavilda TV's social experiment is also inseparable from his experience as a content creator who was a member of the Lombok influencer community.

Vilda's Instagram highlights @vilda\_emon shows screenshots from her personal WhatsApp social media home page, showing some of her WhatsApp groups. Vilda has also joined the Lombok Youth/I Da'wah group, Majlis Ta'lim Akhwat MPR, Mahabbatul Iman and the Story of the Prophet and the Companions. Of course, this also influences Vilda's way of conveying religious messages and her reflections on death. Indirectly, the institution that once housed Vilda has influenced the use of terms and the way religion is presented to its audiences.



Zavilda TV's social experiment content was created in Malioboro Yogyakarta, which is one of the urban areas in Indonesia and is visited by many residents from other areas either to study or travel (Sektiadi, 2021). Zavilda TV's targets are immigrants from different regions, such as the capital city of Jakarta, where urban life is free due to secondary supervision (control). Control in urban communities tends to ignore the personal behavior of each other, social control is non-personal (only applies to things that are not detrimental to the public), and control in urban society does not care about personal behavior such as religion (Novita, 2022).

It is unsurprising to find many people with diverse cultures from other regions, including those targeted by Zavilda TV, who are not native people from Yogyakarta. The clothes worn and the habits of the Zavilda targets differ from those of the people of Yogyakarta, who adhere to Javanese ethics and show more spirituality than materiality (Novita, 2022).

However, the secularisation of people in the capital is inversely proportional to the system of Indonesian society, which considers religion as a higher norm than the norms of everyday social life in general (Mulyadi, 2016). Thus, people use religion as a source of values that can regulate behavioural patterns, such as the content of Zavilda TV's Islamic Social Experiment, which includes religious symbols in its content. They also use religion as a source of values for their target behaviours. Religion also has a social control and transformative function, and religion can transform the personality of an individual or group into a new life through the teachings of their religion.

According to the 2022 Tolerance Year Notes survey, it was found that 72.6% of respondents considered that Indonesian society still upholds the value of tolerance. However, religious patience and political tolerance risk eroding national cohesion; almost half of the respondents, namely 47.6%, think religious tolerance needs to be increased further (Kontributor, 2022).

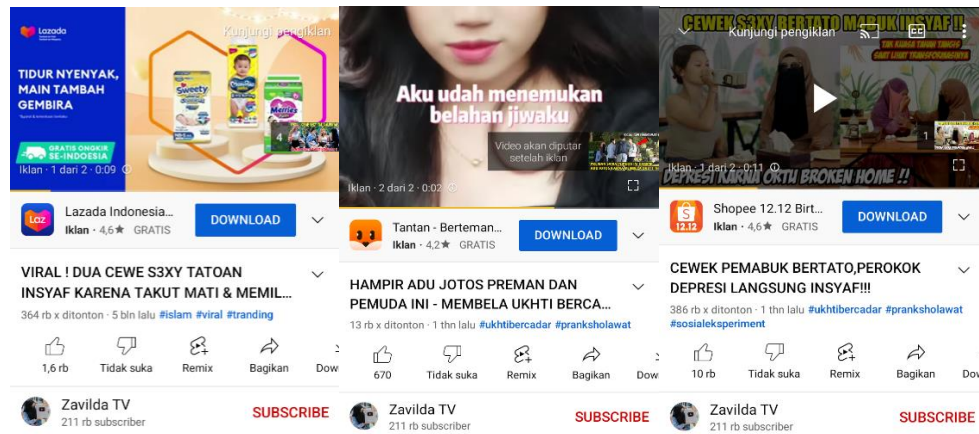
Indonesia is a pluralistic country with various beliefs such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam, with the most significant religious population being Muslims, reaching 229 million, equivalent to 13% of the Muslim population in the world (Itsram, 2021). Tolerance, considered good, and Islam as the majority religion indirectly influence the content creators of Zavilda TV to create social experiments with women of other faiths and offer the hijab.

### **B. The Commodification of Audience**

The commodification of audiences is the attempt to turn a media's audience into a commodity to be sold to advertisers in order to generate profits for content producers. Social media audiences are different because the characteristics of each social media platform are different. YouTube's social media audiences are called viewers for viewers and subscribers for followers.

Zavilda TV attracts viewers and subscribers through Islamic social experiment content they create and sell to advertisers through the Youtube Partner Program. They will get ads and profits from these ads when they reach 10,000 views (Helianthusonfri, 2018:135). So, in commodifying this audience, there is a "Symbiosis of Mutualism" or mutually beneficial collaboration between content creators and advertisers.

**Figures 4.** Ads on Zavilda TV YouTube content (Zavilda TV, 2022h, 2022e, 2022b)



The image above is an advertisement that appears in Zavilda TV content. Not just one ad, but up to two ads simultaneously in one content, and all the ads cannot be skipped (skipped). From these advertisements, Zavilda TV benefits; the more viewers who see the advertisements, the more profits they get (Pusat Bantuan Google, no date). Zavilda TV uses its audience to attract advertisers, so commodification occurs in this case.

The content of the audience also plays a role in controlling the content of the content, especially when the content is no longer in line with the norms or habits of the society, such as the number of subscribers of the Zavilda TV YouTube channel, which previously had 212,000 subscribers, dropped to 211,000 after the content went viral and received negative comments from netizens because of the perceived forcing of women to wear the hijab and intolerance towards women who are not Muslim. This case shows that the audience also plays a role in controlling the content. If the audience (viewers and subscribers) on the YouTube account decreases, the advertisements that the content creator receives will also decrease due to fewer views. (AdSense, no date).

**Figure 5.** Zavilda TV’s Subscribers Before Receiving Negative Comments (Zavilda TV, 2022i)



Source: Zavilda TV Youtube Channel

**Figure 6.** Zavilda TV’s Subscribers After Receiving Negative Comments (TV, 2023)



The two pictures were taken at different times. The first picture was taken on December 23, 2022, while the second was taken on January 31, 2023. You can see the difference in the number of subscribers from Zavilda TV's YouTube channel after they went viral, received negative comments, and switched to another YouTube channel.

### **C. The Commodification of Labor**

The commodification of labour does not only see workers as a team. Workers are also assets that can be used to drive and increase profits for content creators. Workers are not only a team that drives content production, but also a driving force for distribution. There are two processes in the commodification of labour (Haryono, 2020). First, the commodification of labour through the use of existing communication systems and technologies to increase the mastery of workers and commodify all processes performed by workers. Second, from an economic-political perspective, it explains the process of commodification, that is, when workers commodify something, they are simultaneously commodified.

This commodification also occurs in Zavilda TV. Vilda, who owns the YouTube channel Zavilda TV, is not only a content creator or designer. He is also a talent and a presenter who appears in the video. Vilda not only commodifies religion in her content, but in fact becomes a commodity and determines the course of the Islamic social experiment that is being carried out.

Vincent Mosco mentioned the commodification of labor. Vincent Mosco highlights the commodification of labor, characterized by exploitation and the intensification of work processes, demanding workers to possess multitasking abilities (Mosco, 2009). This is evident in the case of Vilda and Eza, who juggle multiple roles within their content creation process. They expressed this multiple roles in a clarification on the IWS Project's YouTube channel entitled "Eksklusif Klarifikasi Zavilda TV Paksa Orang Tak Dikenal Pakai Hijab?! HTI anti-Pancasila?" at 30:05 minutes Eza said "*Disini saya akui saya sebagai videografer juga iya, saya jadi editor juga iya, pembuat thumbnail juga ya saya*" (in addition to my other responsibilities, I also function as the videographer, editor, and thumbnail creator) (Wawan, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Zavilda TV's social experiment shows three primary forms of commodification: audience, labour and content. First, the audience is commodified as a 'product' to be sold to advertisers. Viewers' active participation in Zavilda TV's content, such as commenting and sharing, increases engagement, which directly benefits advertisers. This highlights how the digital media industry treats viewers as data points to be monetised. Second, labour is commodified through the multitasking nature of the work. The requirement for individuals to simultaneously be videographers, editors and thumbnail creators illustrates the digital media industry's demand for multi-skilled workers in order to maximise profits. Third, content is commodified through the exploitation of religious symbols, particularly the Islamic phrase "kalimah tayyibah". Religious symbols are used not just as ornaments, but as tools to attract and engage audiences. The content is strategically designed to evoke emotional responses and increase engagement, often simplifying complex religious doctrines for commercial purposes.

The content also commodifies discussions of death and religious practices, often presenting them in ways that discriminate against certain groups. These commodification strategies are evident in every aspect of the content, from dialogue and titles to thumbnails and descriptions. The use of hashtags such as #viral and #trending is aimed at maximising viewership and engagement. In conclusion, Zavilda TV commercialises religion, turning it into a marketable commodity. Viewers are treated as consumers and religious symbols are exploited for commercial gain. This practice is consistent with the concept of 'abuse of faith', where religious beliefs are manipulated for personal gain, often at the expense of the core values of the religion.

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## Artificial Intelligence on Journalism: Algorithmic Power Targeting the Crack in Memory in the Example of 'Religious Wave' Terrorist Attacks

Fikriye ÇELİK\*

### Abstract

The digital technology that governs this historical process is a partner in the creation of an ambiguous world with its image attached to everyday life forms. This picture the world is trapped in is becoming clearer in journalism practices. As the sector becomes acquainted with new forms of journalism, the responsibility of the news reader to be a truth reader increases. AI is visible in news production, from access to the source to the production. This study emerged from the necessity of considering the news-power-technology relationship and the memory distortion dynamics of global power structures together. In this study, which aims to point out the risks of AI news in the context of memory distortion, the 'religious wave' terrorist attacks are taken into consideration. Critical discourse analysis was used in this research conducted on a sample of the ChatGPT's news regarding 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris and Christchurch attacks. The findings show that the discourse of global power is repeated in artificial intelligence news on religion-based terrorist attacks and that technology targeting social memory reproduces the ideology of power. Accordingly, an intensive reading practice can be recommended to the interlocutors of the news against the news emerging from AI algorithms.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence Journalism, Collective Memory, ChatGPT, Algorithmic Power, AI Bias

## Habercilikte Yapay Zekâ: 'Dini Dalga' Terör Saldırıları Örneğinde Algoritmik İktidarın Bellekteki Çatlağı Hedeflemesi

### Öz

Deneyimlediğimiz tarihsel sürecin şeklini tayin eden dijital teknoloji, gündelik hayat formlarına ilişik görüntüsüyle hiç olmadığı kadar muğlak bir dünya yaratımına ortaklık etmektedir. Dünyanın hızla hapsediği bu müphem tablo habercilik pratiklerinde belirginleşmekte; sektör yeni birtakım gazetecilik biçimleriyle tanışırken haber okuyucusunun omzundaki hakikat okuryazarı olma sorumluluğu biraz daha artmaktadır. Nitekim bugün artık kaynağa erişimden metnin üretimine haber yapım sürecinde yapay zekâ faktörü görünürlük kazanmıştır. Bu çalışma haber-iktidar-teknoloji ilişkisi ile küresel iktidar yapılarının belleği çarpıtma dinamiklerini birlikte düşünme gerekliliğinden ortaya çıkmıştır. Yapay zekâ ürünü haberlerin belleğin çarpıtılması bağlamındaki olası risklerini işaret etme amacındaki çalışmada, söz konusu bağlantılılığı net biçimde gösterme potansiyeline sahip olduğu düşünülen 'dini dalga' terör saldırıları dikkate alınmıştır. Örneğini ChatGPT yapay zekâ algoritmasının 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris ve Christchurch saldırıları konusunda ürettiği haber metinlerinin oluşturduğu çalışmada eleştirel söylem analizinden yararlanılmıştır. Bulgular din tabanlı terör saldırılarının yapay zekâ tarafından haberleştirilme pratiğinde küresel iktidar söyleminin tekrar edildiği, toplumsal belleği hedefleyen modern teknolojinin iktidar ideolojisini yeniden üreten bir araç konumuna yerleştiği sonucuna ulaştırmıştır. Bu sonuçtan hareketle hem üretim hem tüketim konumunda bulunan haberin muhataplarına, yapay zekâ algoritmalarından çıkan haber metinlerine karşı dikkat yoğun bir okuma pratiği geliştirme önerisinde bulunulabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yapay Zekâ Haberciliği, Kolektif Hafıza, ChatGPT, Algoritmik İktidar, Yapay Zekâ Yanlılığı

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## Introduction

Artificial intelligence algorithms, which have developed as technology has taken a position in relation to human life, have rapidly become visible in all forms of daily life. Artificial intelligence algorithms, which have forced many sectors from health to economy to adapt to advanced technology, have also taken a prominent position in journalism. Undoubtedly, this rapid transition process observed in journalism has also brought ethical issues to the agenda. As a matter of fact, algorithms, which are seen to have gained functionality within the framework of access to information, which is the first stage of the news production process, and the practice of writing texts in the last stage, have become the control mechanism of the content that constitutes the subject of the news. Thus, in the process where both research and writing are carried out by machines, gatekeeping, one of the most critical operations of the news production process, has been handed over to machine intelligence instead of human intelligence. This situation makes the selective elements that come to the fore in the gatekeeping process, especially ideological, economic and political preferences, more important. This is because the necessity of evaluating artificial intelligence algorithms within an economic and political framework becomes evident here. Just as the ownership structure in traditional news media has a sanctioning role on the news, the power structures that are the creators of the algorithms have an influence on the news produced by artificial intelligence. In this case, it should be mentioned that we are faced with news content that serves the interests of the global power structure in the practice of new journalism.

Undoubtedly, this reality is not unique to the news production process. More generally, the hierarchy of information on the internet points to a global gatekeeping. Algorithms that select the information to be presented to people create the public agenda (Musiani, 2013, p. 4). Depending on this fact, the fact that algorithm-generated news reports raise ethical issues stems from access to information, which is known to be the first stage of the news-making process. This is the stage where the content is determined and the scope and boundaries are drawn. It is at this stage that the debate on the accuracy of the information used in the news emerges. It is known that information whose accuracy is not certain, especially on issues of collective interest, has the potential to distort the truth. This situation raises the concern that the collective memory, which already functions in a problematic area, can be easily and quickly manipulated by artificial intelligence algorithms. This is because it is a known fact that the data used by algorithms are vulnerable to manipulation. Undoubtedly, the fact that algorithms utilize data from the internet environment to be used in news requires taking into account the global identity of the internet network. As a matter of fact, there is nothing more natural than the widespread or dominant information on the internet, which is dominated by the global economy, serving the interests of global power. This situation points to algorithmic power. This sign reminds us of the truth of Lash's (2007) idea that "power has become more sinister in a post-hegemonic age" (p. 59). For now, both power has become unlimited and the techniques of power are equipped with the ability to transform everything.

The claims that algorithm design, which is seen as a socio-technical artifact, is actually an authority or a technique of power rather than just an algorithm production are getting stronger day by day. This is because algorithms based on calculations lead to an automated process while fulfilling the functions of finding, recording and storing information that exceed the limits of human memory. This process necessitates the automatization of decision-making mechanisms. This situation points to the fact that we are faced with a new problem of power and control. Likewise, it is now a matter of debate who the managers of algorithms are (Barocas vd., 2013, p. 5). There are also researchs that evaluate these systems in the center of "algorithmic war stories" (Gorwa, 2019, p. 2). In addition, it should be said that the way of seeing algorithms based on power-centered evaluation constructs this context around accountability relations. This perspective is based on the claim that the power relations that bring algorithms to the fore remain invisible and free from



responsibility by keeping themselves in the background (Woolgar & Neyland, 2013). In the current form of the relationship between knowledge and power, the more invisible power is, the more the knowledge of algorithms is unknowable, even secret. Undoubtedly, this fact is important to show that the world is faced with a perfectly functioning global power technique.

Another important issue is that algorithms represent micro-scale thoughts or expressions as a holistic portrait. In other words, it should be said that algorithms have the potential to create a big new reality. The presentation of the data collected by the system as “absolute universal consensus” undoubtedly contains the traces of global power (Geiger, 2009, pp. 24-26). Accordingly, first and foremost, the algorithms that regulate and centralize the circulation on the network, that measure what is important and relevant, work as a technique of power. However, the local dimension of public opinion is often more important than the global one. As it is known, the public interest is closely linked to culture and society and to the specific regulatory framework (Kutchel, 2023).

This study discusses the new forms that digital technology, which has become the determinant of the historical process we experience by being attached to everyday life forms, has caused in journalistic practices within the framework of the relationship between power and technology. It is thought that the most accurate way to see the transformation caused by new technologies in journalism in the context of power is to conduct the research on a few news texts. In this context, this research focuses on terrorist attacks, which have the potential to strikingly show the traces of power in news texts produced by artificial intelligence, the last stage of technology. The global nature of the algorithms in question and the fact that the reviewed literature points to algorithmic power showed that the research should focus on global terrorist attacks. In this context, four religious wave terrorist texts, namely 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris and Christchurch attacks, were considered in the study. Four news articles produced by the ChatGPT artificial intelligence algorithm about these attacks were determined as the sample and critical discourse analysis was applied to them. The determination of both the sample and the research technique was influenced by the fact that the whole fiction, especially the words that the reader encounters in the news on terrorism, is a product of choice in a very distinct way, unlike other news content.

### **The Age of Algorithms in the Relationality of Knowledge and Power**

Algorithmic power is essentially the updated form of power networks as a result of historical and periodic conditions. The tradition of power structures throughout history of directing social dynamics through the production of information is still being realized today in accordance with periodic changes. There is no doubt that today's means of knowledge production are artificial intelligence systems. Accordingly, these systems are not objective tools that develop spontaneously or contribute to the emancipation of society. On the contrary, thanks to their global outlook, they bear the traces of a larger power structure than before. This is not a fact that can be understood at first glance. Because it has an unmanned form, it is claimed that artificial intelligence algorithms have an objective decision-making mechanism. However, when approached carefully, it is understood that we are faced with a mechanism that operates with the data it learns just like a human being.

Of course, it is not surprising that a fact such as “AI bias” is revealed here. AI bias refers to an AI system’s production of biased content about a particular topic, situation or group (Chang vd., 2024, p. 14; Ferrara, 2023, pp. 2-5, 2024c, pp. 2-3, 2024a, p. 2, 2024b, p. 550; Liu vd., 2023, pp. 16-18). This is due to biases in the data sets on which algorithms are trained or biased choices in the design of algorithms. In other words, there is a problem of selection bias based on data (Hovy & Prabhunoye, 2021, p. 5). Undoubtedly, this plays a major role in the creation of a 'black box society' (Fioriglio, 2015, p. 404). Artificial intelligence bias mostly encompasses social patterns and themes of discrimination. On the one hand, this bias leads to social and ethical problems, and on the other

hand, it causes the field of use to be realized in an unjust environment. This situation points to problems such as access to data, bias in data collection, ownership and power in AI systems.

When we look at artificial intelligence algorithms from these frameworks, Foucault's (1977) claim that the relationship between power and knowledge reveals an intertwined image becomes meaningful. According to him, knowledge, which is shaped by historical, cultural and social conditions, is a tool that reflects hegemonic class interests and perspectives and is used as a technique of power. In this context, the Foucauldian approach offers a perspective that is significantly useful in denying the objectivity of AI-generated knowledge. When the knowledge produced by artificial intelligence is evaluated from this framework, it is seen that the traces of the relations of production, ownership structure and the paradigm and value judgments of the creators of the system that enable the emergence of this knowledge are clearly evident. Because throughout history, knowledge has been the most functional tool that protects power and enables it to reproduce itself in the attempts to explain, categorize or justify the power asserted by the dominant environments. Thus, while the relationship between knowledge and power has allowed the dominant discourse to be immanent in society, it has led to the marginalization of other or minority knowledge, values and perspectives.

When we look at today in the light of Foucault's suggestions, it is more difficult than in the past to illuminate the reality of knowledge that passes through the filter of power in this age under the control of artificial intelligence. This is because this time it is not a human being who undertakes the production of knowledge, but a machine that is free from emotion. Therefore, it is not easy to think and prove that machines, which claim to produce concrete data free of all subjectivity, actually produce knowledge based on social power inequalities. It is certainly not possible to detect information that is not based on any accurate data or that is fed by distortions and prejudices. However, it is natural to think that the prejudices that shape knowledge are based on historical, social and cultural stereotypes. As a matter of fact, for example, when artificial intelligence algorithms are trained with data that is more reflective of a certain ideology, prejudices appropriate to that data will be revealed directly and effortlessly. As a natural consequence, the AI system will produce wrong content based on manipulated data.

The issue where these directed or distorted or faulty productions are most clearly revealed is undoubtedly terrorism. This is because terrorism is a subject where the artificial intelligence system is much more easily constructed, especially due to its global nature. Artificial intelligence, which is known to be a system based on human instruction, is a partner in the process of deliberate distortion of knowledge. Because the selection, labeling and editing of the data used in the training of these models is done by real humans. Thus, the ideology of global power, which reproduces itself through human beings in particular, keeps the data collection process under control and processes ideological data into the system. The result is deliberate machine bias.

Based on the framework proposed by Foucault (1977), the belief that artificial intelligence, which is seen as a new form of resistance against power, has the potential to create is not independent of power under any circumstances. This gives rise to a new concept such as "algorithmic power" that deserves to be discussed. Beer (2009) explains this with the concept of 'power through the algorithm'. In this new form, where it is possible to talk about a power model that depends on the size of the data, we encounter a reality such as "algorithm dictatorship". In this form of dictatorship, automated procedures work as decision-makers, uncontrollable abstract power comes to the fore instead of controllable human beings, and human beings are objectified (Rodotà, 2014, pp. 37-38; cited in Fioriglio, 2015, p. 407). Here, data collected by digital devices and obtained directly from primary sources about people and society are programmed and manipulated in favor of power. This means that a secret dictatorship gains functionality with the help of human beings. Indeed, algorithmic power owes its existence to human data. This digital

data is invisibly installed on various media that lead to rapid circulation and distribution, presenting a growing appearance in today's world (Musiani, 2013, p. 2).

In this dictatorship based on human cooperation, while a new culture is created, economic and political power controls the body on the one hand and memory on the other. Likewise, as is known, both individual memory and collective memory exist in various construction processes. The fact that it is a structure composed of cracks makes memory open to intervention. Due to this quality, it is an area where power struggles are constantly ongoing, especially over collective memory. In this age of artificial intelligence, the power provided by algorithms offers economic and political power environments the opportunity to distort, manipulate or reconstruct collective memory. Undoubtedly, this means recreating the reality of developments or events within history. From this point of view, arguments that see algorithms as a kind of artifact of power arrangements and new faces of politics make sense (Latour, 1993). Because today, the shaping of the organization that involves the production and distribution of knowledge reveals a completely algorithmic image. The political nature of these algorithms is an outcome of the organization of knowledge as well as the culture that gave rise to this system (Anderson, 2011, pp. 541-543). In other words, these tools, which are used as a kind of power technique, serve collective efforts to know and be known (Gillespie, 2014, p. 3).

Based on all these explanations, we have no choice but to see that the transformation in surveillance with modern technology reproduces itself through the techniques and technologies available today. The high capability of algorithms in surveillance, coding and archiving has revolutionized surveillance. This is due to the fact that algorithms have become the main tool that shapes the daily life knowledge of society. In this case, both the regulation of algorithms by power and the design of society by algorithms are possible (Musiani, 2013, pp. 1-2). Thus, it is not difficult to say that the panoptic culture based on disciplining and controlling has gained a new dimension with the phenomenon of algorithm dictatorship. The idea that power is established from everywhere at any time, which reveals the panopticon, has paved the way for reproducing the surveillance culture in question with new techniques by updating it depending on the periodic processes while allowing the ruler to observe without being seen mechanically. Thus, the panopticon, which transcends spatial and temporal walls, has now reached its current appearance in the form of fluid surveillance. At this point, the importance of the consent factor, which both Foucault (1977) and Deleuze (1992) draw attention to in the cooperation of discipline and control societies, is understood. Because, as is known, the biggest trump card of algorithmic power is the data taken from people with their consent. This trump card reminds us of what Lash (2007) explains through the concept of 'post-hegemonic power' (p. 55). With the help of this concept, Lash is actually trying to explain that an ontological regime of power has begun. According to him, power has replaced 'knowledge', which has always been its target, with 'truth'. Lash (2007) thinks that knowing the 'truth' is no longer a cognitive process, but a purely emotional process: "In the age of hegemony, power only appropriated your predicates: in the post-hegemonic present it penetrates your very being. Power, previously extensive and operating from without, becomes intensive and now works from within" (pp. 58-59).

Undoubtedly, deciding which of the digital footprints left by humans in the environment that represents the new world will be included in the database implies a selection process. The algorithms that carry out this selection specifically produce calculated public opinion. There is a process of transforming public opinion into an algorithmic commodity, putting this commodity back in front of the public and inviting the public to meet it, so to speak. Maps made up of preferences and new cultures created based on maps are part of this process. The fact that algorithms, which are coded procedures, work as a technique of power due to their calculative nature, makes it invalid to doubt the existence of an antidemocratic system. Accordingly, it should not be surprising to find warm human beings, ideological choices and economic and political

justifications behind these cold mechanisms that are abstract and technical achievements (Gillespie, 2014, pp. 1-3).

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Purpose and Importance of the Research**

The primary aim of this study is to point out the possible risks of artificial intelligence news in the context of memory distortion. For this purpose, it was thought that it would be appropriate to prove this fact through 'religious wave' terrorist attacks, which have the potential to clearly demonstrate this reality. David C. Rapoport's (2002, 2013) Wave Theory was taken into consideration in determining the sample. According to him, terrorism has been an important factor in the reorganization of the international world. Stating that modern terrorism consists of four waves, Rapoport mentions that each wave was created by political events. The first wave, which emerged in the 1880s and lasted for forty years, was the 'anarchist wave', while the second wave, the 'anti-colonial wave', started in the 1920s and lost its importance in the 1960s. Because in the late 1960s the world was introduced to the third wave, the 'new left wave', which would dissipate by the 1990s. The fourth wave, defined as the last wave and called the 'religious wave', started in 1979. Today, the world still seems to be facing a religious wave. The adherence to this theory was influenced by the fact that terrorism, which is a violence-intensive discourse, is carried to the concrete sphere through action practices and that the motivational sources that facilitate the transition from discourse to action are updated depending on social dynamics. Based on this fact, within the framework of the Wave Theory, which characterizes today's wave of terrorism as a "religious wave", four cases have been selected among the most mediatic religious wave terrorist attacks of the last 30 years.

The research is important because on the one hand, it deals with a current issue such as artificial intelligence, on the other hand, it deals with the appearance of artificial intelligence in journalism with a nuanced literature review that reveals a perspective centered on power and collective memory, and on the other hand, it proves the relationship between news-power-technology through sample texts.

#### **Method**

In this study, critical discourse analysis was applied to the news articles under scrutiny with the idea that it will help to understand whether the news produced with artificial intelligence algorithms are fed by the discourse of power inherent in the global media. For this purpose, the study focuses on four religious wave terrorist acts in the form of 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris and Christchurch attacks that took place in the last thirty years and had a global impact, which are considered to have the potential to clearly show the reality in question. In determining the sample, the events that caused reactions and turned into dramatic political turning points, which are accepted as an important threshold in the reshaping of the international world, and which provided the necessary conditions for religion-centered discrimination were taken into consideration. The fact that the events that constitute the subject of the sample of the research are of a nature that internationalizes terrorism was also an important factor in the selection of these events.

The main questions for reporting these events were asked to the ChatGPT artificial intelligence algorithm. The four different news obtained as a result of the questions that enable the algorithm to access the information needed in news production became the sample of the study. ChatGPT generated news were evaluated in terms of prominent theme, language structure, use of sources and accuracy of information. With the data obtained, artificial intelligence-produced news on the religious wave terrorist attack were considered around 5W1H answers and global media ideology, and evaluated in the context of the relationship between algorithmic power and news. The limitation of the study is the selection of ChatGPT among language models. In this study,

in which critical discourse analysis was applied, the macro and micro structures of the texts were analyzed. In macro-structural analysis, thematic and schematic analysis was conducted, while in micro-structural analysis, word choice was analyzed. Another important limitation of the study is that microstructural analysis was limited to word choice and syntactic analysis, regional cohesion and rhetorical analysis were not applied to the texts.

Critical discourse analysis aims to make discourse, which is an object of production, transparent and visible. This is because the way discourse is represented, retold or rewritten sheds light on the emergence of new discourse orders, struggles for normativity, attempts at control and resistance against power regimes. As is well known, discourse is an implicit instrument of power. According to Fairclough, a discourse text is a discursive practice produced, circulated, distributed and consumed in society and is the product of an ideological and hegemonic process. According to him, hegemonies are changing, and accordingly, the instrumentalization of discourse takes place through this change. As a matter of fact, it is possible to witness the discursive change that develops in line with renewed hegemonies, especially in the context of intertextuality (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449). From this perspective, van Dijk, who focuses all his attention on the text, also approaches Fairclough. According to van Dijk (1988), who sees the text as an indicator of ideology due to the signs it carries, news is also a discourse and is not independent from the social structure it emerges from. Accordingly, van Dijk's claim that power relations are the most important determinant of the news production process is strong.

## Findings

It should be noted that the most important practice to reach accurate findings regarding the news texts produced by ChatGPT about the four different religious wave terrorist attacks that constitute the subject of the study sample is to ask the same questions to the algorithm in each production. In this context, in the prompt we entered into the interface of the artificial intelligence, the question pattern remained the same, only the events were renewed. Thus, with the help of the prompt “write a news text about the attack that occurred on ..... at .....”, ChatGPT was enabled to produce news text about the 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris and Christchurch attacks selected as case studies. Each news item was analyzed under separate headings.

### 1. 7/7 News by ChatGPT

Prompt: Write a news text about the attack in London on July 7, 2005.

#### 1. 1. Macro Structural Analysis

##### 1. 1. 1. Thematic Analysis

In the macro-structural analysis of the news report on the 7/7 attacks, firstly a thematic analysis was conducted. For this purpose, the title, introduction and body of the news text were evaluated from a general framework.

##### 1. 1. 1. 1. Title

ChatGPT produced a news report about the terrorist attack in London on July 7, 2005 with the headline “City in Mourning in London Attacks: July 7 Tragedy” (OpenAI, 2024).

##### 1. 1. 1. 2. News Entry and Body of the Text

In the analyzed news, it was observed that the artificial intelligence algorithm preferred a comment-oriented language. Throughout the entire text, we see a practice of conveying information that directly targets emotion and is far from providing answers to the 5W1Hs that constitute the essence of the event.

ChatGPT saw the incident as a terrorist attack targeting tube stations and buses in London (OpenAI, 2024). It is important that there is no data to answer the question “when”, which is known

to be one of the most important questions of the news. Except for the date information given in the prompt that enables the algorithm to generate news, there is no information about the time of the attack in the text. In general, it is seen that the news flash was not constructed correctly. As a matter of fact, the first paragraph of the news should have an introduction with a conclusion. It is also seen that there is no source in the news produced by ChatGPT. This situation indicates that the accuracy of the information obtained by the artificial intelligence algorithm during the news production process is questionable.

### **1. 1. 2. Schematic Analysis**

#### **1. 1. 2. 1. Background and Context**

Background and context information is extremely important in terms of revealing the way the news reflects the event. As a matter of fact, the context in which the news is constructed can often be more remarkable than the event itself. Because the event gains meaning in the context in which it is placed. In other words, the event is either presented as it is or goes through a new creation process as it is intended to be. Sometimes, the background information that highlights the social, cultural, economic and political aspects of the event that is the subject of the news is important enough to be analyzed.

The attacks of July 7, 2005 were reported by ChatGPT in the context of terrorism (OpenAI, 2024). In the entire text, a language of condemnation, unity and solidarity messages against terrorism is used, while the necessity of security measures to facilitate the fight against terrorism is mentioned.

#### **1. 2. Micro Structural Analysis**

Analyzing the words and sentences that make up the news at the local level and explaining them through concrete examples makes it easier to reach the meaning of the text. In this context, microstructural analysis was used in the study as it is a technique that enables inferences to be made about the meaning of word choices and sentence structures that significantly build the basis of the news text. Within the scope of microstructural analysis, only the word choice of the analyzed texts was examined.

First of all, it is seen that the characterization 'terror' stands out in the news text in question. This is an important data. As a matter of fact, the choice made in characterizing the event reflects the widespread way of seeing in the internet network that is the source of ChatGPT, which reveals a motor skill. In this case, it is possible to say that the attacks that took place in London on July 7, 2005 were included in the global network as a terrorist attack.

### **2. 2015 Paris Attacks News by ChatGPT**

Prompt: Write a news text about the attack in Paris on November 13, 2015.

#### **2. 1. Macro Structural Analysis**

##### **2. 1. 1. Thematic Analysis**

In the first stage of the 2015 Paris attacks news report's macrostructure analysis, a thematic analysis was conducted. Within the scope of this analysis, the title, introduction and body of the news text were analyzed.

##### **2. 1. 1. 1. Title**

ChatGPT did not use a headline in the news text it produced about the terrorist attack in Paris on November 13, 2015. It started the text directly with the introduction "Let us remind you of a sad event" (OpenAI, 2024).

## 2. 1. 1. 2. News Entry and Body of the Text

In the analyzed algorithm-produced news text, a comment-oriented news language is encountered. When we look at the editing of the text, the act of emotion rather than the practice of informing comes to the fore. ChatGPT defines the event in question as a terrorist attack against innocent people in Paris (OpenAI, 2024). When the text is analyzed, it is seen that temporality, which is among the 5W1H and one of the basic elements of news, is not taken into account. Except for the date information given in the prompt that enables the algorithm to generate news, the time of the attack was not shared with the reader. There is also no source information in the news produced by ChatGPT. This data is noteworthy in terms of illuminating the fact that the information utilized by the artificial intelligence algorithm in news production is in need of confirmation.

Another important finding in the body of the text is the prominence of vague information instead of clear statements. The information that “more than 130 people” were killed and “hundreds of people” were injured as a result of the attacks is an example of this (OpenAI, 2024). In fact, these and other similar findings, while pointing out the faulty practices of artificial intelligence in news production, also provide information about the dominant news language in the internet network used by the algorithm and the common wrong practices in traditional journalism. In this respect, the data obtained is also valuable.

## 2. 1. 2. Schematic Analysis

### 2. 1. 2. 1. Background and Context

Since the reader does not read the event itself but the way it is processed in the news text, background and contextual information that illuminates the point of view here is extremely important. The context in which the news is constructed is mostly in a position to recreate the event. Along with the context, the background information that highlights the social, cultural, economic and political aspects of the event is also critical enough to be analyzed.

The news text produced by ChatGPT about the attacks that took place in Paris on November 13, 2015 was constructed in the context of terrorism (OpenAI, 2024). In the text, in which the use of a language inviting the international community to fight against terrorism is prominent, the name of the terrorist group to have organized the attack is also mentioned. It is known that the terrorist group in question introduces itself to the international community through Islam. The data pointing to the fact that the artificial intelligence algorithm is a tool that repeats the discourse of global power is certainly not limited to this. For example, striking statements such as “the Paris attacks have led to increased concern and a review of security measures in the fight against terrorism around the world. This tragic event has also brought about an ongoing debate and effort on how people will cope with the effects of terrorism” seem to be a product of securitization policies that serve to reproduce the global power discourse. Accordingly, the emphasis on Islam in the name of the terrorist group in question and the construction of the news text in the context of terrorism-religion-global security ensure that the securitization policies that expand their space in the global world are prioritized and justified within the framework of terrorist acts.

## 2. 2. Micro Structural Analysis

Microstructural analysis is a nuanced analysis of the news text centered on words and sentences. The idea that the strongest message of the text can only be reached by analyzing the words in detail makes microstructural analysis valuable. In this context, it is understood that the word choices in this news text are remarkable.

As a result of the analysis, it was understood that the word 'terror' is the most important data that establishes the context of the news. There is no doubt that this finding is noteworthy in

terms of pointing out the theme on which the news is built. This is because the word choice in question does not only have the meaning of a word but also characterizes the event. This means that the prominent visual tendency about the event under scrutiny on the internet network used as a source by the ChatGPT artificial intelligence algorithm, which is known to have motor skills, is in the context of terrorism. Accordingly, it is possible to say that the attacks that took place in Paris on November 13, 2015 were characterized as an act of terrorism by the global power that shapes the global network.

### **3. Christchurch Attacks News by ChatGPT**

Prompt: Write a news text about the attack in New Zealand on March 15, 2019.

#### **3. 1. Macro Structural Analysis**

##### **3. 1. 1. Thematic Analysis**

The third ChatGPT-produced text analyzed in the study is the news text on Christchurch attacks dated March 15, 2019. The title, introduction and body were evaluated within the framework of the thematic analysis of the text, which was analyzed macro-structurally.

##### **3. 1. 1. 1. Title**

ChatGPT's news about the terrorist attack in New Zealand on March 15, 2019 was titled "Terrifying attack in New Zealand: Dozens dead and wounded" (OpenAI, 2024). Based on the title, it is not possible to understand that the event in question is a terrorist attack. As a matter of fact, there is no clue about the nature of the attack or the target. The headline is important in this respect. As the most important element of the news, the headline serves a framing logic that aims to leave behind as much as to bring forward. Undoubtedly, the framing in this news text points to the aim of preventing the event from being seen as a terrorist attack.

##### **3. 1. 1. 2. News Entry and Body of the Text**

This news text, like the other texts in the sample, has created an emotion-intensive discourse. When the discourse used in the text is analyzed, an interpretation-centered narration is encountered, from the horrifying nature of the attacks to the shock effect in the country.

ChatGPT did not see the attack in question as a terrorist attack. The fact that the answers to the "who" and "what" questions, which are undoubtedly the two most important questions of the 5W1H that enable a complete understanding of the incident, are not found in the text indicates the practice of distortion. This is because the true nature of an event is hidden in the answers to the questions of who and what. In the analyzed news text, the perpetrator of the crime is shown as "armed assailants". However, the perpetrator is only one person. Similarly, the news article states that the factors motivating the attack have not yet been clarified. However, the attack is a terrorist attack from beginning to end, as can be understood from the content served to the world by the terrorist himself with the help of new media. It is a highly significant finding that the terrorist nature of the attack is mentioned as a kind of possibility in the text. The fact that the artificial intelligence algorithm that produces news on the global internet network leads to this finding shows the media ecosystem of algorithmic power. There is no doubt that this data constitutes a concrete example of the global actors that the technology-centered transformation in journalism draws attention to and the renewed news format as an ideological tool.

Another important finding in the news article is the use of unclear expressions in the transmission of numerical data, as in the other analyzed texts. The statement "tens of people lost their lives and many people were injured" confirms this idea (OpenAI, 2024). This output produced by the algorithm is contrary to the principle of objectivity and accuracy, which are the primary values of news.



### 3. 1. 2. Schematic Analysis

#### 3. 1. 2. 1. Background and Context

As it known, since an event that is the subject of a news story gains meaning within the context and background information, this information is the most important determinants of the news editing process. For this reason, the news on the Christchurch attacks produced by ChatGPT was analyzed especially within the context in which it was placed.

As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the event in question was not reported in the context of terrorism. This finding is quite remarkable as it has the potential to question the reliability of data sources, how and for what purpose the data is produced, and the way in which the data selection process, in which a kind of threshold-keeping is operated, takes place. The fact that the attack on two Muslim places of worship in Christchurch was an act of terrorism is beyond doubt. Likewise, the terrorist who organized the attack shared in detail when and how he would carry out the terrorist attack. Moreover, the terrorist recorded the moment of the attack with the help of an overhead camera and broadcast it live to the world. Thus, a concrete case of terrorism has emerged both in action and discourse. Despite this fact, which is obvious with all the evidence, it is not difficult to talk about the existence of distortion in both the background and context of the news article under scrutiny. As a matter of fact, there is no accurate background information in the text about the action of the terrorist who declared that he had a far-right racist ideology through both linguistic and actional practices.

When the information that the incident under review was not covered in the context of terrorism is considered together with the fact that news-producing algorithms work based on structured data and that data is easily manipulated, the idea that editorial independence, which is claimed to be operating in an already problematic area, is facing complete destruction gains weight. There is no doubt that the ageless tradition in the field of these new actors is to reproduce the discourse of global power.

#### 2. 2. Micro Structural Analysis

It is known that the words used in the news text are not random, they are used as a result of certain preferences. In this context, when the microstructural analysis of the analyzed news text is made, it is seen that the incident is not clearly associated with terrorism. The term terrorism is only mentioned in the sentence as a possibility. In addition, it is emphasized that the factors motivating the attacks are not yet clear. Undoubtedly, these findings are extremely striking. Because the terrorist clearly emphasized the terrorist nature of the act in all the content he prepared before the attack. At the same time, the terrorist broadcasted the attack live to the world on his social media accounts. Despite all this, ChatGPT refrained from making terrorist associations in its coverage.

#### 4. 9/11 Attacks News by ChatGPT

Prompt: Write a news text about the attack in the United States on September 11, 2001.

ChatGPT did not produce news about this event. The algorithm responded to the prompt by saying “due to current policy, I am unable to generate content on sensitive topics” (OpenAI, 2024). Only in the text it was stated that the attacks on September 11, 2001 were an important event in the history of the United States and had a great impact. The text mentions that the attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, which killed thousands of people, caused major changes in global security policies. Undoubtedly, it is a striking finding that the algorithm, which practiced creating emotionally intense and detailed text about other terrorist attacks, did not produce news about 9/11. Even when evaluated from this aspect alone, the biased, manipulative

and directly targeting collective memory characteristic of artificial intelligence algorithms comes to the fore.

### Conclusion

Understanding the current view of the relationship between knowledge and power, which has been reproducing itself throughout history, paves the way for a correct reading of the way artificial intelligence systems work today. This fact is extremely important in terms of pointing out the ethical dilemmas of algorithms, which represent the last stage that technology has reached for now. Likewise, it is only possible for artificial intelligence, which is a data-centered system, to be part of a properly functioning process through transparency. However, the entire process, from the collection of data to its editing, takes place far from transparency. Accordingly, it can be said that the information produced by the artificial intelligence system, which is the product of the ideology of global power, does not contain objectivity and is a partner in the creation of an ideological discourse. Because the dominant power structures that direct the data collection phase and the choices based on prejudices fed by the ideology of the productive forces determine the algorithmic process.

Considering that we are dealing with a mechanism that operates with the data it learns just like a human being, AI bias is not surprising. Biases in the data sets on which algorithms are trained or biased choices in the design of algorithms have a share in the 'black box society'. This bias points to the problems of data access, ownership and power relations in artificial intelligence systems. Undoubtedly used as a kind of power technique, these algorithms serve the collective effort to know and be known. This effort stems from the fractured nature of collective memory, which is reproduced again and again. Because since time immemorial, collective memory, which tells society what and how it should know, has always been a field on which techniques of power have been practiced. When artificial intelligence algorithms, which are the determinants of the historical process we are experiencing, are considered around these ideas, the fact that the news production process, which has a collective power of influence, is surrounded by algorithmic power becomes meaningful. This research has reached findings that confirm this reality.

The four news samples produced by the ChatGPT artificial intelligence algorithm about 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris and Christchurch attacks analyzed in the study showed that the texts constructed on the global internet network lacked values such as accuracy, objectivity and neutrality. The findings led to the conclusion that the news texts with basically the same theme by covering the religious wave terrorist attack revealed a different discourse structure from each other. This result shows that the news texts constructed by algorithms have a structure that repeats the dominant discourse structure in the global media. In the analyzed texts, extremely important differences were found in the answers given to 5W1H, which contains the most important questions of the event.

In fact, while all of the findings point to the faulty practice of artificial intelligence in news production, they also provide information about the dominant news language in the internet network used by the algorithm and the common wrong practices in traditional journalism. In this respect, the data obtained is also valuable. As a matter of fact, the fact that it is not possible to construct an alternative news-making practice to traditional journalism that develops in line with the dominant global discourse of power, but on the contrary, the fact that the space for the reproduction of the dominant discourse in a new and more widespread way is included in the process is illuminated. Accordingly, handing over the gatekeeping, one of the most critical operations of the news production process, to machine intelligence means that editorial independence has become even more fragile.

In addition to news text production, the research sought to reach a few more supporting findings in order to prove the existence of algorithmic power with the help of concrete data. For this purpose, another prompt was directed to ChatGPT. In the prompt, ChatGPT was asked to explain the nature of each attack separately. The algorithm's response to this prompt is very important in supporting the findings of this study. Because it was seen that the algorithm emphasizing that the perpetrators of the attack on July 7, 2005 were members of an Islamist terrorist group, and that these people were suicide bombers, described this event as the deadliest terrorist attack in the history of the UK. Similarly, ChatGPT stated that the nature of the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015 was radical Islamist ideology. In contrast, the Christchurch attack was only associated with terrorism by the algorithm, but no reference was made to any ideology or religion motivating the attack. This data alone should be considered significant in terms of proving the existence of global algorithmic power.

As a result, the claim that a robot that explicitly signals a potential threat can be easily manipulated (Milosavljević & Vobič, 2019) has found a provable concrete plane in this study. As a matter of fact, the findings of the research show that structured data-dependent language models and algorithms that are vulnerable to manipulative operations are faced with a risk picture that requires attention in the process of acquiring and selecting data. The result of the study is in line with similar studies in the literature (Chang vd., 2024; Ferrara, 2023, 2024c, 2024a, 2024b; Liu vd., 2023) and is a small but important contribution to the claim that artificial intelligence algorithms reveal unethical practices such as bias, prejudice and alienation. In addition to the conclusion reached, the proposed solution is to enable transparency, ensure data security and increase accountability. It should be pointed out that artificial intelligence should undergo ethical questioning as the first step in all areas where it gains functionality, especially news.

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# MEDİAD

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## Habercilikte Yapay Zekâ: 'Dini Dalga' Terör Saldırıları Örneğinde Algoritmik İktidarın Bellekteki Çatlağı Hedeflemesi

Fikriye ÇELİK\*

### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Araştırmanın Konusu ve Kapsamı

Bugünün dünyasına yön veren yapay zekâ sistemlerinin çalışma biçimini anlamak için tarih boyu kendini yeniden üreten bilgi – iktidar ilişkisinin güncel görünümünü doğru okumak gerekmektedir. Nitekim her seferinde yeniden kurulan bu ilişki teknolojinin şimdilik ulaştığı son aşamayı temsil eden algoritmaların etik çıkmazlarını göstermek bakımından son derece önemlidir. Keza veri merkezli bir sistem olarak yapay zekânın şeffaf bir sürecin parçası olması beklenirken verinin toplanmasından kurgulanmasına bütün işleyiş şeffaflıktan uzak, algoritmik iktidarı korumaya yönelik bir çerçevede gerçekleşmektedir. Buna göre küresel iktidar yapılarının ürünü olan algoritmalarca üretilen bilginin nesnellik içermediği, aksine ideolojik söylem yaratımına ortaklık ettiği söylenebilir. Zira üretici güçleri kontrol eden iktidar ideolojisinden beslenen önyargılara dayalı seçimler veri toplama aşamasına yön vererek algoritmik sürecin belirleyeni olmaktadır.

Esasında tıpkı bir insan gibi öğrendiği verilere bağlı bir mekanizmayla karşı karşıya olduğumuz düşünüldüğünde yapay zekâ yanlılığı şaşırtıcı değildir. Bu yanlılık yapay zekâ sistemlerinde ortaya çıkan veriye ulaşma, mülkiyet ve iktidar ilişkisi sorunlarını işaret etmektedir. Bir tür iktidar tekniği olarak kullanılan algoritmaların kolektif bilme ve bilinme çabalarına hizmet ettiğine ise şüphe yoktur. Bu çaba kolektif belleğin tekrar ve tekrar üretilen çatlaklı doğasından ileri gelmektedir. Bilindiği gibi geçmiş zamanlardan bu yana topluma neyi nasıl bilmesi gerektiğini söyleyen kolektif bellek daima iktidar tekniklerinin üzerinde çalıştırıldığı bir alan olmuştur. Deneyimlediğimiz tarihsel sürecin belirleyicisi yapay zekâ algoritmaları bu düşünceler etrafında değerlendirildiğinde, kolektif bir etki gücü bulunan haber yapım sürecinin de algoritmik iktidar tarafından kuşatıldığı gerçeği anlam kazanmaktadır.

Bu çalışma, gündelik hayat formlarına ilişik bir görüntüye kavuşan ileri teknolojinin habercilik pratiklerinde yol açtığı yeni biçimi bilgi – iktidar - teknoloji çerçevesinde tartışmayı denemektedir. Bu bağlamda habercilikte yaşanan dönüşümü iktidar merkezli görme biçimi üzerinden açıklamaya yardımcı en doğru yolun araştırmayı haber metni örneğinde gerçekleştirmek olduğu fikri anlamlı bulunmuş; iktidar izlerini yoğun biçimde gösterme potansiyeline sahip terör saldırılarını konu edinen yapay zekâ ürünü haberler merkeze alınmıştır. Söz konusu algoritmaların küresel niteliği ve

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incelenen literatürün algoritmik iktidar vurgusu araştırmanın yönünü küresel terör saldırılarına çevirmede pay sahibi olmuştur.

### **Araştırmanın Amacı ve Önemi**

Çalışmanın öncelikli amacı yapay zekâ ürünü haberlerin algoritmik iktidar tarafından araçsallaştırılarak bellek çarpıtma pratiğinde olası riske dönüşme potansiyelini ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaca uygun olarak söz konusu gerçeği örnekleme gücü bulunan 'dini dalga' terör saldırıları dikkate alınmıştır. Hem yapay zekâ gibi güncel bir konuya yönelmek hem de incelikli bir alanyazın taramasından hareketle habercilikte yapay zekâ görünümünü iktidar ve kolektif bellek merkezli bir bakış açısından ele almak araştırmayı önemli kılmaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca haber-iktidar-teknoloji ilişkisini örnek metinler üzerinden kanıtlamayı başardığı için de önemli bulunmayı hak etmektedir.

### **Araştırmanın Yöntemi**

Çalışmada yapay zekâ algoritmaları tarafından üretilen haberlerin küresel iktidar söylemine gömülü ideolojiden beslenip beslenmediğini anlamaya yardımcı olacağı düşüncesiyle son otuz yılda yaşanıp global ölçekte etki yaratan 9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris ve Christchurch saldırıları dikkate alınmıştır. Dört dini dalga terör saldırısının belirlenmesinin ardından ChatGPT yapay zekâ algoritmasının bu olaylar hakkında haber üretiminde bulunması sağlanmıştır. Elde edilen dört haber araştırmanın örneklemini oluşturmuş; bunlara eleştirel söylem analizi uygulanmıştır. Eleştirel söylem analizi kapsamında yürütülen makro yapısal çözümlemede tematik ve şematik analizde bulunulmuş, mikro yapısal çözümlemede ise sözcük seçimine bakılmıştır. Mikro yapısal analizin sözcük seçimiyle sınırlı tutulup metinlere sentaktik çözümleme, bölgesel uyum ve retorik çözümleme uygulanmaması araştırmanın kısıtlılığını oluşturmaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra dil modelleri arasından ChatGPT'nin seçilmesi araştırmanın bir diğer önemli kısıtlılığıdır.

### **Araştırmanın Bulguları**

9/11, 7/7, 2015 Paris ve Christchurch saldırıları hakkında ChatGPT yapay zekâ algoritması tarafından üretilen dört haber örneğinde gerçekleşen çalışma, küresel internet ağı kaynaklığında kurgulanan metinlerin doğruluk, nesnellik ve yansızlık gibi değerlerden yoksun olduğunu göstermek bakımından son derece önemli bulgulara ulaşmayı başarmıştır. Söz konusu haberler öne çıkan tema, dil yapısı, kaynak kullanımı ve bilgilerin doğruluğu çerçevesinde incelenmiş; elde edilen veriler algoritmik iktidar - haber ilişkisi bağlamında değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular dini dalga terör saldırısını konu edinerek temelde aynı temaya sahip haberlerin birbirinden farklı söylem yapısı ortaya koyduğu sonucuna ulaştırmıştır. Bu sonuç algoritmalar tarafından kurgulanan haber metinlerinin aynı zamanda küresel medyaya da hâkim iktidar söylemini tekrar eden bir yapıya sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. İncelenen metinlerde olaya ilişkin önemli soruları cevaplayan 5N1K'nın farklılık gösterdiği tespit edilmiştir. Özellikle failin kimliğini aydınlatan "kim" ve olayın niteliğini ortaya koyan "ne" sorularına verilen cevaplarda çarpıtma pratiğine rastlandığı belirtilmelidir.

### **Sonuç**

Bulguların tamamı bir yandan yapay zekâ sisteminin haber üretiminde yürüttüğü hatalı pratiği işaret ederken diğer taraftan algoritmanın yararlandığı internet ağına hâkim söylem yapısı ve yerleşik haber dili hakkında bilgi vermektedir. Bu bakımdan elde edilen veriler ayrıca değerlidir.

Nitekim küresel iktidardan beslenen medyaya içkin haber yapma pratiğine alternatif bir habercilik inşa etmenin imkânlar dâhilinde olmadığı, aksine egemen söylemi yeniden ve daha yaygın biçimde üretme potansiyeli bulunan yeni mekânın da sürece dâhil edildiği gerçeği aydınlanmaktadır. Buna göre haber yapım sürecinin en kritik işlemlerinden biri olan eşikbekçiliğinin makine zekâsına teslim edilmesi editoryal bağımsızlığın daha da kırılanlaştığı anlamına gelmektedir.

Araştırmada haber metni üretiminin yanında algoritmik iktidarın varlığını somut verilere dayalı biçimde kanıtlamak amacıyla birkaç destekleyici bulguya daha ulaşmanın yolu aranmıştır. Bu amaçla ChatGPT'ye bir prompt daha yöneltilmiştir. Promptta algoritmadan her saldırının niteliğini ayrı ayrı açıklaması istenmiştir. Algoritmanın bu promptta verdiği cevap çalışmanın ulaştığı bulguları desteklemek bakımından son derece önemlidir. Zira algoritma 7 Temmuz 2005'te Londra'da meydana gelen saldırıyı gerçekleştirenlerin İslamcı bir terör hücresi üyesi olduğunun altını çizerek intihar bombacıları tarafından düzenlendiğini belirttiği eylemi İngiltere tarihindeki en ölümcül terör saldırısı olarak nitelemiştir. Benzer şekilde 13 Kasım 2015'teki Paris saldırılarının da niteliği radikal İslamcı ideolojiyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Buna karşılık Christchurch saldırısı algoritma tarafından sadece terörizmle ilişkilendirilmiş, saldırıyı motive eden herhangi bir ideoloji ya da din göndermesinde bulunulmamıştır.

Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, olası tehdidi açık biçimde ifade eden “bir robotun kolayca manipüle edilebileceği” iddiasını somut örnekler üzerinden kanıtlanabilir bir düzleme taşımıştır. Nitekim elde edilen bulgularda, yapılandırılmış veriye bağımlı dil modellerinin ve manipülatif işlemler karşısında kırılabilir algoritmaların verileri edinme ve bunları seçme sürecinde dikkat gerektiren risk tablosuyla karşılaşmıştır. Ulaşılan sonuç itibarıyla araştırma, literatürdeki benzer çalışmalarla örtüşerek yapay zekâ algortirmalarının yanlışlık ortaya koyan etik dışı pratiklerde bulunduğu iddiasına ufak ancak kayda değer bir katkı olmuştur. Kuşkusuz çözüm yolu sunmak da en az sonuca varmak kadar kıymetlidir. Buna göre bahsi edilen sorunun çözümü için şeffaflığı mümkün kılmak, veri güvenliğinden emin olmak ve hesap verilebilirliğin artırılmasını sağlamak önerisinde bulunulabilir. Başta haber olmak üzere yapay zekâ sisteminin işlevsellik elde ettiği alanlarda algoritma üretimi içeriklerin öncelikli olarak etik sorgudan geçmesi gerektiği unutulmamalı ya da bu gereklilik atlanmamalıdır.

**Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Arařtırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütölmüřtür.

*The research was conducted by a single author.*

\*\*\*\*\*

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## Religious Communication in Digital Culture: A Study on Islamic Memes on Reddit

İsmail KAPLAN\*

### Abstract

Internet memes, a form of expression that has come along with digital culture, define content that is usually spread through social media platforms and often contains humour. Memes, which online communities use to express their opinions, thoughts, positive or negative approaches, are a unique communication method of internet culture. Memes, especially those containing humor, spread to large masses in a short time and can explain complex issues with a single image. Internet memes offer religious communities a new tool to express their personal and social views on social media. This study analyses memes on religious channels on the Reddit platform. The study examines 166 memes shared in selected communities between 1 January and 15 April 2024 through content analysis and discusses how memes are designed in relation to which topics and how they shape their discourse and religious communication. The findings of the study show that religious memes on social media focus on perspectives, politics, cultural differences, and the transmission of religious knowledge. The study also discusses how memes contribute to the formation of online religious communities. According to this, people's similar religious experiences are effective in creating a bond between them that transcends distances. The fact that the language of religion has started to include more humor is also among the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** Digital Culture, Internet Culture, Religious Communication, Memes

## Dijital Kültürde Dini İletişim: Reddit'teki İslami Memler Üzerine Bir Araştırma

### Öz

Dijital kültürle birlikte gelen bir ifade biçimi olan internet memleri, genellikle sosyal medya platformları aracılığıyla yayılan ve çoğu zaman mizah içeren içerikleri tanımlamaktadır. Çevrimiçi toplulukların görüşlerini, düşüncelerini, olumlu ya da olumsuz yaklaşımlarını ifade etmek için kullandıkları memler, internet kültürünün kendine özgü bir iletişim yöntemidir. Özellikle mizah unsuru içeren memler kısa zamanda geniş kitlelere yayılmakta ve karmaşık konuları tek görsel ile açıklayabilmektedir. İnternet memleri sosyal medyada dini topluluklara da kişisel ve toplumsal görüşlerini ifade edebilmek için yeni bir araç sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Reddit platformundaki dini kanallarda yer alan memleri analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, 1 Ocak - 15 Nisan 2024 tarihleri arasında seçilmiş topluluklarda paylaşılan 166 memi içerik analizi yoluyla incelemekte ve memlerin hangi konularla ilişkili olarak nasıl tasarlandığını, söylemlerini ve dini iletişimi nasıl şekillendirdiğini tartışmaktadır. Çalışmada ulaşılan bulgular, sosyal medyadaki dini memlerin bakış açılarına, politikaya, kültürel farklılıklara ve dini bilginin aktarımına odaklandığını göstermektedir. Çalışmada ayrıca memlerin çevrimiçi dini toplulukların oluşumuna nasıl katkıda bulunduğu da tartışılmaktadır. Buna göre, insanların benzer din deneyimleri, aralarında mesafeleri aşan bir bağ kurulmasında etkili olmaktadır. Din dilinin daha fazla mizah içermeye başlaması da çalışmanın bulguları arasında yer almaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dijital kültür, İnternet kültürü, Dini iletişim, Memler

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## Introduction

The development and spread of digital communication technologies has led to the emergence of different types and means of communication. Just as the invention of the printing press led to the rise of written culture, and just as the widespread use of television led to the emergence of a television culture, digital communication technologies have also created their own language and style. Internet memes are an important part of this new internet culture and are a practical and useful tool for people communicating over the internet.

Modern internet memes are defined as units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated and transformed by internet users to create shared cultural experiences. Internet memes, which were initially seen as insignificant, have been recognized as an important element of online communication that reflects and shapes cultural and social norms, thanks to the spread of internet culture and the adaptation of young people to the language of this culture (Miltner, 2018).

This study aims to show the role of memes in religious communication. For this purpose, the study has two research questions:

- 1) Which topics do internet memes produced and shared within the scope of religious communication address?
- 2) What is the place of memes in religious communication in the context of Islam?

In this study, based on the above research questions above, firstly, internet memes and their characteristics will be explained. Then, the role of internet memes in religious communication will be discussed. After mentioning the studies in the literature on internet memes, the method of the research will be explained. In the last section, how memes with religious content are designed, their discourses and their place in religious communication will be discussed.

### 1. Internet Memes

The concept of 'memes', defined by Richard Dawkins (1976) as small units of culture transmitted from person to person through copying and imitation, was initially exemplified by abstract ideas, texts or practices, and their dissemination was based on repetition and diversity. According to Dawkins, just as genes transmit biological information, memes transmit cultural information in a similar way. The ease of recreating memes was seen as the most important reason for their rapid spread. The first examples of memes consisted of concepts such as melodies, slogans and fashion.

A meme is a phenomenon that enables thoughts, behaviors and ideas to be transmitted from person to person in various ways. Memes spread through different methods such as gestures, writings, photographs, animations and speeches, and spread like a 'virus' among people. However, in this process of transmission, they usually do not remain in their original form and undergo 'mutation'. The user spreads a meme by modifying it with new information. While the Oxford English Dictionary defines memes as cultural units, the Merriam Webster Dictionary defines them as styles, thoughts and usages that are transmitted from person to person in a culture. In this way, memes reflect the dynamic and variable structure of cultural knowledge (Kırık & Saltık, 2017).

The concept of memes has gained more importance with the digital age because it has become easier to copy, diversify and spread cultural elements with the internet. The more frequent use of the concept of memes in daily life also occurred after the increase in these contents created and disseminated online. In the sense used today, memes consist of texts and images created and distributed by many users on the internet. Memes are communication elements that are often used to convey humor, criticism and political commentary. They also encompass the experiences, ideologies and habits of the communities that create them (Smith et al., 2024). The unique

characteristics of internet memes are their rapid diffusion and formal forms. Internet memes are part of the internet subculture and play a critical role in generating new meanings and functions in the networked environment.

Memes are important for internet culture because they provide valuable insights into how culture is produced and transmitted in new media contexts. Jenkins (2006) describes the process of cultural production and consumption in new media environments as ‘participatory culture’, according to which individuals create not only mass media but also digital cultural artefacts that are shared and circulated over the internet. Instead of a passive audience, new media are full of prosumers (producer-consumers), where online individuals function as producers and consumers of both images and texts. The practices of meme production and interpretation reflect this ‘participatory culture’. The power of digital culture comes from the opportunity it offers people to interact, co-produce and collaborate. For example, meme creators create new texts by drawing images, texts and ideas from multiple sources, and these texts become independent of the author’s intentions and agenda by remixing the original meanings. This demonstrates the importance of participatory production in digital culture.

Internet memes have been developed to describe items such as jokes, videos, gossip that spread rapidly online. The common characteristic of these memes is that each one inspires another user to create new parodies and remixes. This form of communication, in which content is constantly reinterpreted, is closely related to the participatory nature of digital culture. From this perspective, memes are a kind of postmodern folklore. Memes, which contribute to the creation and transmission of cultural and political identities, are content units created, transmitted and disseminated on the internet by groups that share common characteristics (Shifman, 2014). The network environment increases the feeling of being a group or community with its participatory structure, and meme culture supports this feeling. People can easily share their thoughts, images and events in the digital environment, and these shares spread rapidly on the internet and evolve with the contributions of users (Kırık & Saltık, 2017).

If the memes designed and shared on the internet are closely related to the agenda and contain a strong sense of humor, they can spread virally and reach millions of people in a short time on the internet. In order for memes to reach this popularity, it is important that they are also suitable for popular culture and internet jargon. A meme that is popular enough is soon imitated by writing different texts on the same image and continues to spread virally (Eskicioğlu, 2022).

## **2. Characteristics of Internet Memes**

The origin of internet memes can be traced back to 1982, when emoticons were first used in internet forum discussions to reveal obscure humor and irony. Following the recommended ‘:-)’ sign at the end of humorous messages, countless emoticons became widespread for different purposes. Emoticons are also seen as a kind of meme because they are easy to create and distribute. They can also have a different meaning for each person, or be used for different purposes by the people who use them. This means the possibility of a new meaning in each use (Davison, 2020). The first examples of memes that we know today appear on the website called Bert is Evil in the late 1990s. This website was creating funny and remarkable images by adding the face or body of the Sesame Street character Bert to various historical photographs or posters with visual editing programs, showing one of the first examples of meme culture. This method formed the basis of the visual and text combination memes that are widely used today. Bert is Evil has an important place in internet culture as it is considered to be the first examples of classic memes (Eskicioğlu, 2022).

Internet memes are a digital storytelling method that is often inspired by popular culture and can quickly spread to all social media channels. It is a flexible and useful tool as it can be easily interpreted and imitated (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021). Memes spread virally on the internet, but the

difference between memes and viral content is that memes transform and continue to spread. Therefore, content that spreads rapidly without changing in the network environment is not accepted as memes by some researchers. Knobel and Lankshear state that there are two types of memes: fixed and remixed. While fixed memes are not changed by other users after they are created, remixed memes evolve with the touches of users. In the remix creation process, the original form of the image changes and creates new meanings. These new meanings spread in the social media environment and are imitated by different users. This process is essentially the editing of content that does not offer anything new by different users and sharing it through a different channel. This is also called 'imitation'. For example, trends such as 'Mannequin Challenge', 'Gangnam Style dances' and 'Harlem Shake' are good examples of such memes. In the 'Mannequin Challenge', everyone freezes in position when the music starts and these images are shared on social media, which is a popular internet meme all over the world (Kırık & Saltık, 2017).

### 3. Religious Communication and Internet Memes

Social media in general has a significant impact on the internalization, transmission, dissemination and transformation of religious messages. Accounts on different social media platforms design and share religious messages in a way that can attract large audiences (Rustandi, 2022). Recent research has also shown a growing interest in the intersection of online memes and religion. Memes have become an important tool for the expression and dissemination of religious beliefs and practices in the digital age.

The study of religious memes is an important area for understanding not only memetics in popular culture, but also everyday religious life and the increasing integration of religion in digital environments. Religious memes should be considered in their context and may differ markedly from popular culture memes. Religious memes convey specific meanings and messages specific to religious institutions and beliefs. Religious memes, unlike popular culture memes, can carry deeper and more spiritual content and therefore have a special place in the digital representation of religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, this does not mean that religious memes do not interact with popular culture (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

Rozi et al.'s (2021) research emphasizes that access to Islamic information through social media is widespread, especially among millennial Muslims. According to them, social media has an important role in shaping religious identity. Memes, like other content on social media platforms, are an important tool for enriching users' religious understanding and motivating them for a spiritual journey. In addition, memes also contribute to identity formation in social media. In their study, Nurdin and Godal (2023) examined how memes are used in religious sermons, especially by young ulema in Indonesia. In the study, the importance of memes in the transmission of religious worship and teachings was emphasized. In addition, memes containing various prayers that Muslims can recite in their daily lives are also shared. The use of memes has supported the geographical spread of Islamic teachings to a wider area.

Memes do not only convey humor to their viewers. They also convey ideas and thoughts on various topics. This feature also makes memes important for conveying religious messages. Memes sometimes help to create religious motivation for various practices. Internet memes facilitate a unique form of cultural and political critique by offering a creative visual-textual language that allows individuals to publicly express their beliefs. This flexibility allows users to speak more freely about social norms, political agendas and religious practices, often embedding deeper messages and views within humor. Campbell and Sheldon (2021) explain how users' religious responses to global challenges are expressed through memes in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The messages offered by internet memes on religious issues are analyzed in five different frameworks according to their types and approaches:

- The encouragement frame, which positively addresses religious beliefs and worship,
- Entertaining framework that does not harm religious ideas and approaches and only cares about humor,
- Questioning framework that emphasizes skepticism about religious issues and concepts
- Sarcastic framework criticizing religious subjects and characters through satire
- A metaphorical framework that presents common religious understandings and sayings in a humorous way (Aguilar et al., 2017).

#### 4. Research Method

This study aims to present a thematic analysis of religious-themed internet memes. The study analyses Islamic-themed memes posted on the r/Izlam and r/IslamicHistoryMeme channels on Reddit between 1 January 2024 and 15 April 2024. This date range provided a sufficient time frame to understand how different memes addressed religious issues and how users reacted to them.

Reddit is an important social media platform where users share and discuss content on various topics. The r/Izlam and r/IslamicHistoryMeme channels are also places where Islamic-themed memes are mostly shared and discussed. This research aims to analyze the memes shared on these two channels within the specified date range. A total of 166 memes were shared on these channels between 1 January - 15 April 2024, 141 on r/Izlam channel and 25 on r/IslamicHistoryMeme channel. All of these memes were selected as a sample in the study.

The thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data obtained in the study. This method is a qualitative research method that allows the data to be analyzed systematically to reveal certain themes. Thematic analysis is a process of discovering recurring patterns and meanings in the data. In our study, the thematic analysis method was used to identify the prominent themes related to religion in the memes of Islamic content shared on Reddit. The first step of thematic analysis is to define and code the data. In this study, firstly, 166 memes selected as a sample were analyzed and the ideas and messages in each meme were identified. The texts in the memes were also analyzed and the first codes were determined. To ensure the reliability of coding and categorisation, 25 memes were selected from the sample and the memes were recoded by a different coder. The similarity between the coding of the researcher and the coder was found to be 88%. After that, the problems found in the coding frame were eliminated and the data were recoded.

On the next step, similar codes were grouped and themes were formed. The revised themes were finally defined in detail and what this theme identified was explained. Thus, interpretation and understanding of the research findings became easier.

The themes created based on the findings are as follows:

1. POV (Point of View): This theme includes memes that show a particular perspective or point of view on any subject.
2. Politics: This theme includes memes that reveal the relationships between Islamic religion and political events.
3. Cultural Differences: This theme includes memes that present and interpret various cultural elements in the Islamic world.
4. Transmission of Religious Knowledge: This theme includes memes that aim to convey religious knowledge on different topics.

After determining the themes, the data analysis phase started. At this stage, each theme was analyzed in detail and explanations of the themes were made through specific examples in the memes.

## 5. Findings

In this study in which 166 different memes were analyzed, all memes were grouped under four different themes in terms of their content. It is possible to explain these themes as follows:

**POV (Point of View):** This theme consists of memes that show prominent perspectives on a particular subject. In the memes, personal experiences, observations and interpretations about Islam come to the fore. This theme is important for understanding how memes reflect individual and social perspectives on religion.

**Politics:** The memes under this theme deal with the relationship between Islam and political events. Religious references and criticisms about political leaders, events and ideologies are frequently included in the memes.

**Cultural Differences:** The theme of cultural differences examines how memes present and interpret various cultural elements in the Islamic world. This theme is important for understanding cultural diversity, traditions and social norms in memes. The memes reflect different cultural practices and how they are interpreted in a religious context.

**Transmission of Religious Knowledge:** This theme examines how memes convey religious knowledge and teachings. Qur'anic verses, hadiths and information about Islamic history are frequently used in memes. This theme shows how memes are used as an educational tool and how they play a role in the dissemination of religious knowledge.

### 5.1. POV (Point of View)

As seen in Image 1 (mhabarneh, 2024) and Image 2 (sameer2285, 2024), some of the memes shared on Islamic humor channels on Reddit encompass a variety of humorous approaches to common experiences and challenges faced by Muslims, with a particular focus on social and religious contexts. These memes reflect the intersection of religious practices, cultural nuances and the everyday life of Muslims in a humorous and relatable way. These memes aim to humorously reflect the difficulties experienced during prayers, the time spent in mosques and masjids by religiously educated children, the reflections of discipline in religious education, and similar situations experienced by Muslims in their daily lives. This form of interpretation provides a shortcut to the intersection of cultural identity and religious affiliation, and the common experiences of people who share the same faith on a global scale. In general, the memes discussed under this theme function as a cultural reflection, using humor to bring to light the everyday experiences, challenges and nuances of Muslim life.

The increasing integration of daily religious life with digital media is an issue that has been addressed in previous studies. The fact that memes include topics related to daily religious life reveals a similar result to previous studies.

**Image 1.** Stars were made, and Imams were made angry



**Image 2.** What is my name (sameer2285, 2024)



## 5.2. Politics

The memes covered under the theme of politics encompass a mix of humor, political commentary and historical reflection from a Muslim perspective. They offer insights into how specific historical events, political dynamics and cultural contexts are perceived and criticized within the Muslim community. This theme includes memes that sometimes show the different interpretations of a historical event among Muslims, and sometimes the reflections of current political events of interest to Muslims.

These memes reflect a critical stance towards how Muslim history is portrayed, especially by Western sources. Emphasis is placed on the need for an accurate acknowledgement of the contributions and struggles of Muslim civilizations. This critique highlights the importance of decolonizing history and including different perspectives. The memes also contain important political commentary criticizing both historical and contemporary actions against Muslim communities, as in Image 3 (LocalSpawn, 2024). This includes criticism of extremist groups, military actions of states and colonial powers. Reflecting concerns about both state and non-state actors

perpetrating injustice against Muslim communities, as seen in Image 4, this critique is relevant to debates in security studies and human rights about the ethics and impact of military action (blitzkreiging, 2024). Another feature of the memes considered under this theme is the juxtaposition of important historical or political events with personal experiences, emphasizing the deep emotional ties that many Muslims feel towards these issues.

The humor in the memes considered under this theme reflects a sense of resilience and the ability to find humor in discussing serious and often painful historical and political realities, and highlights how communities use humor and other coping mechanisms to overcome adversity.

Memes have become an accessible means of social and political critique because they are easy for users to produce and distribute. As previous studies have shown, memes allow users to talk more freely about social norms, political agendas and religious practices. In this study, it was observed that users utilized memes to express their political criticisms or opinions.

Image 3. Who even says this?



Image 4. Isis actually released a statement condemning H



### 5.3. Cultural Differences

The memes discussed under the theme of cultural differences illustrate cultural differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially in the context of religious practices and daily

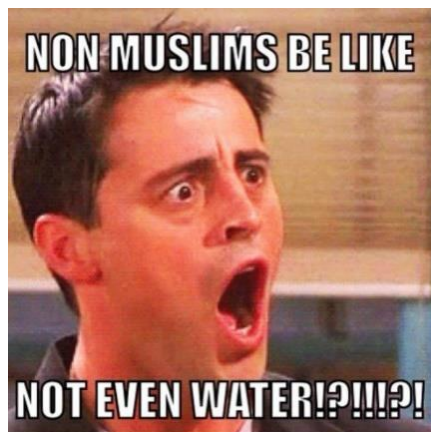


routines. By using humor to highlight these differences, these memes provide insights into how humor is used to bridge cultural gaps and dispel misunderstandings.

These memes use humor to address the cultural shock or misunderstanding that is likely to occur between different cultures. Thus, people with different beliefs and approaches can more easily understand and empathize with each other. Humor also serves to normalize Islamic practices, making them less foreign and more understandable to non-Muslims. This in turn helps to reduce cultural barriers and helps Muslims' daily practices to be understood by people from different cultures. For example, in Image 5 there is a meme about how the Muslim practice of fasting might be viewed by a non-Muslim (Many\_Rip6642, 2024). This is because it is unusual for non-Muslims to go without eating or drinking for a whole day. Image 6 shows the reaction of Muslims to a video of a person waking up early for a month (bhattfaizaan, 2024). This is because Muslims already wake up early in the day to perform morning prayers. Such memes also serve an educational purpose, informing non-Muslims about the realities of Islamic practices in an upbeat and engaging way.

The memes in this theme are also examples of how humor can be a powerful tool in intercultural communication. They address common misconceptions and curiosities in a non-confrontational and inclusive way. Areas of curiosity and potential friction are softened through humor.

**Image 5.** They are like that though



**Image 6.** A meme about the waking hours of Muslims.



#### 5.4. Transmission of Religious Knowledge

Memes are sometimes used to convey Islamic rules, religious practices and knowledge to a wider audience. These memes are particularly effective in making religious concepts more accessible and relatable to younger audiences who are more familiar with internet culture. Such memes often relate verses or hadiths to everyday events or phenomena. Islamic teachings can thus be more memorable.

A humorous approach to religious teachings can enhance learning and retention, especially among younger audiences who are accustomed to consuming information through entertaining formats. Humor also makes religious rules more acceptable to a wider audience when addressing sensitive issues.

These memes also demonstrate the potential of digital media as a tool for religious education. Combining humor and scenarios relatable to everyday life can make religious teachings more engaging, especially for young people. Image 7 (milkywomen, 2024) is a humorous interpretation of the hadith that the sunnah of the morning prayer is more valuable than anything else in the world (Nevevî, 2014, p. 293). Image 8 (mukulaal\_, 2024) dramatises the hadith about locking up the devil during Ramadan (Nevevî, 2014, p. 484) using a popular meme.

Such memes often emphasize common religious practices and community identity. For example, communal worship and celebrations at special times such as Ramadan and festivals are among the topics frequently covered in memes. Another issue addressed is the conflict between religious identity and social norms.

The findings of the study support the view in the literature about the advantages of using religious memes in religious education, especially for young social media users.

Image 7. Lol



Image 8. Eid Mubarak!



## 6. Conclusion

This study examines the topics that religious memes shared on social media focus on and the purposes for which memes are used in religious communication. For this purpose, the memes shared on the r/Izlam and r/IslamicHistoryMeme channels on Reddit between 1 January 2024 and 15 April 2024 were examined by thematic analysis method. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that the memes were concentrated under four themes: POV (Point of View), Politics, Cultural Differences and Transfer of Religious Knowledge. Each of these themes encompasses the multifaceted nature of Islamic internet memes and their role in contemporary digital discourse.

The theme of perspective emphasizes how memes reflect personal and communal perspectives on religious practices and everyday challenges faced by Muslims. These memes serve as a cultural mirror reflecting the intersection of cultural identity and religious commitment. By depicting everyday experiences in a humorous way, these memes provide insight into the realities Muslims live with and foster a sense of shared identity and community. The theme of politics reveals the critical and often satirical nature of memes in addressing historical and current political events affecting Muslim communities. These memes criticize the portrayal of Muslim history by Western sources and stress the importance of acknowledging the contributions and struggles of Muslim civilizations. They also reflect wider debates about military actions against Muslim communities. The Cultural Differences theme illustrates how memes use humor to bridge cultural gaps and dispel misconceptions about Islamic practices. By relating Islamic practices to everyday life, these memes promote greater understanding and empathy between different cultural groups. The theme of Transmission of Religious Knowledge underlines the role of memes in the dissemination of religious teachings and practices. By incorporating Qur'anic verses, hadiths and Islamic history into humorous contexts, these memes increase the accessibility and memorability of religious knowledge, especially among younger audiences. This is in line with the existing literature on the use of digital media in religious education and emphasizes the potential of memes as effective educational tools.

The findings of the study support the view that internet memes are powerful tools for cultural and religious expression. They facilitate the dissemination of religious knowledge, strengthen community identity, and provide a platform for social and political commentary. The study also emphasizes the importance of digital media in shaping contemporary religious practices and identities, especially among younger generations.

Internet memes serve as a unique and dynamic form of digital narrative that reflects the complex interplay between religion, culture and politics in the digital age. Their ability to convey deep and subtle messages through humor underlines the importance of memes in today's digital culture. Future research could further investigate the impact of internet memes on religious education and social cohesion by examining how different demographic groups interact with and interpret these digital artefacts. In addition, the potential of memes to create dialogue between different cultures is another topic that needs to be explored.

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# MEDİAD

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## Dijital Kültürde Dini İletişim: Reddit'teki İslami Memler Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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### Genişletilmiş Özet

Mem, düşünce, davranış ve fikirlerin çeşitli yollarla kişiden kişiye aktarılmasını sağlayan bir olgudur. Jestler, yazılar, fotoğraflar, animasyonlar ve konuşmalar gibi farklı yöntemlerle yayılan memler, insanlar arasında "virüs" gibi dağılır. Ancak, bu aktarım sürecinde genellikle ilk halleriyle kalmazlar ve "mutasyon" geçirirler. Yani, bir kişi aldığı bir memi öğrendiği bilgilerle değiştirerek yayar.

Mem kavramı dijital çağ ile birlikte daha fazla önem kazanmıştır çünkü kültürel öğeleri kopyalamak, çeşitlendirmek ve yaymak internet ile birlikte daha kolay hale gelmiştir. Mem kavramının günlük hayatta daha sık kullanılması da çevrimiçi olarak yaratılan ve yayılan bu içeriklerin artması sonrasında gerçekleşmiştir. Bugün kullanılan anlamıyla memler, internet ortamındaki birçok kullanıcı tarafından yaratılan ve dağıtılan metinlerden ve görüntülerden oluşmaktadır. Memler genellikle mizah, eleştiri ve siyasi yorumların iletilmesi amacıyla kullanılan iletişim öğeleridir. İnternet memlerinin benzersiz özellikleri, hızlı yayılmaları ve şekilsel formlarıdır. Dijital kültürü anlamak için büyük önem taşıyan internet memleri, internet alt kültürünün bir parçası olmanın yanı sıra, ağ ortamında yeni anlamlar ve işlevler üretmeleri açısından da kritik bir rol oynar.

İnternet memlerinin kökeni ilk defa 1982 yılında internet forumlarındaki tartışmalarda, zor anlaşılabilir esprileri ve ironileri açığa çıkarması amacıyla kullanılan emoticonlara dayandırılır. Mizah içeren iletilerin sonuna konulması tavsiye edilen “:-)” işaretinin ardından sayısız emoticon farklı amaçlarla yaygınlaşmıştır. Emoticonlar da bir çeşit mem olarak görülür zira onları oluşturmak ve dağıtmak kolaydır. Ayrıca her kişide farklı bir anlam oluşturabilir ya da onları kullanan kişiler farklı amaçlarla kullanabilir. Bugün bildiğimiz memlerin ilk örnekleri ise 1990'ların sonlarında Bert is Evil adlı web sitesinde karşımıza çıkar. Bu site, Susam Sokağı karakteri Bert'in yüzünü veya bedenini, görsel düzenleme programları ile çeşitli tarihi fotoğraflara veya posterlere ekleyerek komik ve dikkat çekici görüntüler oluşturuyordu ve mem kültürünün ilk örneklerinden birini gösteriyordu. Bu yöntem, günümüzde yaygın olarak kullanılan görsel ve metin birleşimi memlerin temelini oluşturdu.

### Dini İletişim ve İnternet Memleri

Son zamanlarda yapılan araştırmalar, çevrimiçi memler ve dinin kesişimine yönelik artan bir ilgi olduğunu göstermiştir. Memler, dijital çağda dini inanç ve uygulamaların ifade edilmesi ve yayılması için önemli bir araç haline gelmiştir.

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Dini içerikli memler hakkındaki çalışmalar, dini yaşantının ve dijital ortamlarda dinin artan görünürlüğünün anlaşılmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Memler izleyicilerine yalnızca mizahı iletmez. Onlara çeşitli konularda fikirler ve düşünceler de iletir. Bu özellik memleri dini mesajların iletilmesi için de önemli hale getirir. Memler kimi zaman çeşitli uygulamalar için dini motivasyon oluşturulmasına da yardım eder. İnternet memleri, bireylerin inançlarını kamuya açık bir şekilde dile getirmelerine olanak tanıyan yaratıcı bir görsel-metinsel dil sunarak benzersiz bir kültürel ve siyasi eleştiri biçimini kolaylaştırmaktadır. Dini içerikli memler inançlara özgü belirli anlamları ve mesajları iletir. Öte yandan popüler kültür memlerinden farklı olarak, daha derin ve manevi içerikler taşıyabilir ve bu nedenle dini inanç ve uygulamaların dijital temsilinde özel bir yer tutarlar. Özellikle Y kuşağına mensup Müslümanlar arasında dini bilgilere erişim için sosyal medyadan sıkça yararlanılması, bu mecraları dini kimliğin şekillenmesinde önemli bir role büründürmektedir. Sosyal medya platformlarında diğer içerikler gibi memler de kullanıcıların dinî anlayışlarının zenginleşmesi ve manevi yolculuk için motivasyon kazanılması konusunda önemli bir araçtır. Ayrıca memler sosyal medyada kimlik oluşumuna da katkı sunmaktadır. Memlerin kullanımı, İslam öğretilerinin coğrafi olarak daha geniş bir alana yayılmasını da desteklemiştir.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışma, dinî içerikli internet memlerinin tematik bir analizini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında, Reddit platformundaki r/İslam ve r/IslamicHistoryMeme kanallarında 1 Ocak - 15 Nisan 2024 tarihleri arasında paylaşılan İslami temalı 166 mem'in tamamı incelenmiştir. Bu tarih aralığı, farklı memlerin din ile ilgili konuları ele alış biçimlerini ve kullanıcıların bu konulara nasıl tepki verdiğini anlamak için yeterli sayıda içerik sağlamıştır.

Araştırmada elde edilen verilerin analizi için tematik analiz yönteminden yararlanılmıştır ve Reddit'te paylaşılan İslami içerikli memlerde din ile ilgili öne çıkan temalar tespit edilmiştir.

### Bulgular ve Yorum

166 farklı mem'in ele alındığı bu çalışmada tüm memler içerikleri bakımından dört farklı tema altında toplanmıştır. Bu temaları şu şekilde açıklamak mümkündür:

**POV (Bakış Açısı):** Bu tema, belirli bir konuda öne çıkan bakış açılarını gösteren memlerden oluşmaktadır. Memlerde, İslam dini ile ilgili kişisel deneyimler, gözlemler ve yorumlar ön plana çıkmaktadır. Bu tema, memlerin din hakkında bireysel ve toplumsal bakış açılarını nasıl yansıttığını anlamak için önemlidir. Günlük dini yaşantının dijital ortam ile entegrasyonunun artması, önceki çalışmalarda da ele alınan bir konudur. Memlerin günlük dini yaşama dair konuları içermesi de daha önce yapılan çalışmalara benzer bir sonucu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Politika:** Bu tema altında ele alınan memler, İslam dini ve politik olaylar arasındaki ilişkileri ele almaktadır. Memlerde, politik liderler, olaylar ve ideolojilerle ilgili dini referanslar ve eleştiriler sıkça yer almaktadır. Memler kullanıcılara üretim ve dağıtım konusunda kolaylık sağladığı için toplumsal ve politik eleştirinin erişilebilir bir aracı olmuştur. Daha önce yapılan çalışmaların gösterdiği gibi, kullanıcılar memler sayesinde sosyal normlar, siyasi gündemler ve dini uygulamalar hakkında daha rahat konuşabilmektedir.

**Kültürel Farklılıklar:** Kültürel farklılıklar teması, memlerin İslam dünyasındaki çeşitli kültürel unsurları nasıl sunduğunu ve yorumladığını incelemektedir. Bu tema, memlerde yer alan kültürel çeşitlilik, gelenekler ve sosyal normları anlamak için önemlidir. Memler, farklı kültürel pratikler ve bunların dini bağlamda nasıl yorumlandığını yansıtmaktadır. Bu temada yer alan memler aynı zamanda, mizahın kültürlerarası iletişimde nasıl güçlü bir araç olabileceğine dair örneklerdir. Yaygın yanlış anlamaları ve merakları çatışmacı olmayan ve kapsayıcı bir şekilde ele alırlar. Merak uyandıran alanlar ve potansiyel sürtüşmeleri mizah sayesinde yumuşatılır.

**Dinî Bilgilerin Aktarılması:** Bu tema, memlerin dinî bilgiler ve öğretileri nasıl ilettiğini incelemektedir. Memlerde, Kur'an ayetleri, hadisler ve İslam tarihi ile ilgili bilgiler sıkça

kullanılmaktadır. Bu tema, memlerin eğitimsel bir araç olarak nasıl kullanıldığını ve dinî bilgilerin yayılmasında nasıl bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Dini öğretilere mizahi yaklaşım, özellikle bilgiyi eğlenceli formatlar aracılığıyla tüketmeye alışkın olan genç kitleler arasında öğrenmeyi ve akılda tutmayı artırabilir. Mizah ayrıca hassas konulara değinirken dini kuralları daha geniş bir kitle için daha kabul edilebilir hale getirir.

### **Sonuç**

Çalışmada elde edilen bulgular, internet memlerinin kültürel ve dini ifade için güçlü bir araç olduğu görüşünü desteklemektedir. İnternet memleri dini bilginin yayılmasını kolaylaştırmakta, topluluk kimliğini güçlendirmekte, sosyal ve siyasi yorumlar için bir platform sağlamaktadırlar. Çalışma ayrıca dijital medyanın özellikle genç nesiller arasında çağdaş dini pratikleri ve kimlikleri şekillendirmedeki önemini vurgulamaktadır. Elde edilen bir başka bulgu ise sosyal medyanın dini kimlik oluşturulmasında önemli bir rol oynadığıdır.

İnternet memleri dijital çağda din, kültür ve siyaset arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi yansıtan benzersiz ve dinamik bir dijital anlatı biçimi olarak hizmet etmektedir. Mizah aracılığıyla derin ve incelikli mesajlar iletme becerileri, memlerin günümüz dijital kültüründeki önemini altını çizmektedir.

#### **Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

*The research was conducted by a single author.*

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

*There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.*

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## Religious Hate Speech against Islam in Bollywood Cinema in the Context of Self-Orientalism: The Example of “The Kerala Story”

Sefer KALAMAN\*

### Abstract

Hate speech, which refers to any form of expression intended to humiliate, harass, intimidate or incite violence against a person or group because of their religion, language, race, gender, political preference, physical disability or illness, occurs in different societies and in different media. Undoubtedly, one of the most common forms of hate speech is religious hate speech. Religious hate speech, which causes great harm to the individual, group or society, when carried out through cinema, causes victimization to increase and the discourse to spread throughout the world. Religious hate speech, generally produced by the West towards the East in cinema, sometimes comes to life with self-orientalist actions and religious hate speech is reinforced. From this point of view, the aim of this study is to reveal how religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims is realized in the context of self-orientalism in Bollywood cinema. In the study, critical discourse analysis method was used and the 2023 Indian film ‘The Kerala Story’ was analyzed. According to the results obtained in the study, the film, which was designed with a self-orientalist perspective, contains intense religious hate speech against Islam. In the film, Islam and Muslims are associated with terrorism through characters, actions, lines and plot.

**Keywords:** Religious Hate Speech, Self-orientalism, Bollywood, Cinema

## Self Oryantalizm Bağlamında Bollywood Sinemasında İslam’a Yönelik Dini Nefret Söylemi: “The Kerala Story” Örneği

### Öz

Bir kişi veya grubu dini, dili, ırkı, cinsiyeti, siyasi tercihi, fiziksel yetersizliği veya hastalığı nedeniyle küçük düşürmek, taciz etmek, yıldırım ve bunlara yönelik şiddeti teşvik etmek amacıyla gerçekleştirilen her türlü ifade biçimine karşılık gelen nefret söylemi, farklı toplumlarda ve farklı mecralarda meydana gelmektedir. Bu nefret söylemleri içerisinde kuşkusuz en fazla gerçekleştirilenlerden birisi dini nefret söylemidir. Bireye, gruba ya da topluma büyük zarar veren dini nefret söyleminin sinema aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmesi ise söz konusu mağduriyetin artmasına ve söylemin dünya geneline yayılmasına neden olmaktadır. Genellikle sinemada Batı tarafından Doğu’ya yönelik üretilen dini nefret söylemi, kimi zaman da self-oryantalist eylemlerle hayat bulmakta ve dini nefret söylemi pekiştirilmektedir. Bu noktadan hareketle yapılan araştırmanın amacı, Bollywood sinemasında self oryantalizm bağlamında İslam’a ve Müslümanlara yönelik dini nefret söyleminin nasıl gerçekleştiğini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Çalışmada eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılmış ve 2023 Hint yapımı ‘The Kerala Story’ filmi incelenmiştir. Araştırmada elde edilen sonuçlara göre, self oryantalist bakış açısıyla tasarlanan film, yoğun şekilde İslam’a yönelik dini nefret söylemi içermektedir. Filmde, karakterler, eylemler, replikler ve olay örgüsü ile İslam dini ve Müslümanlar terörizmle ilişkilendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dini Nefret Söylemi, Self Oryantalizm, Bollywood, Sinema

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## Introduction

All countries contain people of different nationalities, different sects and different religions. Whether these countries are governed by monarchy or democracy, they must protect the language, religion, ethnicity, gender and sect of all people in order to ensure unity, solidarity, peace and justice in the country. However, those who are described as minorities can sometimes be pushed into the position of the other by both the majority of the society and the power that governs that country. Moreover, insults, harassment or violence may be committed against minorities due to their characteristics.

Hate speech consists of expressions that are intended to humiliate, harass and prepare the ground for violence against a person, a group or a society as a whole on the grounds of religion, race, gender, disability, etc. Among these types of hate speech, religious hate speech is one of the most dangerous and harmful, considering the number of people it targets. Religious hate speech, which is deliberately created and disseminated, can target hundreds of millions of people and pave the way for the formation of a negative image about them. Moreover, the sustained perpetration of religious hate speech can lead to acts of prejudice against a religion and its adherents, negative discrimination, prejudice-motivated acts of violence and even genocide.

The fact that religious hate speech is generated and disseminated through mass media such as television, newspapers, social media and cinema further increases the severity of the situation. This is because the realization of religious hate speech through mass media/mediums causes the discourse in question to reach very large masses, become permanent and create more impact. Undoubtedly, among these mass media, cinema is one of the most effective tools for the creation and dissemination of religious hate speech. Especially in many films produced by Hollywood and European cinema, hate speech has been directed against many religions, especially Islam, and the members of those religions. However, this religious hate speech, which is practiced by the West in an orientalist way through cinema, is now also practiced in a self-orientalist way. So much so that ‘eastern societies’ and some producers, screenwriters and directors living in these societies make films that contain religious hate speech against their own societies or eastern societies close to them. The Islamophobic films made by Bollywood in recent years against Islam and Muslims constitute one of the most important and recent examples of this. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the ruling political party in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, openly supports religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims. Islam and Muslim-hostile films are financially funded by the BJP and Modi. In these recent Bollywood films, Muslims are presented as terrorists, criminals, rapists, invaders, foreigners and barbarians (Khatun, 2024).

From this point of view, this study aims to reveal how religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims is realized in Bollywood cinema. Critical discourse analysis method, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. 2023 Indian film ‘The Kerala Story’ was analyzed within the scope of the study.

### 1. Literature Review

Human beings have put socialization in a dominant position in their lives in order to survive and develop from the moment they came into existence. The increase in the number of communities and people in communities has led to the emergence of differences of opinion and life among people. People who lead a social life and develop a sense of belonging have, over time, wanted to act in common with people who think and live like them and have categorized/limit their communities. Likewise, people who do not look like them, think like them or live like them are positioned as the other. Over time, people have sometimes or constantly harbored negative feelings towards the people they see as the other. One of these negative moods or emotions has been ‘hate’.

Hate is the feeling of wanting someone's evil and unhappiness, a feeling of disgust (TDK, 2024). Hate is a state of mind that often arises towards others who are not recognized, unknown, but because they are not like them, because they are different (Karadeniz, 2012, p. 1).

According to the pyramid of hate created by the Anti-Defamation League (2021), hate is a process that starts from prejudiced attitudes and can lead to genocide. The pyramid of hatred is designed as;

*Biased Attitudes, Stereotyping, Fear of differences, Justifying biases by seeking out likeminded people, Seeking out information to confirm one's existing beliefs and/or biases, Lack of self-reflection or awareness of privilege. Acts of Bias, Non-inclusive language, Insensitive remarks, Microaggressions, Biased and belittling jokes, Cultural appropriation, Social avoidance and/or exclusion, Name-calling, Ridicule, Bullying, Slurs and epithets, Dehumanization. Systemic Discrimination, Criminal justice disparities, Inequitable school resource distribution, Housing segregation, Inequitable employment opportunities, Wage disparities, Voter restrictions and suppression and Unequal media representation. Bias-Motivated Violence, Threats, Desecration, Vandalism, Arson, Assault, Rape, Murder and Terrorism. Genocide, The act or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire people.*

Although the concepts of hate and hate speech seem to have the same meaning, they actually mean different things. Hate speech is defined as discrimination against an individual or group on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, sect, political preference, philosophy, socioeconomic status, physical characteristics, physical disability or disease (Irak, 2022, p. 1). Along with this definition, although there are many definitions of hate speech by academics, writers, lawyers, non-governmental organizations and scientists in different countries, there is no agreed definition for hate speech (Howard, 2019, p. 95). However, in Recommendation 97 (20) on 'hate speech' issued by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the concept of hate speech is broadly defined. According to this decision, hate speech is any form of expression that spreads, incites, encourages or legitimizes racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including religious intolerance, expressed in the form of aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of migrant origin (Weber, 2009, p. 3).

Aydos and Aydos (2019, p. 8) define hate speech as any form of expression that discriminates certain segments of the society for reasons such as religion, belief, language, sect, race, disability, gender, and thus violates their personal rights. In light of these definitions, it is possible to define hate speech as any form of expression that is intended to humiliate, harass, intimidate or encourage violence against a person or group because of their religion, language, race, gender, political preference, physical disability or illness.

Hate speech is also the starting point of the process leading to hate crime. In other words, it is the expression of intolerance and intolerance that paves the way for hate crime. The perpetrator of hate speech characterizes the targeted person, group or community as foreign and says that there is no place for you in society. This erodes the democratic order and violates the most fundamental human right to life and participation. At this point, based on the previous definitions, it is possible to base hate speech on three elements: 1) Hate speech must be directed against a person or group because of certain characteristics; 2) The characteristics of the person or group should be characterized negatively; 3) The presence of a person or group characterized negatively should not be welcomed (Demirbaş, 2017, p. 2695-2697).

Hate speech, which takes place in different countries and societies, is based on the characteristics of people and the values they adopt. Binark and Çomu (2012) categorize these types of hate speech as political hate speech, hate speech against women, hate speech against foreigners

and immigrants, hate speech based on sexual identity, hate speech based on beliefs and sects, and hate speech against the disabled and various diseases.

Considering the number of people it affects, one of the most dangerous types of hate speech is undoubtedly religion and sect-based hate speech. Religious hate speech includes malicious, insulting, hateful and violence-provoking expressions directed against a person, group or community on the basis of religious affiliation and belief-related qualities (Weber, 2009). Religious hate speech includes the acts of belittling, provoking, alienating or categorizing an individual, group or community because of their beliefs.

Although religious hate speech has been widely seen and talked about especially in the 21st century, it is actually as old as the history of religions. During this period, every religious hate speech/action, both individually and collectively, has served to spread this discourse and harm people. However, throughout history, no factor has been as effective as the media in the production and dissemination of religious hate speech.

According Doğan (2022, p. 687), the role of the media in the spread of religious hate speech is decisive. In fact, according to academic research on hate speech in the media, the media not only spreads religious hatred in society, but also legitimizes discrimination against a particular person, group or identity, reinforces prejudices and stereotypes, and mobilizes the attitudes and behaviors of the masses. Islam is undoubtedly the religion most exposed to this religious hate speech.

The media, which plays a leading role in the formation of anti-Islamic sentiments and hate speech, targets Islam and Muslims as a whole and misrepresents Islam. Islamophobic language has reached a threatening dimension in international media framing, categorizing and excluding Islam and Muslims. It has created stereotypes of terrorist, reactionary, barbaric and lecherous Muslims. Concepts related to Islam have been associated with radical events and actions far from the truth and a marginalizing portrayal of the religion has been made (Arslan and Temel, 2023, p. 39; Kutlu, 2024). Islam as a belief that is a source of fear, especially in Europe, is not the real Islam. This is the imaginary Islam, which has been distorted and represented in a completely different way by the orientalist and colonialist perspective. Muslims, who face constant aggression and exploitation almost all over the world, are exaggerated, especially their wrong and bad practices. These are combined with violence and Muslims and Islam are portrayed as the epitome of evil (Bilici, 2022, p. 630; Kutlu, 2023).

Media content produced in the Western media with an orientalist perspective and targeting Islam and Muslims is mostly presented and disseminated through television, newspapers, social media and cinema. Especially in cinema, the stereotype of the Middle Easterner has been created by the US and Europe. Through this, religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims in cinema has been carried out by the US and Europe. However, this religious hate speech, which has been created by the West for many years by reducing it to the orientalist way and realized through cinema, now comes to life in a self-orientalist way.

Orientalism, which originally means the study of the East by the West, can also be defined as a style of discourse, a form of expression, a narrative, an ideology or a worldview. The political discourses of Western states, the church, clergy, researchers, painters and literary figures have been influential in the construction of the Orientalist language. Studies that talk about the East and Orientals, and deal with their lifestyles have constructed a new Eastern/Eastern identity (Arslan and Temel, 2023, p. 40). There are different types of orientalism in societies other than Western societies. One of these is self orientalism, which is the most widely accepted term. Self-orientalism is also called internalized orientalism, auto-orientalism, secret orientalism, reverse orientalism, neo-orientalism, self-orientalism, modern orientalism (Golden, 2009; Lary, 2006; Scherer, 1998).

Self-orientalism is the East's representation and expression of itself through the eyes of the West and in the image that the West constructs for itself (Said, 1979; Henderson, 2001). Self-orientalism is when the East or the Easterner sees the West as the superior civilization. The East organizes its culture, life and state policy according to the West (Yetiş, 2022, p. 177). According to Bezci and Çiftci (2012, p. 141), self-orientalism is a weapon and is aimed by the East against the East and Easterner.

Studies on self-orientalism mostly focus on the positioning and expression of the East or the Easterner with the values produced by the West or the Westerners. However, another dimension of self-orientalism is that an Eastern country presents another Eastern country in an orientalist way (in a self-orientalist way) with malicious and stereotypical judgments. Self-orientalism is also the positioning of an Eastern person, group or community with an orientalist approach and in a negative way by an Easterner.

At this point, it is possible to consider the discourse of religious hatred that is practiced by an Eastern country against its own country, people and religious beliefs through cinema as self-orientalism. Bollywood is one of the places where this religious hate speech is carried out in a self-orientalist manner (especially against Islam and Muslims). India, 20% of which is Muslim, carries out religious hate speech through films against both its own people and other Muslim countries and peoples.

The 1999 Bollywood film 'Sarfaroş' is about terrorists of Pakistani origin who aim to disrupt India. Similarly, in the 2006 film 'Fanaa', the Muslim man she falls in love with is a terrorist who is responsible for the bomb blast in New Delhi. In the 2009 film 'Kurbaan', the Muslim husband and his family, whom the Hindu woman marries, are linked to a terrorist group preparing an attack on America. In the films 'Baby' and 'Sooryavanshi', there are Islamic terrorist organizations planning bomb massacres in India's metropolises. It is constantly emphasized in various ways that these terrorists are Muslims. These terrorists are supported by foreign countries such as Pakistan and can easily shelter in Muslim countries such as Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia (Yıldırım, 2022, p. 458-476).

While Muslims were originally portrayed as rulers, poets and esthetes in previous films in India, they are now often depicted as terrorists, gangsters and despots. In Bollywood, especially since 2016, films based on Indian historical epics such as Bajirao Mastani, Padmaavat, Manikarnika, Panipat and Tanhaji have been produced. In these films, Muslim rulers and Muslims are shown as foreigners, non-Indians, barbarians, criminals, gangsters, terrorists and invaders (Molaei and Hussain Babaei, 2020, p. 383-384; Ramnath, 2021).

At this point, Bollywood portrays India's culture, art and religious elements with positive images, while Muslims are portrayed as patriarchal, angry, conservative and terrorist (Çakıcı and Meriç, 2021, p. 52). The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political party in power in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, supports these religious hate speeches against Islam and Muslims. Modi has openly funded these films in recent years.

The Hindutva Watch report supports this situation. According to the report, the ruling BJP is linked to the rise of anti-Muslim hate speech in the country (Aljazeera, 2023). The incident that took place in the Indian parliament in 2023 is a case in point. BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri called Kunwar Danish Ali, a Muslim MP from the opposition Bahujan Samaj Party, a 'terrorist' and a 'pimp', among other offensive terms (Faisal, 2023). These and other actions and discourses show that religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims is being carried out in India. These actions are carried out through Bollywood cinema and both Modi and the BJP support this religious hate speech.

## 2. Methodology

The study aims to reveal how religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims is realized in the context of self-orientalism in Bollywood cinema. In addition, it is also aimed to determine how the discourses, characters, places and plot are created in the context of religious hate speech in the film discussed in the study. Purposive sampling method was used in the study and the 2023 Indian-made film ‘The Kerala Story’ was analyzed. Critical discourse analysis method was used in the study. The film was analyzed using Norman Fairclough’s three-stage critical discourse analysis method consisting of description, interpretation and explanation. Fairclough’s method was chosen because it allows the use of alternative ways to understand what discourse is and how it works. This method prioritizes the inclusion of text, discourse, social practices, the text producer, the broadcasting organization and the political/ideological structure when analyzing the film.

The questions sought to be answered in the study regarding religious hate speech are given below:

Q1: How are Islam and Muslims portrayed in The Kerala Story and which cultural characteristics are emphasized?

Q2: Are there any expressions of religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims in The Kerala Story?

Q3: Does the Muslim profile portrayed in The Kerala Story match with the Muslim profile created by the BJP through its policies/discourses?

## 3. Critical Discourse Analysis of the Film ‘The Kerala Story’ in the Context of Religious Hate Speech

### 3.1. Synopsis

**Table 1.** Characters and Their Roles in the Film

<i>Name of Characters</i>	<i>Roles of Characters</i>
Shalini Unnikrishnan (Begam Fatima)	University student in Kerala
Gitanjali Menon (Anisha)	University student in Kerala
Nima Matthews	University student in Kerala
Asifa	Member of ISIS, University student in Kerala
Rameez	Member of ISIS
Ishak	Member of ISIS
Mujeeb	Member of ISIS
Bhagyalakshmi	The young woman who fell into the trap of ISIS
Aheng Moradi	UN-Afghan army’s detention facility manager
Akram Ahmed	Chief of interrogations of the UN army
Fayeri Karimi	Afghan border police
Peter Rodd	YÖTSG’s vice president for West Asia

The film takes its name from the state of Kerala, located in the southwest of India. Shalini Unnikrishnan (later named Begam Fatima, code name Fatima Ba) is a young woman who lives a happy life with her family among the natural beauties of Kerala. Shalini gets into the international nursing university in Kerala and settles in the student dormitory there. Shalini, who is Hindu, shares her room with Gitanjali (Hindu - later named Anisha), Nima (Christian) and Asifa (Muslim). There are writings on the walls of Shalini’s school, such as Islam, sharia and war. Shalini’s roommate, Asifa, is

a member of ISIS and is secretly trying to recruit her roommates to join ISIS. Asifa introduces her roommates to Abdul and Rameez, whom she introduces as her cousin. Both these two boys and Asifa often tell the girls about Islam. Nima doesn't want to listen and objects every time. Asifa devises a plan to ensure that her roommates are subjected to harassment and violence by other men and convinces them that they are being attacked because they are not wearing headscarves. The 3 girls are very scared and wear headscarves. Rameez, who is said to be a doctor, gives drugs to the girls, saying it is a drug. Then Gitanjali becomes lovers with Abdul and Shalini with Rameez. The girls pray and watch videos, but they have not yet converted to Islam. Rameez and Abdul, who are ISIS members and try to recruit girls into the organization, present premarital sex as legitimate, even though it is not in Islam. Boys have sex with girls. Asifa denigrates and confuses Shalini and Gitanjali about their religion, but Nima is not impressed. Asifa gives them drugs. Shalini becomes pregnant and Rameez forces her to convert to Islam. Gitanjali distances herself from her family and their relationship deteriorates, but then she finds the right path and distances herself from Abdul. When Abdul posts nude images of Gitanjali on social media, she commits suicide. Nima is drugged and raped by Mujeeb. She is taken captive and raped by others. Nima escapes and enters the police. Shalini is now called Begam Fatima. Rameez leaves Fatima. Fatima is forced to marry Ishak and join ISIS in Syria. Ishak and Fatima set off for Afghanistan and then Syria to join the Caliph's service. Ishak rapes Fatima in Afghanistan and then leaves home to go to the conflict. Fatima gives birth to her baby, realizes from the moment she leaves that things have gone wrong and that she has made a big mistake, but is not allowed to return. Ishak takes Fatima's baby (Ishak is not dead) and Fatima is thrown into a tent among women in burkas and with their hands in chains. The women are raped. Women in Afghanistan are slaves, sold, killed. There are dead bodies, guns and fear everywhere. Fatima tries to escape with a few other enslaved women. ISIS kills the women who try to escape, only Fatima managed to escape. Fatima was found in the desert dying of exhaustion and thirst by UN forces and brought to a UN peacekeeping and Afghan army detention facility. Under interrogation, Fatima tells the whole story. Both Fatima and Nima tell the security forces in detail what happened and the connection between the structure in Kerala and ISIS (Sen and Shah, 2023).

Released on May 5, 2023 in India, "The Kerala Story" is written by Suryapal Singh, Sudipto Sen and Vipul Amrutlal Shah and directed by Sudipto Sen and Vipul Amrutlal Shah. The film is a drama and stars Adah Sharma, Yogita Bihani and Sonia Balani in the lead roles.

### 3.2. Analysis of the Film

#### 3.2.1. Description

In this stage of the film analysis, Begam Fatima's dialogues with interrogators, Begam Fatima's dialogues with ISIS members, ISIS members' dialogues and other dialogues are included (Mubi, 2024).

#### **Dialogue 1. (05:09-06:24)**

Akram Ahmed: *So Fatima, we were not expecting you alive. It is indeed a miracle. that you're alive. Thank our doctors. They really fought for your life. So, are you comfortable to talk now?*

Begam Fatima: *I didn't think I would get out alive myself. Thanks to all of you, for saving my life. Sir. My daughter is taken away from me. And the people who took her. They are very dangerous people. I don't know what they'll do to her. Sir, please, get my child back. Just find her, because I don't know what they will do to her.*

Fayeri Karimi: *We have every reason to believe that you are a dreaded terrorist, Fatima Ba. So if you want to prove otherwise, this is your chance.*

Begam Fatima: Yes, sir. I am Shalini Unnikrishnan. I am from Kerala, India. And sir, I was trapped. I was brainwashed sir (Sen and Shah, 2023, 05:09-06:24).

**Dialogue 2. (07:10-22:22)**

Begam Fatima: We reached the Spin Baldak district of Kandahar, Afghanistan. We were on our way to Raqqa, to serve the Caliph. To fight the infidels. Ishak was going to become a mujahid and I was going to follow the Sunnah.

Akram Ahmed: You decided to go to Syria on your own. Nobody forced you. This is the situation that emerged.

Peter Rodd: and you've been preparing for this for years. You wanted to wage war against your country and against humanity.

Begam Fatima: I left India of my own accord and I did a lot of preparation before I left. But whatever I thought, whatever I wanted, it was all loaded into my brain, like a program. I had lost control over myself, it was like an invisible remote controlling me. I wasn't alone in this game. There are thousands of girls like me. Girls who left their homes to be buried in this desert.

Begam Fatima: Sir, my name is Shalini and I don't know how to prove it. This is a very dangerous game sir. This game is about killing my soul, killing Shalini's soul, turning her into a slave. A robotic slave: Fatima. It is very important that you know how they turned a simple nursing student into a suicide bomber. I don't know why no one wants to listen to this part of the story. I don't know why no one is doing anything. Kerala is sitting on a live time bomb, sir. They will destroy God's country. Please save it, please.

Begam Fatima: These narcotic pills are used non-stop. Their only concern is the immediate effect of the drug, not the side effects. They want suicide bombers, not well-trained soldiers (Sen and Shah, 2023, 07:10-22:22).

**Dialogue 3. (126:38-127:43)**

Begam Fatima: If you take me to India, I'll expose everyone. Everyone here is involved in terrorism. Everybody.

Aheng Moradi: We have all the evidence to prove that you are a terrorist. But there is nothing to prove your innocence. The Indian government has zero tolerance for any terror links.

Fayeri Karimi: You have cooperated with us so far in this investigation. You also gave us a graphical guide to the terror network in India. These confessions have helped us in many ways. Rest assured that we will provide you with a safe place in this facility and you will have access to the best of our legal team.

Aheng Moradi: We'll also try to find your daughter. You can feel comfortable in our facility (Sen and Shah, 2023, 126:38-127:43).

**Dialogue 4. (27:14-27:57)**

Ishak: According to ISIS, in the Sharia law, women aren't allowed to keep phones.

Begam Fatima: I wasn't told in India that keeping a phone would be against Sharia law. and where were mobile phones when the Sharia law was made?



ISIS's man: *I don't know all that. But it is indeed a crime. And death is the punishment for this crime (Sen and Shah, 2023, 27:14-27:57).*

**Dialogue 5. (29:17-29:40)**

Ishak: *In Islam, it is a sin not to make the husband happy.*

Begam Fatima: *Ishak, this is rape. Rape is forbidden in Islam.*

Ishak: *Be grateful, a woman cooks and sleeps with her husband. You don't need to take bullets like the mujahideen. Make your choice, you can either endure this pain or burn in hell for eternity (Sen and Shah, 2023, 29:17-29:40).*

**Dialogue 6. (37:07-39:50)**

Asifa: *It is a sin to eat without praying. If we do not thank Allah, His wrath will take us to hell.*

Begam Fatima: *Asifa, you were talking about hellfire. I want to know what hellfire is.*

Asifa: *I mean, according to the Hadith, the fire of hell is seventy times hotter than the fire on earth. There is also a dark pit where all sinners are bound, chained, hung upside down and burned. Whoever believes in Allah will get paradise and those who do not believe in Islam will be burned in hellfire.*

Begam Fatima: *This is the first time I have heard of praying in fear of wrath. Isn't there a love relationship between God and us? Or shouldn't there be? Like with our parents.*

Gitanjali: *I agree. Why would God be angry? It doesn't feel right. Wait, we're Hindus, why are we burning in hellfire?*

Begam Fatima: *Yes, why should your God punish us Hindus?*

Asifa: *God rules this world, only God. And you are a non-believer. You will definitely go to hell. And the day of judgment is not unique to any religion. Only Allah can save you. No one else can save you (Sen and Shah, 2023, 37:07-39:50).*

**Dialogue 7. (95:51-97:07)**

ISIS's executive: *Your first sin is to have intercourse before marriage. Your second sin is having children out of wedlock. Your third sin is using intoxicants. Your parents are infidels. How many sins will Allah punish you for?*

Begam Fatima: *So if I marry someone else, will my sins be forgiven?*

ISIS executive: *Not by continuing to live in this country. But if you get married and answer the call of Allah, if you take up the mission of spreading the eternal kingdom, if you dedicate yourself to the service of the caliphate, if you go to Syria with your husband, then Allah will forgive you not one sin but thousands of sins. He will open the gates of paradise wide open for you. His name is Ishak, he is a very kind man. He used to be a Christian, but recently he converted to Islam (Sen and Shah, 2023, 95:51-97:07).*

**Dialogue 8. (79:51-80:54)**

Bhagyalakshmi: *I'm Bhagyalakshmi. We are 48 girls. 7 of us are Christians and the rest Hindus. We left our homes and came here.*

Begam Fatima: *So why have you been coming here for a month? What happened to you?*

Bhagyalakshmi: *We 48 girls share the same story. Our families do not accept true love. They are so caught up in their caste and religion that they marry us off to random men. Now that we have fallen in love with Muslim men, are we committing a sin? Do you have to ask about someone's caste or religion before you fall in love with them?*

Begam Fatima: *What are you going to do?*

Bhagyalakshmi: *There is no other way but to marry our loved ones and accept Islam. Our families will not accept this. Our love is true. Wouldn't you do anything for true love? We cross all boundaries, don't we? (Sen and Shah, 2023, 79:51-80:54)*

**Dialogue 9. (89:19-98:50)**

Gitanjali's mom: *He couldn't bear the shock when he found out you had converted to Islam.*

Gitanjali: *This heart attack is the wrath of Allah. A lesson. A lesson for those who don't believe in him. If you care about your health and don't want to go to hell, convert to Islam.*

Gitanjali: *Dad, these people are dangerous. If this isn't terrorism, what is? (Sen and Shah, 2023, 89:19-98:50)*

**Dialogue 10. (108:53-118:16)**

Nima: *Asifa, Rameez, Abdul, Mujeeb are all involved. Rameez hasn't gone anywhere, he's here with another girl, he's hanging out with her now. Remember you told me to meet Mujeeb? I went to meet him, but I made it clear that he wasn't going to convert. That day he dripped drugs in my glass. He raped me while I was unconscious. Every day 18-20 people used to come, then I stopped counting. Everything became blurry, they abused me. Somehow I managed to escape. I couldn't even file a complaint. Please come back, you're in danger.*

Nima: *Sir, this is not just about conversion! This is a threat to our national security. This is a global case. Sir, these machines are isolated in Europe and America. But it is our misfortune that the political silence is so great here. Even our former prime minister said: Kerala will become an Islamic state in the next 20 years. According to a government report tabled in parliament in June 2012, there are on average 2800 to 3200 conversions. Every year there are conversions to Islam from Hindu and Christian families. More than 30,000 girls are missing, sir. The unofficial figure is 50,000. We all believe that, sir. How many cases have been registered? 703. How many have been rescued? 261, sir. There's a major link between a local organization in Kerala and ISIS. They are raising a ruthless army of suicide bombers through seemingly harmless conversions. That is harmless?*

Indian police: *I can understand your feelings and I respect that. We will start looking into your complaint from today, but I need proof of what you are telling me. This is a legal system.*

Nima: *How long will it take you to get justice? How long? You know Attikad in Kasargod, right? Like in Syria and Yemen, some villages here have Sharia law. You still want proof? All the blasts in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Afghanistan have Kerala girls and boys in them. You still want proof? I'll bring every single proof. I won't stop until I get it (Sen and Shah, 2023, 108:53-118:16).*

**Dialogue 11. (118:38-119:27)**

Bhagyalakshmi: *I came here for love. I became a slave. A sex slave. They either make women full-time sex slaves or they strap bombs on them and throw them at the infidels shouting “Allah Akbar”!* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 118:38-119:27)

**Other dialogues**

ISIS’s head: *We have only one goal. And that is for every nation in the world to embrace Islam. The jihad will continue until every single person in the world walks on the path shown by Allah* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 11:31-11:43).

ISIS’s executioner: *Punishment is not a sentence, punishment is an example. So that no one will ever break the law again. Anyone who deviates from this path is sinning against the messenger of Allah. An example is the path shown by the messenger of the Shari’ah. And to deviate from this path is to sin against the messenger of Allah. What this girl did is a sin and her husband turned a blind eye to her wrongdoing. His is the greater sin. And let this example be a lesson for you. Takbir Allah Akbar* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 43:36-44:22).

ISIS member in the video: *This drug is known as “chemical courage”. In the pharmaceutical industry, it is known as Captagon and Amphetamine. It is a substance that will keep your thirst for jihad alive. It will never let you deviate from your one true goal. On the battlefield, with this drug, you can go long periods of time without feeling hunger, thirst or drowsiness. It will kill your cowardly self and give birth to a mujahid within you. He will raise the banner of Islamic rule. He will repent of his sins and pave the way to paradise. He will make the infidel praise the only true Allah. Takbir Allah Akbar* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 47:45-48:32).

ISIS executive: *Understood, my Jihadists? Start the app. Bring them (the girls) closer to you. Separate them from their families. Have physical intercourse. Get them pregnant if necessary. Prepare them for the next mission as soon as possible. All this time has passed and you haven’t delivered three girls to me. On the contrary, 25-30 women from England and Europe go to Syria every month by their own choice* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 48:32-49:20).

Rameez: *If two people decide to commit to a relationship for the rest of their lives, what is wrong with their intimacy? Just like Abdul said, there is nothing wrong with sex between two people once it is accepted* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 59:16-59:28).

Ishak: *Here a lonely woman is either sold or shot* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 67:40-67-44).

ISIS executive: *We are counting on young people like you. ISIS has given us the opportunity to accomplish what Alamgir Aurangzeb failed to do in India. This is not something to forget* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 90:27-90:47).

**3.2.2. Interpretation**

**Table 2.** Words used in the Film.

Word	Number	Word	Number
Terror and terrorist	7	Allah	43
Rape	7	Brainwashing	4
Drugs	11	Jihad	5
Sin	8	ISIS	8
Hell and hellfire	19	Islam	26
Death	7	War	7
Love	32	Punishment	8
Sharia	8	Danger	6
Mujahid	5	Relationship	5

Sex	6	Burqa	10
Trap	4	Slave	6

The film is essentially built on dichotomies such as Afghanistan/Syria - India, Islam - Hindu religions, Muslim - Hindu, beautiful - ugly, good - evil, freedom - slavery. In the scenario designed around Islam and Muslims, the words shown in Table 2 are frequently used.

Without exception, all Muslims in the film are presented with bad codes such as reactionary, liar, trapper, terrorist, rapist, murderer, ISIS member, torturer, beater, angry, ignorant. There is not a single good Muslim in the film. On the contrary, all Hindus, without exception, are represented with good codes such as peaceful, beautiful, understanding, emotional, strong family ties, loving their state and country, modern, clean-hearted. There is not a single bad Hindu in the film. In fact, there are no bad actions and discourses of Hindus in the film. However, Muslims are either rapists, instigators or enablers of rape. The most prominent religious hate speech in the film is that Muslims/ISIS members are rapists. In the film, Muslim men/ISIS members raped both the leading woman and many other women. These scenes are shown repeatedly. In one scene, Muslim men even watch Nima as she is raped. In the film, Muslim men see women as slaves and rape as a right.

The other dichotomy in the film is between India and Afghanistan/Syria. India (especially Kerala) is presented as a country of natural beauty, peaceful, peaceful, happy people, singing, dancing, greenery, calm, modern and liberal. There is not a single bad thing about India in the film. There is also not a single good place in Afghanistan or Syria. All the places shown are wastelands. Houses are in ruins, there is death, screaming, fear, oppression, captivity and reaction. All the people are unhappy, especially women who live in fear of death. Women have no place in life, they have no rights. Thus, in the film, Islam and Islamic countries are portrayed in terms of terrorism, backwardness, death, captivity and hate speech.

Another dichotomy that is often compared in the film is Hindu religions and Islam. Hindu religions are never criticized or vilified in the film. These religions are completely innocent, they are the values of India and should be believed in. So much so that Gitanjali realizes that ISIS people are bad people, finds the right path and returns home. Gitanjali says to her father:

*I made a huge mistake, but you are also at fault because you didn't tell them about Hindu religion and traditions (Sen and Shah, 2023, 98:18).*

However, according to the film, Islam is a religion to be avoided and even destroyed because it is a manifestation of backwardness, terror, death, slavery, drugs, violence, rape. There are dozens of scenes in the film to illustrate this. ISIS leaders give drugs to ISIS members and ISIS members give drugs to new recruits or those they are trying to recruit. The pill is ‘chemical courage’ in the language of ISIS. Its name in the pharmaceutical industry is Captagon and Amphetamine. Islam considers drugs normal and necessary for jihad. Another scene that distorts and brutalizes Islam is the scene of sacrifice. Fatima and Ishak joined ISIS and traveled to Afghanistan. ISIS members host them in their home and sacrifice a goat for Fatima and Ishak. However, this sacrifice is not done according to Islamic rules. The ISIS member brutally cuts the goat’s neck with a machete in one fell swoop. Another scene that equates Islam with death and murder is the scene where Fatima goes to Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, Muslims/ISIS members stop a bus and kill or capture Muslim women and children. Seeing this, Fatima can’t stand it and wants to get out of the car and breathe. However, when she sees a man’s mutilated body and a woman’s body half buried in the ground

and smashed with stones nearby, she vomits and is shocked. Ishak reacts calmly and with a slight laugh. This emphasizes that this is the norm in Islam. In another scene, women are sold for 100 riyals on the outskirts of Herat. Fatima wants to escape. A woman who leaves her home without permission is shot in the middle of the road with long-barreled guns. The words 'Allahu Akbar' echo in the neighborhood. In another scene, a woman's arm and a man's throat are cut because he is wearing lipstick. Takbir sounds are raised and guns are fired. At this point, the other religious hate speech that stands out in the film is that Islam and Islamic life include death, murder, slavery and brutality.

Another discriminatory discourse and action against Islam and Muslims is that Muslims are converting Kerala in particular and the whole of India in general. In the film, Muslims/ISIS members force Hindus to convert all over India, especially Hindus in Kerala. Muslims are multiplying in these states and disrupting the structure of the state. The scene when Fatima first arrives at the university is a case in point. Fatima arrives at the international nursing university in Kerala, the 3-wheeled taxi motorcycle that brings her in has the words 'Masha Allah' written on it. There are writings and banners on the walls of the university: Free Kashmir, Osama Bin Laden, Freedom, War, Kashmir will rise from ashes of India, Kill Indian imperialism, Islam is the only solution. Muslims have politicized the university and Kerala, plunging it, in the words of the university official, into chaos.

One of the most emphasized themes in the film is the jihad of love. Malicious Muslim men, who are actually ISIS members, make innocent young Hindu women fall in love with them, get them hooked on drugs and recruit them into the organization. Bhagyalakshmi clearly expresses this situation with the following words:

*I came here for love, I turned into a slave. A sex slave. They either make women full-time sex slaves or they strap bombs on them and throw them at infidels shouting 'Allah-u Akbar'!* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 119:19)

Nima tells the Indian security forces about the ISIS structure in Kerala and India, about Muslims, the dangers in India, the cases of conversions and missing girls. Nima says:

*Even our former prime minister said: Kerala will become an Islamic state in the next 20 years. According to a government report tabled in parliament in June 2012, there are on average 2800 to 3200 conversions. Every year there are conversions to Islam from Hindu and Christian families. More than 30,000 girls are missing, sir. The unofficial figure is 50,000. With this seemingly harmless conversion, they are raising a ruthless army of suicide bombers. That's harmless? How long will it take you to bring justice? You know the Attikad in Kasargod, right? Like in Syria and Yemen, some of the villages there follow Sharia law. You still want proof? All the blasts in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Afghanistan have Kerala children in them* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 114:05).

Thus, he emphasizes that the conversions to Islam in India are not innocent. He says that Muslims kidnap Hindu women, that many parts of Kerala are governed by Sharia and that Kerala will turn into an Islamic state. From this point of view, he calls on both the Indian state and the people of India to prevent conversions to Islam. The ISIS leader said:

*We trust young people like you. ISIS has given us the opportunity to complete what Alamgir Aurangzeb failed to accomplish in India. This is not something to be forgotten* (Sen and Shah, 2023, 90:27).

The statement refers to the Muslim Mughal ruler who came very close to conquering India but failed. In other words, the main goal of Muslims in India and ISIS is to conquer India. Another prominent point in the film is that all Hindu women who join ISIS regret it. The attitude and rhetoric

of the interrogating policemen is that those who join ISIS are terrorists, but if they repent and return, they will be welcomed with compassion by the security forces. At the beginning of the interrogation scene, the interrogators speak to Fatima with dull and harsh expressions, but by the end of the story they are protective, sad, pitying and supportive.

### 3.2.3. Explanation

The explanation part of the research was prepared by taking into account the dialogues, script, images, actors, analysis and comments made through critical analysis, the sociological structure of India, the Indian government, BJP, Modi and India’s political moves/relationships. While conducting critical discourse analysis, an explanation was made by considering and relating all these elements.

In the analysis of the film, 7 main elements stand out: rape of Hindus by Muslims, love jihad, Muslims' aim to invade India, conversion from Hindu religions to Islam, Islam and terrorism, slavery of women in Islam, and the backwardness/intolerance of Islam. These elements are repeatedly shown in the film. These scenes are reinforced with dialogue, dramatized images and music. These elements in the film clearly include religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims.

In fact, one of the most frequently shown scenes and messages in the film is that Muslims/ISIS members rape both Muslim women, Hindu women and women of other religions. The film emphasizes that Muslims/ISIS enslave women. Through the burqa worn by Muslim women, it is emphasized that they are silent, passive and captive. The concept of ‘love jihad’, which is the discourse of the Indian Prime Minister Modi and the main theme of the film, also explains how women are enslaved. According to the film, women in Islam are either captured at gunpoint and made sex slaves, or ISIS men convert Hindu and Christian women to Islam by making them fall in love with them and then enslave them.

In the film, both the nature and social life of India are presented in perfect beauty. On the other hand, Islamic countries are depicted in terms of wasteland, death, brutality, backwardness, captivity and terrorism. In the film, Syria and Afghanistan are openly marginalized and associated with terrorism, but Pakistan is not mentioned. However, in the messages hidden in the film, Pakistan was also targeted and subjected to hate speech. In fact, the name of the film’s lead character Begam Fatima (ISIS terrorist) was inspired by Fatima Begum, a former Pakistani Muslim politician. However, the Mughal ruler Alamgir Aurangzeb was Muslim and was close to conquering India. The ISIS members in the film also want to realize this goal. The Mughal empire already existed on the borders of what is now Pakistan. India has been at war with Pakistan 4 times in history and these tense relations continue with the Kashmir dispute. In Kashmir, where 3 million of the 4 million inhabitants are Muslim, the conflict has been going on for 77 years. India controls 45 percent of Kashmir, Pakistan 35 percent and China 20 percent. Therefore, the film serves India’s desire to maintain its presence in Kashmir and to continue its political and psychological struggle with Pakistan.

One of the most emphasized issues in the film is the high number of conversions from Christianity and Hindu religions to Islam. In the film, Hindu women are forcibly converted to Islam. Women are impregnated by Muslim/ISIS men and forced to marry and convert to Islam. Hindu and Christian women are drugged, brainwashed and converted by ISIS members. Therefore, one of the objectives of the director, producer and Modi in making the film is to stop the increase in the number of Muslims and thus to prevent exodus from Hindu religions.

Prime Minister Modi and the BJP, with its negative policy against Muslims and the films it produces/supports as a result, cause Muslims in India to be directly exposed to hate speech and crime. In India, the Prophet Muhammad was insulted, mosques were set on fire and a Muslim person was killed. Racist attacks and acts of religious hatred have taken place in Muslim neighborhoods. Religious hate speech has even reached the Indian parliament. BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri called Kunwar Danish Ali, a Muslim MP from the Bahujan Samaj Party, a 'terrorist' and a 'pimp'.

### Conclusion

In almost all countries in the world, hate speech/acts occur on a small or large scale against a person, a group or a society as a whole because of their religious beliefs. Hate speech, which is mostly perpetrated by western societies against eastern societies and their religious beliefs from an orientalist perspective, is sometimes perpetrated by eastern societies against eastern societies and their religious beliefs from a self-orientalist perspective. At this point, while eastern societies produce hate speech against the religious beliefs of other eastern societies, they sometimes do so against people in their own society and country.

The fact that these actions, which are carried out on a self-orientalist perspective, are carried out through mass media causes hate speech to spread, become permanent and increase its impact. Especially films produced through cinema, which is one of the mass communication tools, and which contain hate speech have served this purpose for many years. In Bollywood cinema, especially in recent years, films containing hate speech against Islam and Muslims have been produced. These self-orientalist actions and discourses of India, where approximately 20% of the population is Muslim, against its own people and other Muslim peoples are supported by the Indian government and state.

From this point of view, this study aims to determine how hate speech against Islam and Muslims is generated in Bollywood cinema and the film *The Kerala Story* is analyzed through critical discourse analysis. The film was also analyzed with Fairclough's 3D critical discourse analysis. The film analysis was made by taking into account the producer, director, actors, the political structure in the country, the country's rulers, the film's script, dialogues and shots/images.

According to the results obtained from the analysis of *The Kerala Story*, it is possible to say that the entire film contains intense religious hate speech against Islam and Muslims. The characters, script, dialogues, images and music in the film are all selected and constructed to support this hate speech. At this point, in general terms, the most prominent elements in the film are; love jihad, rapes committed by Muslims/ISIS members, the plan of Muslims to take over India, the large number of people converting to Islam and the dangers of this, the backwardness and brutality of Islam, the fact that Islamic countries are very bad both in terms of physical structure and lifestyle (especially for women) and that Islam is a religion of terrorism.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party in power in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, pursues an anti-Islam and anti-Muslim policy. Modi openly defends this policy with both his rhetoric and actions. Modi supports and financially funds marginalizing, hateful and Islamophobic films in Bollywood against Islam and Muslims. As Yildirim (2022, p. 447) points out, in the Bollywood films 'Baby' and 'Sooryavanshi', Islam and Muslims are constantly associated with terrorism. The Modi government supports films like 'Fanaa', 'Kurbaan', 'Baby', 'Sooryavanshi' and 'Sarfaroosh' and promotes its nationalist policies by using popular actors in these films. 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' (2012) is also a film made around Muslims, terrorism and cultural

conflicts. The story, told through the Pakistani character Changez Khan, contains Islamophobic elements.

In fact, Modi’s popular discourse of ‘love jihad’ is the main theme of *The Kerala Story*. Another important element in the film is the frequent portrayal of Muslims/ISIS members as rapists. Without exception, all Muslims/ISIS members in the film are either rapists or enablers of rape. Another striking point here is that Muslims and ISIS members are not separated. The message in the film is that if a person is a Muslim, he/she is an ISIS member, and if he/she is an ISIS member, he/she is a Muslim. Khatun’s work (2024, p. 26-55) also supports this. In fact, in Indian cinema, especially before the 2000s, Muslims were seen as a value of India and a part of its cultural diversity. However, in Indian films made after 2000, Muslims were presented as enemies, the other, the excluded, the other, and terrorists. These Muslims, on the other hand, convert Hindus, especially women, to Islam by deceiving them (getting them addicted to drugs). At this point, the film clearly denigrates Islam and asks Hindus and Christians not to convert to Islam.

The main purpose of making this film and other Islamophobic Bollywood films is for Modi and the BJP to create an other (Islam and Muslims) to maintain their power. Another aim is to stop the increase in the number of Muslims and thus prevent exits from Hindu religions. Another purpose is that India wants to maintain its presence in Kashmir and continue the political and psychological struggle with Pakistan.

In fact, India is called an ‘Eastern’ country by ‘Western’ countries and their discourses about India are realized in orientalist correction. Thereupon, it is seen that India should reject the discourse of Western countries but on the contrary it internalizes this discourse and applies this behavior to its own people. So much so that, India, through both its country’s politics and movies, marginalizes Muslims (enemies, terrorists, foreigners) just like Western countries and Western cinema do. India’s action therefore represents a form of selforientalism and supports the narratives of the West.

At this point, in order to effectively combat hate speech against Islam in Indian cinema and thus Islamophobia, it is necessary to conduct an extensive research on hate speech against Islam in India. The reasons for Islamophobia in India, its reflections in society, and how it affects which areas of life should be determined by experts in the field. For this purpose, this issue should be kept on the political and scientific agenda both in India and around the world. In addition, more academic studies should be conducted on Islamophobic movies in Bollywood and awareness should be raised.

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## Self Oryantalizm Bağlamında Bollywood Sinemasında İslam'a Yönelik Dini Nefret Söylemi: "The Kerala Story" Örneği

Sefer KALAMAN\*

### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

Din, dil, ırk, cinsiyet, engellilik durumu, siyasi tercih, hastalık gibi nedenlerle bir kişiyi, bir grubu ya da topyekun bir toplumu aşağılamak, taciz etmek ve şiddet uygulanmasına zemin hazırlamak amacıyla gerçekleştirilen ifadeler, nefret söylemini oluşturmaktadır. Bu nefret söylemi türleri içerisinde ise, hedef aldığı insan sayısı dikkate alındığında en tehlikelilerinden ve en zararlı olanlarından birisi dini nefret söylemidir. Öyle ki, bilinçli şekilde oluşturulup yayılan dini nefret söylemi, yüz milyonlarca insanı hedef alabilmekte ve onlar hakkında olumsuz bir imajın oluşmasına zemin hazırlayabilmektedir. Dahası bu dini nefret söyleminin sürekli gerçekleştirilmesi, o dine ve o dinin mensuplarına karşı önyargı eylemlerinin yapılmasına, negatif bir ayrımcı tutum sergilenmesine, önyargı motivasyonlu şiddet eylemlerinin gerçekleştirilmesine ve hatta devamında soykırım yapılmasına hizmet edebilmektedir.

Dini nefret söyleminin televizyon, gazete, sosyal medya, sinema gibi kitle iletişim araçlarıyla oluşturulup yayılması ise söylemin çok geniş kitlelere ulaşmasına, kalıcı olmasına ve daha fazla etki yaratmasına neden olmaktadır. Kuşkusuz sinema, bu kitle iletişim araçları içerisinde dini nefret söyleminin oluşturulup yayılmasına yol açan en etkili araçlardan birisidir. Özellikle Hollywood ve Avrupa sineması tarafından yapılan birçok filmde, İslamiyet başta olmak üzere birçok dine ve o dinin mensuplarına yönelik nefret söylemi gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Batı tarafından oryantalist bakış açısıyla oluşturulan ve sinema aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilen bu dini nefret söylemi artık self oryantalist şekilde de hayat bulmaktadır. Öyle ki, 'doğu toplumları' ve bu toplumlarda yaşayan bazı yapımcı, senarist ve yönetmenler, kendi toplumlarına ya da kendilerine yakın olan doğulu toplumlara karşı dini nefret söylemi içeren filmler yapmaktadır. Bollywood tarafından son yıllarda İslam dinine ve Müslümanlara karşı yapılan İslamofobik filmler bunun en önemli ve en güncel örneklerinden birini teşkil etmektedir. Başbakan Narendra Modi yönetiminde Hindistan'da iktidarda olan siyasi parti Bharatiya Janata Party, İslam'a ve Müslümanlara yönelik gerçekleştirilen dini nefret söylemlerini açık şekilde desteklemektedir. Yakın dönem bu Bollywood filmlerinde Müslümanlar, terörist, suçlu, tecavüzcü, işgalci, yabancı ve barbar olarak sunulmaktadır.

### 1. Literatür Taraması

Nefret söylemi, bir kişiyi, grubu veya topluluğu dini, dili, ırkı, mezhebi, cinsiyeti, siyasi tercihi, fiziksel yetersizliği veya hastalığı nedeniyle küçük düşürmek, taciz etmek, yıldırma ve bunlara yönelik şiddeti teşvik etmek amacıyla gerçekleştirilen her türlü ifade biçimidir. Binark ve Çomu (2012) bu nefret söylemi türlerini, siyasal nefret söylemi, kadınlara yönelik nefret söylemi,

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yabancılara ve göçmenlere yönelik nefret söylemi, cinsel kimlik temelli nefret söylemi, inanç ve mezhep temelli nefret söylemi ve engellilere/çeşitli hastalıklara yönelik nefret söylemi şeklinde sınıflandırmıştır.

Etkilediği kişi sayısı dikkate alındığında bu nefret söylemi türleri içerisinde en tehlikelilerinden birisi kuşkusuz din ve mezhep temelli nefret söylemidir. Dini nefret söylemi, dini aidiyet ve inançla ilgili nitelikler üzerinden bir kişi, grup veya topluluğa yönelik kötü niyetli, aşağılayıcı, nefreti ve şiddeti kışkırtıcı ifadeleri içermektedir (Weber, 2009).

Batı medyasında oryantalist bakış açısıyla üretilen ve çoğunlukla İslam’ı ve Müslümanları hedef alan medya içerikleri, en fazla televizyon, gazete, sosyal medya ve sinema aracılığıyla sunulmakta ve yayılmaktadır. Özellikle sinema, ABD ve Avrupa tarafından orta doğulu stereotipi üzerinden İslam ve Müslümanlara yönelik dini nefret söyleminin yapıldığı mecra olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ancak uzun yıllar Batı tarafından oryantalist düzleme indirgenerek oluşturulan ve sinema aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilen bu dini nefret söylemi, artık self oryantalist şekilde de hayat bulmaktadır.

Self oryantalizm üzerine yapılan çalışmalarda çoğunlukla, Doğu’nun ya da doğulunun Batı ya da batılı tarafından üretilen değerlerle kendisini konumlandırması ve ifade etmesi üzerinde durulmaktadır. Ancak self oryantalizmin bir boyutu da, doğulu bir ülkenin yine başka bir doğulu ülkeyi oryantalist düzlemde (self oryantalist şekilde) kötücül ve kalıp yargılarla bezenmiş şekilde sunması/ifade etmesidir. Self oryantalizmin daha derin boyutunda ise, Doğu ya da doğulunun bizzat kendi ülkesindeki insanı, grubu ya da topluluğu dolayısıyla kendi ülkesini oryantalist yaklaşımla ve olumsuz şekilde konumlandırması ve ifade etmesidir. Bu doğrultuda, Doğulu bir ülke tarafından kendi ülkesine, halkına ve dini inancına yönelik sinema aracılığıyla gerçekleştirdiği dini nefret söylemini self oryantalizm düzlemde ele almak mümkündür. Söz konusu dini nefret söyleminin self oryantalist şekilde (Özellikle İslam’a ve Müslümanlara yönelik) gerçekleştiği yerlerden birisi Bollywood olmaktadır. %20’si Müslüman olan Hindistan, hem kendi halkına hem de diğer Müslüman ülkelere ve halklara yönelik sinema filmleri üzerinden dini nefret söylemi gerçekleştirmektedir.

## 2. Metodoloji

Çalışmada, Bollywood sinemasında self oryantalizm bağlamında İslam’a ve Müslümanlara yönelik dini nefret söyleminin nasıl gerçekleştiğini ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmıştır. Bununla birlikte çalışmada ele alınan filmde, dini nefret söylemi bağlamında söylemlerin, karakterlerin, mekanların ve olay örgüsünün nasıl oluşturulduğunu tespit etmek de amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmada amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmış ve 2023 Hint yapımı ‘The Kerala Story’ filmi incelenmiştir. Çalışmada eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Film, Norman Fairclough’un tanımlama, yorumlama ve açıklama bölümlerinden oluşan üç aşamalı eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Fairclough’un yönteminin seçilmesinin nedeni, söylemin ne olduğunu ve nasıl çalıştığını anlamak için alternatif yolların kullanılmasına izin vermesidir. Bu yöntem, filmi analiz ederken metni, söylemi, sosyal pratikleri, metin üreticisini, yayın organını ve siyasal/ideolojik yapıyı da işe dahil etmeyi önelemektedir.

## 3. ‘The Kerala Story’ Filminin Dini Nefret Söylemi Bağlamında Eleştirel Söylem Analizi

Filmde en fazla gösterilen sahnelerden ve verilen mesajlardan birisi Müslümanların/İŞİD’lilerin, hem Müslüman kadınlara hem Hindu kadınlara hem de diğer dinlere mensup kadınlara tecavüz etmesidir. Film’de Müslümanların/İŞİD’in, kadınları köleleştirdiği vurgusu yapılmaktadır. Müslüman kadınların giydiği burka üzerinden onların silik, sessiz, pasif ve esir konumunda oldukları vurgulanmaktadır. Hindistan başbakanı Modi’nin söylemi olan ve filmin ana temasını oluşturan ‘aşk cihadi’ kavramı da kadının nasıl köleleştirildiğini açıklamaktadır. Filme göre, İslam’da kadın ya silah zoruyla esir alınıp seks kölesi yapılmaktadır ya da İŞİD’li erkekler, Hindu ve Hristiyan kadınları kendilerine âşık ederek Müslümanlaştırmakta ardından da köleleştirmektedir.

Filmde Hindistan'ın gerek doğası gerekse de sosyal hayatı kusursuz güzellikte sunulmuştur. Ancak İslam ülkeleri ise çorak arazi, ölüm, vahşet, gericilik, esaret, terör gibi unsurlarla ifade edilmiştir. Filmde, Suriye ve Afganistan'a açıktan bir ötekileştirme ve terörle ilişkilendirme söylemleri gerçekleştirilmiş ancak Pakistan'ın adı geçirilmemiştir. Fakat filmde gizlenen mesajlarda Pakistan da hedef alınmış ve nefret söylemine maruz bırakılmıştır. Öyle ki, Filmin başrolü Begam Fatima'nın adı (İŞİD'li terörist), Pakistanlı Müslüman eski bir politikacı olan Fatima Begum'dan esinlenerek oluşturulmuştur. Bununla birlikte, Babür hükümdarı Alamgir Aurangzeb Müslümandır ve Hindistan'ı fethetmeye çok yaklaşmıştır. Filmde, İŞİD'lilerin de bu amacı gerçekleştirmek istedikleri vurgulanmıştır. Film, Hindistan'ın Keşmir konusunda varlığını sürdürmek ve Pakistan ile süren siyasi ve psikolojik mücadeleyi devam ettirmek istemesine de hizmet etmektedir.

Filmde üzerinde en çok durulan konulardan birisi de, Hristiyanlıktan ve Hindu dinlerinden İslam'a geçişlerin çok olmasıdır. Filmde, Hindu kadınlar zorla İslam'a geçirilmektedir. Kadınlar, Müslüman/İŞİD'li erkekler tarafından hamile bırakılıp evlenmek ve İslam'a geçmek zorunda bırakılmaktadır. Hindu ve Hristiyan kadınlar, İŞİD'liler tarafından uyuşturucuya alıştırmakta, beyinleri yıkanmakta ve bu sayede din değiştirmeleri sağlanmaktadır. Bu nedenle Filmin yönetmeninin, yapımcısının ve Modi'nin filmi yapma amaçlarından birisi de, Müslüman sayısındaki artışı durdurmak dolayısıyla Hindu dinlerinden çıkışları engellemektir. Halihazırda filmin sonunda Nima karakteri, bu amacı açık şekilde destekleyen bir tirat sergilemiştir. Nima, Hindistan'da İslam'a geçişlerin masum olmadığını üstüne basarak belirtmiş ve İslam-terör ilişkisini vurgulamıştır.

### Sonuç

Araştırmada elde edilen sonuçlara göre, filmde temel olarak 7 unsur öne çıkmıştır; Müslümanların Hindu'lara ve Hristiyanlara tecavüzü, aşk cihadı, Müslümanların Hindistan'ı işgal etme amacı, Hindu dinlerinden İslam'a geçiş, İslam ve terör, İslam'da kadının köleliği ve İslam'ın gericiliği/hoşgörüsüzlüğü. Filmde söz konusu bu unsurlar defalarca gösterilmiştir. Bu sahneler hem diyalog hem dramatize görüntüler hem de müzikle pekiştirilmiştir. Filmdeki bu unsurlar, açık şekilde İslam'a ve Müslümanlara yönelik dini nefret söylemini içermektedir.

Bu nefret söylemleri, Hindistan'da nefret eylemlerini de beraberinde getirmiştir. Öyle ki, Hindistan'da Hz. Muhammed'e hakaret edilmiş, camiler kundaklanmış ve Müslümanlar öldürülmüştür. Müslüman mahallelerinde ırkçı saldırılar ve dini nefret eylemleri gerçekleştirilmektedir. Hatta dini nefret söylemi, Hindistan meclisine kadar uzanmıştır. BJP Milletvekili Ramesh Bidhuri, Bahujan Samaj Partisi'ndeki Müslüman milletvekili Kunwar Danimarkalı Ali'ye 'terörist' ve 'pezevenk' demiştir.

Söz konusu filmin ve diğer İslamofobik Bollywood filmlerinin yapılmasının temel amacı, Modi'nin ve BJP'nin iktidarını sürdürmek için bir öteki (İslam ve Müslümanlar) yaratmasıdır. Diğer amaç, Müslüman sayısındaki artışı durdurmak dolayısıyla Hindu dinlerinden çıkışları engellemektir. Başka bir amaç da, Hindistan'ın Keşmir konusunda varlığını sürdürmek ve Pakistan ile süren siyasi ve psikolojik mücadeleyi devam ettirmek istemesidir.

**Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı / Contribution of Authors**

Arařtırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütölmüřtür.

*The research was conducted by a single author.*

\*\*\*\*\*

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*There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.*

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# MEDİAD

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## Hate Speech on Social Media in the Axis of Islamophobia: Example of TikTok

Mustafa BÖYÜK\*

### Abstract

This study focuses on the detection and analysis of Islamophobic hate speech on the TikTok platform. Social media platforms have a great impact in terms of reaching masses and sharing information. However, these platforms can also pave the way for the spread of negative content such as hate speech and discrimination. TikTok draws attention with its short video format, which is especially popular among young people. For this reason, it offers an important area of investigation in terms of the spread of hate speech and discrimination content. In this study, posts containing Islamophobic hate speech on TikTok were identified through the keywords 'Islam', 'Muslim', 'Terrorist', 'Jihad', 'Sharia', 'Radical Islam' and 'Islamist'. These keywords were chosen from the terms that commonly define Islamophobic discourse in the literature. The 10 TikTok posts selected using simple random sampling technique were analysed by critical discourse analysis method. Critical discourse analysis is a method that analyses how texts and speeches gain meaning in the social context and how these meanings reflect social power relations. In the study, linguistic and visual analyses of Islamophobic content on TikTok were conducted. The research was conducted in the first six months of 2024. The data collection process carried out during this period was obtained as a result of the scans carried out on TikTok using the keywords mentioned above. The results of the study show that Islamophobic hate speech is spread linguistically and discursively through posts on TikTok. Islamophobic content reinforces negative stereotypes against Muslims and damages social cohesion. Such content leads to marginalisation, exclusion and violence against Muslims. Islamophobia and hate speech increase social polarisation and create distrust and hostility in society.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Hate Speech, Tiktok, Islamophobia, Anti-Muslim

## İslamofobi Ekseninde Sosyal Medyada Nefret Söylemi: TikTok Örneği

### Öz

Bu çalışma, TikTok platformunda İslamofobik nefret söylemlerinin tespiti ve analizine odaklanmaktadır. Sosyal medya platformları, kitlelere ulaşma ve bilgi paylaşımı açısından büyük bir etkiye sahiptir. Ancak bu platformlar nefret söylemi ve ayrımcılık gibi olumsuz içeriklerin yayılmasına da zemin hazırlayabilmektedir. TikTok, özellikle gençler arasında popüler olan kısa video formatıyla dikkat çekmektedir. Bu nedenle nefret söylemi ve ayrımcılık içeriklerinin yayılması açısından önemli bir inceleme alanı sunmaktadır. Çalışmada, TikTok üzerinde İslamofobik nefret söylemi içeren paylaşımlar "İslam", "Müslüman", "Terörist", "Cihat", "Şeriat", "Radikal İslam" ve "İslamcı" anahtar kelimeleri aracılığıyla tespit edilmiştir. Bu anahtar kelimeler literatürde yaygın olarak İslamofobik söylemi tanımlayan terimlerden seçilmiştir. Basit rastgele örnekleme tekniği kullanılarak seçilen 10 TikTok paylaşımı, eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Eleştirel söylem analizi, metinlerin ve konuşmaların toplumsal bağlamda nasıl anlam kazandığını ve bu anlamların toplumsal güç ilişkilerini nasıl yansıttığını inceleyen bir yöntemdir. Çalışmada, TikTok'taki İslamofobik içeriklerin dilsel ve görsel analizleri yapılmıştır. Araştırma, 2024 yılının ilk altı ayında gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu dönemde yapılan veri toplama süreci, TikTok'ta yukarıda belirtilen anahtar kelimeler kullanılarak gerçekleştirilen taramalar sonucunda elde edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları, TikTok'ta paylaşımlar üzerinden İslamofobik nefret söylemlerinin dilsel ve söylemsel olarak yayıldığını göstermektedir. İslamofobik içerikler, Müslümanlara yönelik olumsuz stereotipleri pekiştirmekte ve toplumsal uyumu zedelemektedir. Bu tür içerikler, Müslümanların marjinalleşmesine, dışlanmasına ve şiddete maruz kalmasına yol açmaktadır. İslamofobi ve nefret söylemi, toplumsal kutuplaşmayı artırmakta ve toplumda güvensizlik ve düşmanlık oluşturmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal Medya, Nefret Söylemi, Tiktok, İslamofobi, İslam Karşıtlığı

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## Introduction

Social media platforms have become an integral part of individuals' daily lives and have fundamentally changed the nature of social interactions. These platforms provide users with rapid access to information, the ability to reach large audiences, and the opportunity to express their views on various topics. However, this freedom and ease of access also lead to the rapid spread of negative content such as hate speech and discrimination. Social media has become a space where social norms and values are reshaped, making various social issues more visible.

Islamophobia is a type of discrimination frequently encountered on social media, which can lead to serious social consequences. Islamophobic content targets Muslim individuals and communities, reinforcing prejudices and increasing social polarization. The spread of such content not only creates psychological and social impacts on the targeted individuals but also threatens social peace and the culture of coexistence.

TikTok stands out as a platform where content in short video format is shared and rapidly reaches large audiences. While this platform allows users to produce creative and entertaining content, it also facilitates the rapid spread of hate speech and discriminatory content. TikTok's algorithmic structure enables popular content to gain more visibility and reach wider audiences. This situation causes hate speech content to spread quickly and negatively affect large audiences.

In this study, posts containing Islamophobic hate speech on TikTok were identified through specific keywords and examined using the simple random sampling technique. Within the limitations of the research, the ten most interacted contents on TikTok were analyzed in detail using the critical discourse analysis method. Critical discourse analysis is a method that examines how language reflects and reproduces social power relations. This method helps us better understand the social impacts of hate speech and discriminatory content by revealing their linguistic and discursive structures. Additionally, the interactions these contents received and how they spread were also evaluated. This evaluation is important for understanding the dissemination dynamics of hate speech content on the platform and users' reactions to these contents.

The study aims to reveal the structure and dissemination patterns of anti-Islamic content on the TikTok platform. The results obtained aim to contribute to the development of more effective policies by social media platforms in combating discriminatory and hate content and to increase social awareness. In this context, the findings of the study will help social media users and platform administrators become more aware of hate speech and discrimination and develop more effective strategies to combat them. Furthermore, this study provides important insights into the measures that social media platforms can take to fulfill their social responsibilities and ensure the safety of their users.

In conclusion, the study provides a significant contribution to understanding the social impacts of social media platforms and how to cope with these impacts by addressing the structure and dissemination patterns of Islamophobic hate speech content on the TikTok platform. In this context, it aims to shed light on the efforts of social media platforms to create a safer and more inclusive environment. Social media platforms need to develop more effective policies to ensure the safety of their users and protect social peace.

### 1. The Social Role of Social Media

Social media has fundamentally transformed communication and interaction patterns since the early twentieth century, reshaping the relationships between individuals, communities, and institutions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 59). These platforms have had profound and wide-ranging impacts in cultural, social, political, and economic domains.



Social media transcends cultural boundaries, bringing people from around the world together and merging different media forms and cultures through what (Jenkins, 2011) describes as "media convergence". Users have the opportunity to discover and share content from diverse cultural backgrounds globally, creating an environment for global dialogue and cultural exchange. This new environment enables people to better understand each other's lifestyles, thoughts, and values. However, this cultural exchange can sometimes also facilitate the spread of hate speech and discriminatory content (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213).

Social media platforms can also lead to conflicts arising from misunderstandings and prejudices among individuals from different cultures. For instance, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and other religious or ethnic-based hate speech can quickly spread through social media, exacerbating social tensions (Matamoros-Fernández, 2017, p. 933). Such content can lead users to develop prejudiced and hostile attitudes towards each other, undermining social cohesion.

Social media has opened new avenues for civic engagement and political mobilization. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), concept of "connective action" describes this process, where individuals take a more active role in social and political issues. Users participate in democratic processes by supporting political campaigns, organizing protest events, and becoming informed about public policies. This contributes to increased democratic participation and more transparent government practices. However, the same platforms can also facilitate the spread of hate speech and misinformation, fueling social polarization and discrimination (Howard & Hussain, 2013, p. 115).

During election periods, disinformation campaigns conducted through social media can heighten social tensions and harm democratic processes. For example, during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, social media platforms played a significant role in the spread of fake news and misleading information (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). Such content can misinform voters and manipulate democratic processes.

Social media has also brought revolutionary changes to the business world. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), discuss the impact of these platforms on functions such as marketing, brand management, and customer relationship management. Companies can directly communicate with consumers, receive feedback, and shape their products or services based on this feedback through social media. This allows for a better understanding of consumer needs and the development of more dynamic strategies to meet them. However, this process can also expose brands and products to hate campaigns (Cheung & Thadani, 2012, p. 461).

Negative campaigns conducted through social media can damage brand image and negatively influence consumer behavior. For instance, negative comments and fake news about a brand's products or services can erode consumer trust and adversely affect sales. This necessitates companies to reassess their social media strategies and develop crisis management plans.

Social media has also led to significant changes in the field of education. (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), highlight how these platforms have transformed learning processes and expanded the ways students access information. While social media facilitates access to information for students, it also offers teachers opportunities to enrich lesson materials and increase student engagement. However, the spread of hate speech and discriminatory content in educational settings can lead to divisions and social tensions among students (Selwyn, 2012, p. 89).

Discrimination based on gender, race, or religious beliefs can be further entrenched through social media, jeopardizing the integrity of the learning environment. For example, the spread of hate speech messages by one student group against another can lead to serious social tensions and even physical conflicts in the school environment. Such situations require educational institutions to regulate social media use and develop more effective policies to promote tolerance and respect among students.

The negative aspects of social media are not limited to the spread of misinformation and fake news. (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), note that these platforms can increase social polarization and have misleading effects on public opinion. Additionally, issues such as social media addiction and privacy violations are serious concerns for users. Hate speech holds a particularly harmful place among these negative effects, as it can lead to the targeting, discrimination, and social exclusion of individuals and groups (Matamoros-Fernández, 2017, p. 933).

Social media platforms must develop more effective policies and regulations to prevent the spread of such content. Major platforms like Facebook, X, and YouTube use algorithms and moderation teams to prevent the spread of hate speech and misinformation. However, these efforts are often insufficient and cannot completely prevent the spread of hate speech content (Gillespie, 2018, p. 257).

In conclusion, the social role of social media is multifaceted and complex. While these platforms offer unique opportunities for global communication and interaction, they also bring new challenges and responsibilities. Understanding and managing the impacts of social media on society requires continuous attention and regulation. Maximizing the opportunities provided by these platforms and minimizing potential risks is an important task for all segments of society. Social media platforms must develop more effective policies and regulations to ensure user safety and protect social cohesion, while users must use these platforms responsibly.

## **2. Islamophobia and Hate Speech on Social Media**

Islamophobia is defined as an irrational fear, hatred, or prejudice against Islam and Muslims. This concept encompasses negative attitudes towards the cultural, religious, and social identities of Muslims. Islamophobia often stems from the association of Muslims with terrorism, the perception of cultural differences as a threat, and the belief that Muslims are difficult to integrate into social life (Allen, 2010, p. 12). In addition to individual prejudices and discrimination, Islamophobia can also manifest itself through institutional policies and practices. Studies on Islamophobia reveal that the concept is multidimensional. For example, Said (1978) emphasises the role of orientalist thought in the formation of prejudices against Islam in the West. In this context, Cesari (2004) draws attention to how secularisation processes in the West feed Islamophobic attitudes. In addition, Bleich (2011) analysed the legal, political and sociological dimensions of Islamophobia and analysed the effects of this concept on social segregation in depth.

Hate speech is defined as expressions that contain hostility, contempt, or discrimination against a particular group. Such speech is often directed at ethnic, religious, sexual, or other identity-based groups and can lead to marginalization, exclusion, or violence against these groups (Perry, 2001, p. 10). Hate speech threatens the safety of individuals and communities and undermines social cohesion.

Social media platforms play a significant role in the spread of Islamophobia and hate speech due to their ability to enable users to create and share content. These platforms allow hate speech to spread rapidly and reach large audiences. Various academic studies have examined the spread of Islamophobia and hate speech on social media and have investigated the social impacts of such speech and methods to combat it. For example, Awan's (2014) study on the dynamics of Islamophobic discourse on Twitter revealed that Islamophobic tweets increase after certain events and spread rapidly to a wide audience. Similarly, Ekman's (2015) study on how Islamophobic groups organise and spread hate speech on Facebook shows that these groups usually form closed communities and spread their hate speech in these communities. However, more recent studies offer new insights into this issue. Vidgen & Yasseri (2020) study focused on identifying weak and strong Islamophobic hate speech on social media and analysed in detail how it spreads at different levels. Furthermore, Gata & Bayhaqy (2020) study analysing the sensitivities towards Islamophobia

on social media after the Christchurch attack reveals how such hate speech resonates in the aftermath of global events.

Historically, Islamophobia reflects the prejudices and fears towards Islam and Muslims in the Western world. During the Crusades in the Middle Ages, Muslims were seen as enemies by the Christian world, and this enmity was propagated through literature and art. During the colonial period in the 19th century, Western powers occupied Muslim countries and spread negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, often depicting them as backward, barbaric, and uncivilized (Said, 1978, p. 206).

In the modern era, Islamophobia has gained a new dimension, especially after the attacks in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. These attacks led to the establishment of a direct relationship between Islam and terrorism in the Western world and increased fear and prejudice against Muslims. The media, politicians and some academics have also contributed to the reinforcement of these prejudices by spreading Islamophobic rhetoric (Cesari, 2013, p. 45). In this context, Huntington's (1996) theory of Clashing Civilisations has been a frequently used framework to explain the antagonism between the West and Islam. Huntington argued that such conflicts are inevitable, seeing Islam as the main rival of the West.

In particular, events such as the Charlie Hebdo attack (2015) and the murder of Samuel Paty (2020) have led to the strengthening of Islamophobic discourses in the West and deepened social segregation against Muslims. These events have contributed to the perception of Islam as a 'threat' not only in the media but also in the political arena and social debates. The Turkish literature also draws attention to the impact of these developments and the construction of Islamophobia in the media. Dondurucu (2022) analysed the representation of Islam and the construction of Islamophobia in French newspapers through examples such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and *L'Opinion* and revealed how these discourses reinforce negative perceptions against Muslims. Similarly, Kilci et al. (2017) analysed videos containing hate speech in the context of Islamophobia in new media environments, especially on YouTube, and showed how digital platforms pave the way for Islamophobia.

Various methods have been developed to combat Islamophobia and hate speech on social media; however, these methods are often simplistic and insufficient. These methods include the development of more effective monitoring mechanisms by platforms, raising user awareness and strengthening legal regulations. Social media platforms have developed various monitoring mechanisms to combat hate speech. These mechanisms include users reporting hate speech content, algorithms detecting hate speech content and removal of such content. For example, Facebook uses artificial intelligence and human moderators to detect and remove hate speech content (Gillespie, 2018, p. 89)

Increasing user awareness is also important in combating hate speech on social media. Users should be informed about the harms of hate speech and trained on how to respond to such content. For example, some civil society organisations organise training programmes and campaigns to combat hate speech on social media (Citron, 2016, p. 112). However, increasing new media literacy is also an important part of this fight. Cahyani (2019), while emphasising the role of new media literacy in preventing the spread of hate speech and disinformation, argued that digital media users should be raised awareness.

Strengthening legal regulations is also critical in combating hate speech. Many countries have enacted laws to prevent the spread of hate speech. For example, Germany's NetzDG law, which came into force in 2017, requires social media platforms to quickly remove hate speech content (Kaye, 2019, p. 56). Stockmann et al. (2023) study on strategies to combat online hate speech in Germany details the effectiveness of social media governance and legal regulations. Furthermore, Udanor & Anyanwu's (2019) study on countering hate speech on Twitter analyses the

challenges of dealing with hate speech in polarised societies on social media and the policies developed in this context.

The spread of Islamophobia and hate speech on social media is a significant issue that threatens social peace. Such rhetoric leads to the marginalization, exclusion, and violence against Muslims. Additionally, Islamophobia and hate speech undermine social cohesion and cause polarization within society.

The spread of Islamophobia and hate speech on social media leads to the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims. Such rhetoric can hinder the integration of Muslims into social life, obstructing their access to essential services such as education, employment, and healthcare. For example, some studies have shown that Islamophobic rhetoric increases the risk of Muslim students being bullied at school.

Islamophobia and hate speech encourage violence and discrimination against Muslims. Hate speech disseminated on social media can incite some individuals to carry out physical attacks or engage in discriminatory behaviors against Muslims. For instance, some studies have shown that Islamophobic rhetoric leads to an increase in hate crimes against Muslims.

Islamophobia and hate speech undermine social cohesion and cause polarization within society. Such rhetoric fosters distrust and hostility among different ethnic and religious groups, threatening social peace. For example, some studies have shown that Islamophobic rhetoric increases polarization within society and undermines social cohesion (Modood, 2013, p. 102).

### **2.1. Islamophobia, TikTok and Hate Speech**

TikTok is a social media platform launched in 2016 by the China-based company ByteDance. Users can share videos from 15 seconds to 3 minutes in length, usually including music, dance, comedy and other entertainment content. However, TikTok's large user base and ease of content creation also paves the way for the spread of hate speech. Especially Islamophobic content can spread rapidly through the platform's algorithms and user interactions.

TikTok's algorithms can increase the visibility of content that users are interested in, leading to the rapid spread of videos containing hate speech. For example, when a user shares an Islamophobic video, this content can quickly reach thousands of people and encourage the production of similar content. Alvarez-Cueva (2023), referring to TikTok's difficulties in combating hate speech, stated that the platform has difficulty in countering the spread of hate speech. Weimann & Masri (2023) also emphasise that the spread of hate speech on TikTok is especially due to the algorithmic structure of the platform and that these discourses reach wider audiences by recommending more content that users are interested in.

However, it should be emphasised that recent research focusing on the TikTok platform occupies an important place in the literature. In particular, Civilia et al. (2023) study sheds light on the relationship between social media and otherness by examining the hashtag #Islamterrorism on TikTok. This study provides important findings on how hate speech is constructed, given the popularity of TikTok among young users. At the same time, González-Esteban et al.'s (2024) research analysed how conversations on TikTok contributed to the intensification of hate speech during the 2023 escalation of the war in the Middle East. In this context, TikTok's interaction with social events and its impact on hate speech is a current research topic. Oboler et al.'s (2024) study analyses the role of TikTok on the spread of Islamophobic discourse by addressing online anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination against Palestinians. These studies are critical to understanding the dynamics of Islamophobic discourses on the TikTok platform.

TikTok's algorithms recommend content based on users' viewing habits. These algorithms may not be effective enough to prevent the spread of videos containing hate speech. For example, when a user watches Islamophobic content, the algorithm may continue to recommend similar content. This contributes to the normalisation and further spread of hate speech (Weimann & Masri, 2023).

Islamophobic hate speech spread on TikTok can have serious negative effects on Muslim communities. These effects can cause psychological harm at the individual level and discrimination and exclusion at the social level. Hate speech can lead to psychological problems such as stress, anxiety and depression in affected individuals. Muslim users may feel insecure and excluded due to the Islamophobic content they encounter on TikTok. This may lead individuals to limit or completely abandon the use of social media (Alvarez-Cueva, 2023).

### 3. Methodology

This study aims to identify and analyze Islamophobic hate speech on the TikTok platform. The research was conducted using a qualitative research design. Qualitative research methods provide an appropriate framework for the in-depth examination and interpretation of content on social media platforms (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). This section details the research questions, data collection, data analysis, research limitations, and ethical approval processes. The primary research questions of this study are as follows:

- What are the linguistic and discursive structures of content containing Islamophobic hate speech on the TikTok platform?
- What discourse strategies are used in this content?
- How is Islamophobic content disseminated on the TikTok platform, and what interactions does it encounter?
- What are the social impacts of this content?

#### 3.1. Research Design

A qualitative research method was chosen as the research design. Qualitative research is an approach that allows for a deep understanding of social phenomena and reveals the perspectives of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 78). In this study, the linguistic and discursive structures of Islamophobic hate speech on the TikTok platform were examined, and the social impacts and dissemination patterns of this content were analyzed.

The selected content was analyzed using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. Critical Discourse Analysis examines how language reflects and reproduces social power relations (Fairclough, 2013, p. 23). In this context, the linguistic structures, discourse strategies, and social impacts of Islamophobic content on TikTok were analyzed.

During the Critical Discourse Analysis process, the linguistic structures of the content were first examined. This examination aimed to reveal the meanings of the words and expressions used in the content, the context in which these expressions were used, and the social meanings they carried. Linguistic analysis provides a framework for understanding the surface and deep structures of the content (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 472).

Following the linguistic analysis, the discourse strategies of the content were examined. Discourse strategies are linguistic and rhetorical tools used for a specific purpose. These strategies help us understand the intended impact of the content and the social power relations it reflects (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 34). Discourse strategies include polarization, othering, blaming, and legitimization.

### 3.2. Data Collection Process

During the data collection process, posts containing Islamophobic hate speech on the TikTok platform were identified through specific keywords. These keywords were selected from terms commonly used in the literature to define Islamophobic rhetoric (Allen, 2010, p. 112). Keywords included terms such as "İslam", "Müslüman", "terörist", "cihat", "şeriat" "radikal İslam" and "İslamcı". These terms were identified through searches conducted on the TikTok platform.

Using TikTok's search and explore features, Islamophobic content was identified. From this content, the ten most interacted posts were selected using a simple random sampling method. Simple random sampling is a method where each piece of content has an equal chance of being selected, thereby increasing the representativeness of the sample (Bryman, 2016, p. 89). The selected content was recorded for in-depth analysis in line with the research objectives.

### 3.3. Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, firstly, the social effects and diffusion patterns of the contents were analysed. This analysis aimed to reveal how the contents spread on the TikTok platform, which interactions they encounter and their social effects. The number of likes, comments and shares received by the content shows how wide an audience these contents reach and what kind of interactions they receive. In addition, by analysing the comments on the content, it was tried to understand how users reacted to these contents and the social meanings of these reactions.

In the data collection process, content was collected using the keywords determined on the TikTok platform in the first six months of 2024. 'Islam,' As a result of searches with keywords such as "İslam", "Müslüman", "terörist", "cihat", "şeriat" "radikal İslam" and "İslamcı" 10 interacted content was selected. The total number of content that could be accessed through this tag search was 150, but the analysis was focused on the 10 content that received engagement. This limitation allowed for a more detailed examination of the overall trends and engagement patterns of the content on the platform.

The comments were analysed qualitatively to gain a deeper understanding of the social meaning of the content, and this analysis revealed the social impact of the content and users' perceptions of the content.

Finally, the social impacts and dissemination patterns of the content were analyzed. This analysis aimed to reveal how the content spread on the TikTok platform, what interactions it encountered, and its social impact. The number of likes, comments, and shares the content received indicated how widely it reached and the type of interaction it garnered. Additionally, the comments on the content were analyzed to understand how users responded to it and the social meanings of these responses.

### 3.4. Selection of Tags and Reasons

In this study, the keywords and tags used were carefully selected based on their relevance to Islamophobic rhetoric and their frequent appearance in both academic literature and social media platforms. These keywords serve a dual purpose: they define the scope of the content related to Islamophobia and provide a methodological framework for identifying such content in a consistent manner across different posts and user interactions.

**Universe and Population:** The universe of this research consists of TikTok content, particularly videos and posts that engage with topics related to Islam and Muslims. Given the extensive and global nature of TikTok, the population from which the sample was drawn is highly diverse, covering a broad spectrum of posts from multiple regions, user demographics, and linguistic backgrounds. To manage the scope, specific keywords were utilized to filter and focus on

content that explicitly or implicitly relates to Islamophobic discourse. The choice of these keywords is crucial for narrowing down the universe into a manageable population for content analysis. By applying these tags, a representative sample of Islamophobic content was identified for in-depth analysis.

**Selection of Keywords:** The keywords and tags used in this study were chosen from terms commonly associated with Islamophobic rhetoric. These terms have been frequently documented in previous research on hate speech and Islamophobia, and they allow for a systematic approach to identifying relevant content. The selection process was guided by both the academic literature and real-time usage patterns on TikTok. Below is a breakdown of the selected terms:

**İslam:** This term is used to identify content broadly related to the Islamic religion, religious practices, and the portrayal of Islam in both positive and negative contexts.

**Müslüman:** Focused on posts mentioning Muslim individuals or communities, this term helps identify content that either discusses Muslim identities or targets them in a discriminatory manner.

**Terörist:** A term often used in Islamophobic narratives to link Muslims with terrorism, reinforcing negative stereotypes. This keyword captures content that perpetuates such harmful associations.

**Cihat:** Frequently misunderstood or misrepresented, this term is often associated with violence in Islamophobic rhetoric. It was selected to identify content linking Islam with radicalism or violent extremism.

**Şeriat:** Used to identify content that discusses Islamic law, often in a negative light, focusing on misconceptions about Sharia as oppressive or incompatible with Western values.

**Radikal İslam:** This term captures content discussing radical or extremist groups that claim to represent Islam, often used to generalize about all Muslims.

**İslamcı:** Refers to content that discusses Islamist political ideologies or movements, which are often conflated with extremism in Islamophobic discourse.

These keywords were not arbitrarily selected; rather, they reflect patterns observed in both academic studies on Islamophobia and the real-world usage of social media platforms like TikTok. The terms were tested on TikTok to ensure they effectively capture the content relevant to the study. This methodological approach ensures that the sample drawn from TikTok is representative of the broader patterns of Islamophobic discourse prevalent on the platform.

**Methodological Framework:** The selection of these keywords aligns with a systematic content analysis approach, which allows for the identification of patterns in Islamophobic rhetoric. By focusing on specific terms, the research captures the nuances of how hate speech is constructed and propagated on TikTok. The methodology also considers the algorithmic nature of TikTok, where user engagement with certain keywords can amplify the visibility of similar content. This feedback loop makes the choice of keywords crucial for understanding how Islamophobia spreads on the platform (Allen, 2010, p. 112).

### 3.5. Research Limitations

The limitations of this study include the fact that only the posts on the TikTok platform were analysed and the sample size was limited. TikTok is a platform with millions of users worldwide, so it is not possible to analyse all posts. The research was limited to 10 posts identified through certain keywords. Although this limitation restricts the generalisability of the research findings, the selection of the most engaged posts increases the potential of the findings to reflect the general trends in TikTok.

The data used in the research consists of content obtained in the first six months of 2024. In this period, data were collected in the light of certain events and discussions in which Islamophobic content increased. In addition, the vast majority of the analysed content consists of Turkish posts, which reveals that the findings should be evaluated in a framework that is more oriented towards the user audience in Turkey. While the preference for Turkish content enables the research to better reflect a local social media dynamic, the fact that content in other languages was not analysed means that the findings cannot fully represent Islamophobic discourses at the global level. Therefore, in order to evaluate the research in a broader framework, content in different languages should also be analysed.

#### 4. Anti-Muslim Rhetoric on Social Media: A Study on TikTok

##### Content 1 Main Elements:

**Question Asked:** The video begins by asking the viewer whether they would prefer to marry a Muslim or a Christian.

**First Choice:** The girl in the video selects the "Christian" option.

**Reaction and Violence:** The girl's mother then reacts violently and uses a derogatory expression, saying, "You stupid girl." The girl submissively responds with, "Okay, mom."

**Forced Change of Choice:** The girl is then forced to switch to the "Muslim" option.

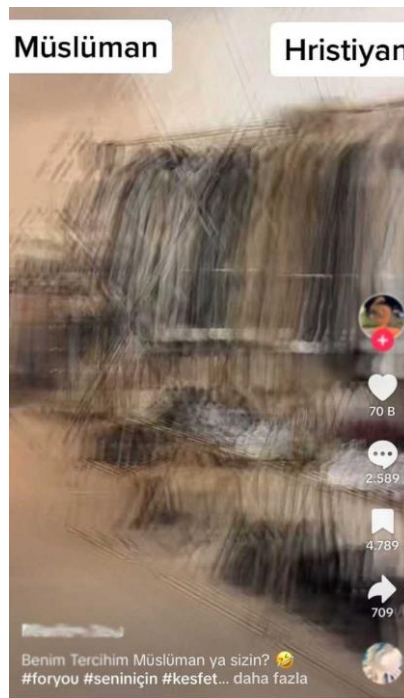


Figure 1. TikTok Screenshot (Tiktok, 2024a)

##### Analysis:

###### Representation of Religion:

- The video presents being Muslim or Christian as a binary choice, exhibiting a reductive and polarizing approach.



- The violent reaction of the mother following the "Christian" choice creates a negative image of Muslim families as intolerant and coercive.

#### Use of Violence:

- The use of physical violence and verbal abuse by the mother reinforces negative stereotypes of Muslim families as oppressive and violent.
- Such a depiction supports Islamophobic narratives, giving the impression that Muslim families do not respect individual choices and enforce religious conformity.

#### Language and Tone:

- The derogatory language used by the mother ("You stupid girl") is aggressive and belittling, negatively portraying Muslim family dynamics.
- The girl's submissive response ("Okay, mom") and forced change of choice reinforce the stereotype of Muslim women as lacking agency and being under pressure.

#### Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The forced change of choice by the girl provides a powerful visual representation that can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers.
- Dramatic elements like the "shaking" effect enhance the intensity of the scene, making the depiction more impactful and memorable.

Evaluation: The video can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Portraying Muslim families as intolerant and violent.
- Reinforcing negative stereotypes of Muslim women as lacking agency and being under pressure.
- Using dramatic and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions against Muslim family dynamics.

#### **Content 2 Main Elements:**

Timeline: The video begins by comparing the years 2018 and 2021.

2018 Representation: The character in 2018 is labeled as "Muslim" and described with negative terms such as "Hates," and "Loser."

2021 Representation: The character in 2021 is described with positive terms such as "Devil," "Cool and Best," "Respectful and Smart," and is noted to have "Joined," indicating a transformation.



Figure 2. TikTok Screenshot (TikTok, 2024b)

### Analysis:

#### Representation of Religion:

- The video describes being Muslim with negative and derogatory terms while describing the other state with positive and laudatory terms. This creates a dichotomy where being Muslim is bad, and the other state is good.
- Labeling the Muslim characters as "Hates" and "Loser" creates a negative stereotype that Muslims are hateful and weak.

#### Change and Transformation:

- The video depicts the Muslim character transitioning to a state labeled as "Devil," presenting this change as a positive development, implying that being Muslim is bad and leaving this state is good.
- The phrase "Joined" implies joining a group or undergoing a transformation, suggesting that being Muslim is a condition to be excluded from.

#### Language and Tone:

- The language used describes the Muslim character in a belittling and derogatory manner while describing the other state in a laudatory and positive manner. This sends the message to viewers that being Muslim is a bad thing.
- Terms like "Hates" and "Loser" associate the Muslim character with negative traits.

**Visual and Emotional Impact:**

- The visual transformation in the video can strongly convey the message that being Muslim is bad and leaving this state is good.
- The visual representations of the characters and the expressions used can evoke strong emotional reactions in viewers and foster a negative perspective toward Muslims.

Evaluation: The video can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Defining being Muslim with negative and derogatory terms.
- Presenting the transformation of the Muslim character as a positive development, implying that being Muslim is bad.
- Using dramatic and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions against Muslims.

**Content 3 Main Elements:**

Content and Text: The video shows various K-pop idols' actions and statements that are considered disrespectful to Islam. The texts highlight the idols' negative behaviors and statements towards Islam.

Visuals: The video includes clips from the idols' stage performances and music videos. These clips are presented to the viewer along with the texts.

**Text Content:**

- "Enhyphen - Jake: For wearing a necklace with 'Allah' written in Arabic."
- "NCT U: For having writings from the Quran in the decorations of the song 'Make a Wish.'"
- "CL: For having religious music backgrounds specific to Muslims in some songs."
- "Jay Park: For having some songs about Islam. And for the line 'Worship me like Allah' in one of his songs."

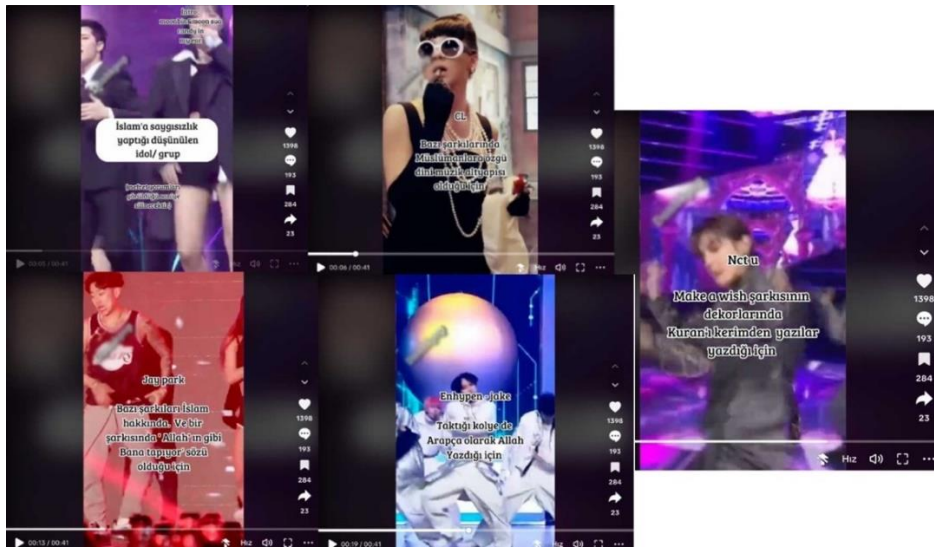


Figure 3. TikTok Screenshot (Tiktok, 2024c)

**Analysis:**

Representation of Religion:

- The video highlights actions and statements by K-pop idols that are considered disrespectful to Islam. This can present viewers with a negative perspective on Islam.
- The actions and statements of the idols are presented as disrespectful to Islam, which can evoke negative feelings towards Islam among viewers.

Language and Tone:

- The language used presents the actions and statements of the idols in a critical manner. This conveys the message to viewers that disrespect towards Islam is being shown.
- The expressions used in the texts describe the actions and statements of the idols negatively, which can evoke negative feelings toward Islam among viewers.

Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The visuals in the video include clips from the idols' stage performances and music videos. These clips, presented alongside the texts, can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers.
- By using texts and visuals together, the message that disrespect towards Islam is being shown is strongly conveyed to viewers.

Evaluation: The video can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Presenting the actions and statements of K-pop idols as disrespectful to Islam.
- Describing the actions and statements of the idols negatively, thereby evoking negative feelings towards Islam among viewers.
- Using dramatic and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions towards Islam among viewers.

**Content 4 Main Elements:**

Voiceover Text: "It is said that a person who dies as a child will go to heaven. If the purpose of this life is truly a test, then no child should die. Because for someone who came for a test to go directly to heaven without taking the test is as unjust as some students passing the exam directly because there are no exam papers left."

Visuals: The video depicts a child who died in a traffic accident ascending to heaven. The child is shown rising to heaven with angel wings.



Figure 4. TikTok Screenshot (Tiktok, 2024d)

### Analysis:

#### Representation of Religion:

- The video questions religious beliefs through the concepts of justice and testing. The death of children and their ascension to heaven is presented as contradictory to the notion of justice in religious beliefs.
- Such questioning can give the impression that religious beliefs are irrational or unjust and may evoke negative feelings towards religious beliefs among viewers.

#### Language and Tone:

- The language used presents religious beliefs in a questioning and critical tone. Terms like "injustice" and "test" convey the message that religious beliefs are irrational.
- The voiceover text suggests to viewers that the justice of religious beliefs should be questioned.

#### Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The visuals in the video, depicting the death of a child and their ascension to heaven, can evoke strong emotional reactions. Such visuals can evoke strong emotional responses toward religious beliefs among viewers.
- The depiction of the child ascending to heaven with angel wings visually supports the questioning of the justice of religious beliefs.

**Evaluation:** The video, by presenting content that questions and criticizes religious beliefs, can evoke negative feelings towards religious beliefs among viewers. Such content can give the impression that religious beliefs are irrational or unjust and may evoke negative feelings towards religious beliefs among viewers. Therefore, such content should be critically examined and addressed to promote a more respectful and nuanced understanding of religious and cultural beliefs.

### Content 5 Main Elements:

**Text and Visuals:** The video compares desert and green nature landscapes with the phrases "Lands Honored with Islam" and "Godless Lands." The top visual, labeled "Lands Honored with Islam," shows a desert landscape. The bottom visual, labeled "Godless Lands," shows a green and fertile natural landscape.

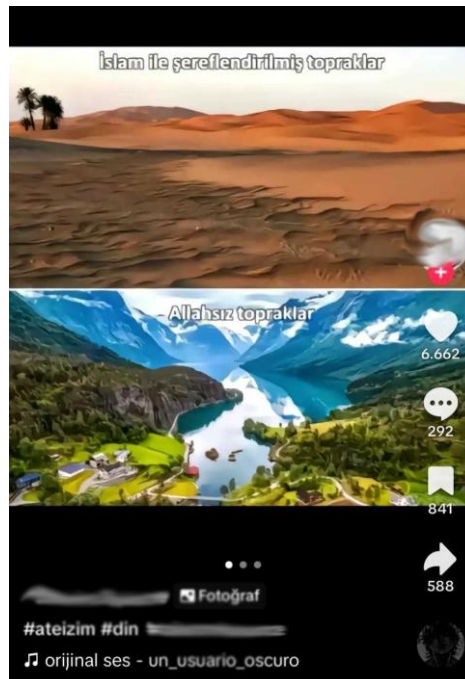


Figure 5. TikTok Screenshot (Tiktok, 2024e)

### Analysis:

#### Representation of Religion:

- The video associates places where Islam is present with deserts and aridity, while places without Islam are associated with greenery and fertility. This conveys the message that places with Islam are negative, while places without Islam are positive.
- The phrase "Lands Honored with Islam" creates the impression that places with Islam are in worse condition. This can present a negative perspective on Islam and create an Islamophobic narrative.

#### Language and Tone:

- The language used describes Islam negatively while describing places without Islam positively. This conveys the message to viewers that Islam has negative effects.
- Terms like "Honored" and "Godless" present the effects of religious beliefs in a questioning and critical tone.

#### Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The visuals in the video can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers. The desert landscape is associated with aridity and negativity, while the green natural landscape is associated with fertility and positive feelings.
- Such visual comparisons can evoke negative feelings toward Islam among viewers and reinforce an Islamophobic narrative.

**Evaluation:** The video can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Depicting places with Islam as negative and arid, while places without Islam are depicted as positive and fertile.
- Describing Islam negatively, thereby evoking negative feelings towards Islam among viewers.
- Using visual and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions towards Islam among viewers.

**Content 6 Main Elements:**

**Symbols and Signs:** The visual includes three different religious symbols (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and a pencil symbol. These symbols are represented by a star, a cross, and a crescent, respectively. The pencil symbol is placed next to the other three symbols, with a checkbox marked underneath it.

**Text and Hashtags:** The visual is accompanied by hashtags such as "#turkiye #bilimsel #fyp #ateizm #müslüman #din #deizm #agnostikateist #allah."

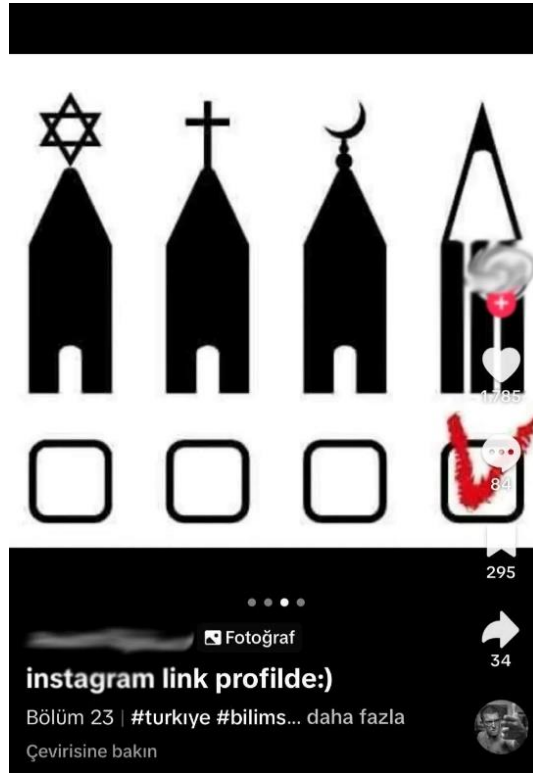


Figure 6. TikTok Screenshot (Tiktok, 2024f)

**Analysis:**

Representation of Religion:

- The visual includes symbols of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam alongside a pencil symbol. The checkbox under the pencil symbol is marked, while the checkboxes under the other symbols are left blank. This conveys the message that science and rationality (represented by the pencil) should be preferred over religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).
- Such representation can create the impression that religions are in conflict with science and rationality and are less valuable. This can present a particularly negative perspective on Islam and create an Islamophobic narrative.

Language and Tone:

- The hashtags used indicate that the content supports atheism and scientific thinking while criticizing religious beliefs. Hashtags like "#ateizm" and "#bilimsel" convey the message to viewers that religious beliefs conflict with scientific thinking.
- Such expressions convey the message to viewers that religious beliefs are irrational and that scientific thinking is superior, reinforcing an Islamophobic narrative.
- Visual and Emotional Impact:
  - The symbols and signs in the visual can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers. Preferring the pencil symbol over religious symbols can convey the message that religious beliefs are worthless.
  - The combined use of visuals and texts strongly conveys the message to viewers that religious beliefs conflict with science and rationality.

**Evaluation:** The visual can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Depicting religions as conflicting with science and rationality and as less valuable.
- Describing Islam and other religions in a belittling and derogatory manner.
- Using visual and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions toward religious beliefs among viewers.

**Content 7 Main Elements:**

Text: "I am about to part the sea. After the invention of the camera; no ant has spoken, no sea or planet has split in two, no staff has turned into a serpent, no tribe has been punished, no one has lived for 900 years, and no one has encountered flying horses."

Visual: A scene depicting a figure of Moses about to part the sea.





Figure 7. TikTok Screenshot (TikTok, 2024g)

### Analysis:

#### Representation of Religion:

- The text implies that religious miracles and events are not real and that such events do not occur in the modern age. This includes a discourse questioning the validity of religious beliefs and miracles.
- Such representation can create the impression that religious beliefs are irrational and unrealistic. This can present a particularly negative perspective on Islam and create an Islamophobic narrative.

#### Language and Tone:

- The language used presents religious miracles in a belittling and mocking tone. Phrases like "no ant has spoken," and "no sea or planet has split in two" convey the message that religious beliefs and miracles are not real.
- Such expressions convey the message to viewers that religious beliefs are irrational and conflict with modern science, reinforcing an Islamophobic narrative.

#### Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The visual includes a scene depicting a figure about to part the sea. Such visuals can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers and make religious beliefs a subject of mockery.
- The combined use of visuals and texts strongly conveys the message to viewers that religious beliefs and miracles are not real.

**Evaluation:** The visual can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Describing religious miracles and beliefs in a mocking and belittling manner.
- Describing Islam and other religions in a derogatory and belittling manner.
- Using visual and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions toward religious beliefs among viewers.

**Content 8 Main Elements:**

Text: "Prayers are useless. Because, like thousands of other gods, Allah was also invented by humans..."

Map: The map shows two regions:

- Green and fertile areas are labeled as "Countries without Allah."
- Desert and arid areas are labeled as "Countries praying to Allah for rain."



Figure 8. TikTok Screenshot (Tiktok, 2024h)

**Analysis:**

Representation of Religion:

- The text claims that prayers and belief in Allah are useless and that Allah was invented by humans. This conveys the message that religious beliefs are invalid and irrational.
- The map shows countries praying to Allah as arid and desert, while countries without Allah are shown as green and fertile. This creates the impression that religious beliefs have negative effects and that scientific thinking is superior.

Language and Tone:

- The language used presents religious beliefs in a belittling and critical tone. Phrases like "Prayers are useless" and "Allah was also invented by humans" convey the message that religious beliefs are invalid and irrational.
- Such expressions convey the message to viewers that religious beliefs are irrational and conflict with modern science, reinforcing an Islamophobic narrative.

**Visual and Emotional Impact:**

- The map shows countries praying to Allah as arid and desert, while countries without Allah are shown as green and fertile. Such visuals can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers and lead to a negative perception of religious beliefs.
- The combined use of visuals and texts strongly conveys the message to viewers that religious beliefs and prayers are useless.

**Evaluation:** The visual can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Depicting religious beliefs and prayers as invalid and irrational.
- Describing Islam and other religions in a derogatory and belittling manner.
- Using visual and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions toward religious beliefs among viewers.

**Content 9 Main Elements:**

**Text:** "Remember, religion is only for the poor. So they can be grateful and not make noise..."

**Visual:** Saudi Princess Ameera Al-Taweel and a person identified as an Arab billionaire.



**Figure 9.** TikTok Screenshot (TikTok, 2024i)

**Analysis:**

Representation of Religion:

- The text conveys the message that religion is only for the poor, so they can be grateful and remain silent. This can create the impression that religion is used as an oppressive and manipulative tool.
- The visual implies that wealthy and powerful individuals use religion to control the poor. This can lead to a negative representation of Islam and other religions.

Language and Tone:

- The language used presents religion in a belittling and critical tone. Phrases like "only for the poor" and "so they can be grateful and not make noise" convey the message that religion is used as a manipulative and oppressive tool.
- Such expressions convey the message to viewers that religion is something negative and oppressive, reinforcing an Islamophobic narrative.

Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The visual implies that wealthy and powerful individuals use religion to control the poor. This can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers and lead to a negative perception of religion.
- The combined use of visuals and texts strongly conveys the message to viewers that religion is an oppressive and manipulative tool.

**Evaluation:** The visual can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Depicting religion as an oppressive and manipulative tool used to control the poor.
- Describing Islam and other religions in a derogatory and belittling manner.
- Using visual and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions toward religious beliefs among viewers.

**Content 10 Main Elements:**

Text and Visuals:

- A visual labeled "Real World."
- A visual labeled "World as Described in the Quran," depicts a flat world with water spilling over the edges.
- The phrase "With just one picture."

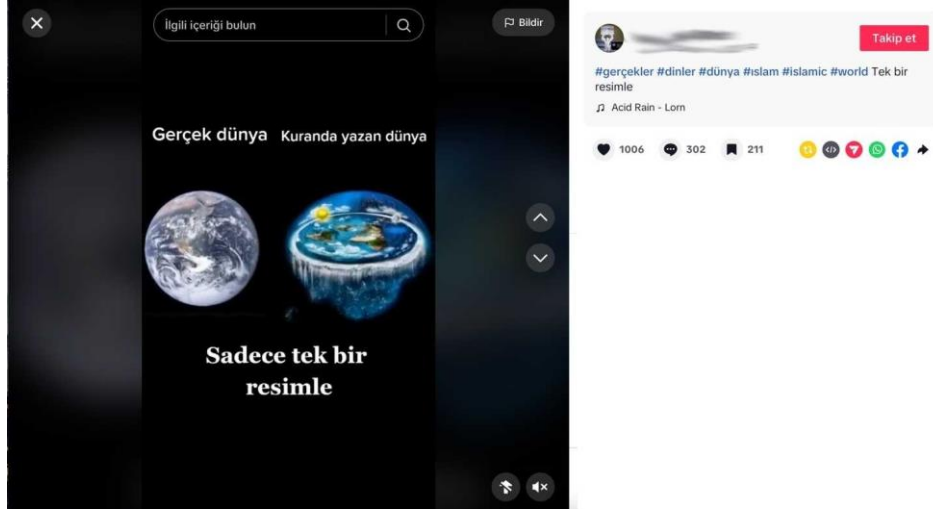


Figure 10. TikTok Screenshot (TikTok, 2024j)

### Analysis:

#### Representation of Religion:

- The visual implies that the Quran describes the world as flat. This conveys the message that Islam contradicts scientific facts.
- The phrases "Real World" and "World as Described in the Quran" create the impression that Islam is incompatible with scientific facts. This can present a negative perspective on Islam and create an Islamophobic narrative.

#### Language and Tone:

- The language used presents Islam in a belittling and critical tone. The phrase "With just one picture" mockingly conveys the message that Islam contradicts scientific facts.
- Such expressions convey the message to viewers that Islam is irrational and conflicts with modern science, reinforcing an Islamophobic narrative.

#### Visual and Emotional Impact:

- The visuals can evoke strong emotional reactions from viewers. The visual of a flat world labeled "World as Described in the Quran" strongly conveys the message that Islam contradicts scientific facts.
- The combined use of visuals and texts strongly conveys the message to viewers that Islam is irrational and conflicts with scientific facts.

**Evaluation:** The visual can be criticized for reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech in the following ways:

- Conveying the message that Islam contradicts scientific facts and is irrational.
- Describing Islam in a belittling and derogatory manner.
- Using visual and emotional elements to evoke strong negative reactions towards Islam among viewers.

## Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the spread of Islamophobic hate speech on the TikTok platform and its social effects in depth. The study adopted a qualitative approach to understanding the effects of social media on social dynamics and analyzed the linguistic and discursive structures and social effects of Islamophobic content on TikTok. The findings reveal the impact of social media, especially TikTok, on hate speech and Islamophobia.

**Spread of Islamophobic Content on TikTok:** Content analysis on TikTok revealed that Islamophobic discourses often increase after certain events or social debates. In the content identified through specific keywords, it was seen that users reinforced negative stereotypes against Muslims and that this content spread rapidly. For example, studies such as Awan (2014) and Ekman (2015) reveal how Islamophobic discourses are organised and spread on social media platforms. This demonstrates the impact of social media - especially TikTok - on hate speech and Islamophobia.

However, while these previous studies focussed more on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, more recent studies on TikTok show that the dynamics of the spread of hate speech are more rapid and far-reaching. For example, Weimann & Masri (2023) state that the viralisation of hate speech on TikTok is more effective than on other social media platforms, thanks to the ability of the platform's algorithms to quickly recommend content.

In addition, the study by Gata & Bayhaqy (2020) reveals that the spread of hate speech on new generation social media platforms such as TikTok occurs much faster after certain events. Especially after the Christchurch attack, it was stated that Islamophobic content increased rapidly on TikTok and these contents were shared intensively by users. This finding supports more recent studies that TikTok accelerates the spread of hate speech through user interactions.

In addition, Vidgen & Yasserli (2020) presented an analysis of how weak and strong Islamophobic hate speech can be detected on TikTok and emphasised that these discourses are prevalent among certain user groups. This study reveals that TikTok's content management policies cannot sufficiently prevent the spread of hate speech and that the faster spread of hate speech on the platform is related to users' community building practices as well as algorithms.

In sum, more recent studies on the dynamics of the spread of Islamophobic content on TikTok support previous research on how social media platforms increase hate speech, but reveal that the spread of hate speech is much faster and more effective due to TikTok's algorithmic structure. TikTok's special algorithms and user interactions contribute to the viralisation of hate speech on the platform, leading to serious negative social effects.

**Linguistic and Discursive Structures:** In the analyzed content, it has been observed that Muslims are generally defined in negative and derogatory terms, while other groups are represented positively. This stands out as a discourse strategy that leads to the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims. The language used in the content generally carries a polarizing and marginalizing tone. For example, negative adjectives attached to the word "Muslim" are an important factor affecting how these individuals are perceived in society. Such content leads to further discrimination and exclusion of Muslims in social life.

**Social Impacts:** Islamophobic content on TikTok has serious negative impacts on Muslim communities. Research has shown that such content causes psychological problems such as stress, anxiety and depression in individuals. It was also found that it can make it difficult for Muslims to integrate into social life and hinder their access to basic services such as education, employment and health. This leads to further discrimination and exclusion of Muslim individuals in public life. For

example, some studies show that Islamophobic discourses increase the risk of Muslim students being bullied at school.

**The Role of Algorithms:** TikTok's algorithms offer content recommendations based on users' viewing habits, causing videos containing hate speech to gain more visibility. This situation contributes to the normalization and spread of hate speech and causes users to become desensitized to such content. Algorithms may not be effective enough to prevent the spread of hate speech. Exposure to hate speech content has been found to desensitize users to such content.

**Countering Strategies:** Social media platforms need to develop more effective control mechanisms to combat hate speech. Raising awareness and educating users plays an important role in combating hate speech. In addition, strengthening legal regulations is critical to prevent the dissemination of hate speech. For example, legal regulations such as Germany's NetzDG law require social media platforms to quickly remove hate speech content. Such legislation can help social media platforms play a more responsible and effective role in combating hate speech.

Thanks to its large user base and ease of content creation, TikTok creates a platform for the spread of hate speech. The ability of users to create and share content allows Islamophobia and hate speech to spread rapidly. Islamophobic content spread on this platform reinforces negative stereotypes of Muslims and undermines social cohesion. TikTok's algorithms contribute to the normalization of such content by causing hate speech content to gain more visibility.

Islamophobic content on social media increases social polarization and creates mistrust and hostility between different ethnic and religious groups. Such content leads to the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims, undermining social cohesion and polarizing society. For example, some studies show that Islamophobic discourses increase polarization in society and undermine social cohesion. This leads to further discrimination and exclusion of Muslim individuals in social life.

Social media platforms such as TikTok are widely used among young users and this plays an important role in shaping their worldviews. The impact of Islamophobic content on young people can lead them to develop negative attitudes towards Muslims, which can manifest as discrimination in daily life. For example, Muslim students may be bullied at school or face discrimination in the workplace. This calls for educational institutions to develop more effective policies to regulate the use of social media and promote tolerance and respect among students.

In conclusion, TikTok and similar social media platforms play an important role in the spread of Islamophobia and hate speech. Thanks to the ability of users to create and share content, these platforms enable the rapid spread of hate speech. This leads to the marginalization, exclusion and violence against Muslim communities. Social media platforms need to develop more effective policies and regulations to prevent the spread of hate speech and misinformation. Furthermore, raising awareness and educating users is critical in combating hate speech.

This study emphasizes the need for further research and policy development to understand and deal with the social impacts of social media. Social media platforms need to adopt a more responsible approach to maintain social peace and harmony, and users need to use these platforms responsibly. In this way, the social role of social media can be shaped more positively and constructively.

Future research should also examine different social media platforms to provide a broader perspective on hate speech and Islamophobia on social media platforms. Furthermore, long-term studies are recommended to better understand the social impact of such content. In this context, quantitative as well as qualitative research should be conducted to understand the experiences and perceptions of social media users. Such studies can help social media platforms develop more effective strategies to combat hate speech.

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## İslamofobi Ekseninde Sosyal Medyada Nefret Söylemi: TikTok Örneği

Mustafa BÖYÜK\*

### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

Sosyal medya platformları, yirminci yüzyılın sonlarından itibaren bireylerin günlük yaşamlarının ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmiş ve toplumsal etkileşimlerin doğasını köklü bir şekilde değiştirmiştir. Bu platformlar, bilgiye hızlı erişim, geniş kitlelere ulaşma ve çeşitli konularda görüşlerini ifade etme imkanı sunmaktadır. Ancak, bu özgürlük ve erişim kolaylığı, nefret söylemi ve ayrımcılık gibi olumsuz içeriklerin de hızla yayılmasına neden olmaktadır. İslamofobi, sosyal medyada sıkça karşılaşılan ve ciddi toplumsal sonuçlara yol açabilen bir ayrımcılık türüdür. TikTok, kısa video formatında içeriklerin paylaşıldığı ve hızla geniş kitlelere ulaştığı bir platform olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, TikTok üzerinde yapılan İslamofobik nefret söylemi içeren paylaşımlar, belirli anahtar kelimeler aracılığıyla tespit edilerek basit rastgele örnekleme tekniğiyle incelenmiştir.

#### Araştırmanın Amacı ve Önemi

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, TikTok üzerinde İslamofobik nefret söylemi içeren paylaşımları tespit etmek ve bu içeriklerin dilsel ve görsel analizlerini yaparak, nefret söyleminin nasıl yapılandırıldığını ve hangi temalar etrafında şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktır. İslamofobi, Müslümanlara karşı duyulan korku, nefret veya ayrımcılığı ifade eden bir terimdir ve bu tür içeriklerin sosyal medya platformlarında yayılması, toplumsal uyumu zedelemekte ve Müslümanların marjinalleşmesine yol açmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, TikTok gibi platformlarda yayılan İslamofobik içeriklerin analizi, toplumsal etkilerini anlamak ve bu tür içeriklerin yayılmasını önlemek için stratejiler geliştirmek açısından büyük bir önem taşımaktadır.

#### Sosyal Medyanın Toplumsal Rolü

Sosyal medya, yirminci yüzyılın başlarından itibaren iletişim ve etkileşim biçimlerini köklü bir şekilde dönüştürerek bireylerin, toplulukların ve kurumların birbirleriyle olan ilişkilerini yeniden şekillendirmiştir. Bu platformlar, kültürel, sosyal, politik ve ekonomik alanlarda derin ve geniş kapsamlı etkiler oluşturmuştur. Sosyal medya, bireylerin bilgiye hızlı erişimini sağlamakta, geniş kitlelere ulaşma imkanı sunmakta ve çeşitli konularda görüşlerini ifade etme fırsatı tanımaktadır.

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Ancak, sosyal medya platformları, farklı kültürlerden gelen bireyler arasında yanlış anlamalar ve önyargılar nedeniyle çatışmaların ortaya çıkmasına da neden olabilir. Sosyal medya, sivil katılım ve politik mobilizasyon için yeni alanlar açmıştır. Ancak, aynı platformlar, nefret söylemi ve yanıltıcı bilgilerin yayılmasına da olanak tanıyarak toplumsal kutuplaşmayı ve ayrımcılığı körükleyebilmektedir.

### **Sosyal Medyada İslamofobi ve Nefret Söylemi**

İslamofobi, İslam'a ve Müslümanlara karşı duyulan irrasyonel korku, nefret veya önyargı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Nefret söylemi ise belirli bir gruba karşı düşmanlık, aşağılama veya ayrımcılık içeren ifadeler olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Sosyal medya platformları, kullanıcıların içerik oluşturma ve paylaşma yetenekleri sayesinde, İslamofobi ve nefret söyleminin yayılmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu platformlar, nefret söyleminin hızla yayılmasına ve geniş kitlelere ulaşmasına olanak tanımaktadır. İslamofobi, sosyal medyada sıkça karşılaşılan ve ciddi toplumsal sonuçlara yol açabilen bir ayrımcılık türüdür. TikTok, kısa video formatında içeriklerin paylaşıldığı ve hızla geniş kitlelere ulaştığı bir platform olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, TikTok üzerinde yapılan İslamofobik nefret söylemi içeren paylaşımlar, belirli anahtar kelimeler aracılığıyla tespit edilerek basit rastgele örnekleme tekniğiyle incelenmiştir.

### **Yöntem**

Bu çalışmada, TikTok platformunda yer alan İslamofobik nefret söylemlerinin tespiti ve analizi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırma, nitel bir araştırma deseni kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Eleştirel söylem analizi, bu çalışmanın temel yöntemidir. Bu yöntem, metinlerin ve konuşmaların toplumsal bağlamda nasıl anlam kazandığını ve bu anlamların toplumsal güç ilişkilerini nasıl yansıttığını incelemektedir. Veri toplama sürecinde, 2024 yılının ilk altı ayında TikTok platformunda İslamofobik nefret söylemi içeren paylaşımlar "İslam", "Müslüman", "Terörist", "Cihat", "Şeriat", "Radikal İslam" ve "İslamcı" anahtar kelimeleri aracılığıyla tespit edilmiştir. Basit rastgele örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak 10 içerik seçilmiştir. Seçilen içerikler, eleştirel söylem analizi (CDA) yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Bu yöntem, dilin toplumsal güç ilişkilerini nasıl yansıttığını ve yeniden ürettiğini anlamak için kullanılır. Eleştirel söylem analizi, dilin ideolojik ve toplumsal bağlamını inceleyerek, nefret söyleminin nasıl yapılandırıldığını ve yayıldığını ortaya koyar.

### **Bulgular**

Araştırma bulguları, TikTok'ta yayılan İslamofobik nefret söylemlerinin dilsel ve söylemsel yapılarının, bu içeriklerin toplumsal etkilerini ve yayılma biçimlerini anlamamıza yardımcı olmuştur. TikTok'ta tespit edilen İslamofobik içerikler, belirli temalar etrafında şekillenmektedir. Bu temalar arasında, Müslümanların terörizmle ilişkilendirilmesi, kültürel farklılıkların vurgulanması ve Müslümanların toplumda bir tehdit olarak gösterilmesi yer almaktadır. Bu içerikler, izleyiciler üzerinde olumsuz bir etki yaratarak, Müslümanlara karşı duyulan önyargıları pekiştirmektedir. İslamofobik içerikler, Müslümanlara yönelik olumsuz stereotipleri pekiştirmekte ve toplumsal uyumu zedelemektedir. TikTok'ta yayılan İslamofobik nefret söylemi, belirli bir dil ve görsel estetik ile yapılandırılmaktadır. İçeriklerde kullanılan dil, genellikle saldırgan ve küçümseyici bir üslup taşımaktadır. Bu dil, izleyiciler üzerinde güçlü bir etki yaratarak, Müslümanlara karşı olumsuz bir algı oluşturmakta ve bu algının pekişmesine neden olmaktadır. Görsel unsurlar ise, içeriklerin etkisini artırmakta ve izleyicilerin dikkatini çekmektedir. Örneğin, bazı içeriklerde Müslümanların

sembollerinin (örneğin, başörtüsü) olumsuz bir şekilde temsil edilmesi, bu gruba karşı duyulan nefretin pekişmesine yol açmaktadır. Bu tür içerikler, Müslümanların marjinalleşmesine, dışlanmasına ve şiddete maruz kalmasına yol açmaktadır. Ayrıca, İslamofobi ve nefret söylemi, toplumsal kutuplaşmayı artırmakta ve toplumda güvensizlik ve düşmanlık oluşturmaktadır. TikTok'ta yayılan İslamofobik nefret söylemleri, genellikle Müslümanların terörizmle ilişkilendirilmesi, kültürel ve dini pratiklerinin aşağılanması ve Müslüman kadınların başörtüsü gibi dini sembollerinin hedef alınması şeklinde ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu tür içerikler, Müslümanların toplumda marjinalleşmesine ve dışlanmasına yol açmakta, toplumsal uyumu zedelemekte ve güvensizlik ortamı yaratmaktadır.

## Sonuç

İslamofobi, son yıllarda dünya genelinde artan bir sorun haline gelmiştir. Müslümanlara yönelik olumsuz stereotipler, medya ve sosyal medya aracılığıyla yayılmakta ve bu durum, toplumsal kutuplaşmayı artırmaktadır. Nefret söylemi, belirli bir grup veya bireye karşı düşmanlık, nefret veya ayrımcılık içeren ifadeleri kapsar. Bu tür söylemler, sosyal medya platformlarında hızla yayılabilmekte ve geniş kitlelere ulaşabilmektedir. TikTok gibi platformlar, kullanıcıların içerik üretme ve paylaşma özgürlüğüne sahip olduğu yerlerdir, ancak bu özgürlük, nefret söylemi ve ayrımcılık gibi olumsuz içeriklerin yayılmasına da olanak tanımaktadır.

Sosyal medyada İslamofobi ve nefret söylemiyle mücadele etmek için platformların daha etkili denetim mekanizmaları geliştirmesi, kullanıcıların bilinçlendirilmesi ve hukuki düzenlemelerin güçlendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Sosyal medya platformları, nefret söylemiyle mücadele etmek için çeşitli denetim mekanizmaları geliştirmiştir, ancak bu çabalar genellikle yetersiz kalmaktadır. Kullanıcıların bilinçlendirilmesi ve eğitilmesi, nefret söylemiyle mücadelede önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Ayrıca, hukuki düzenlemelerin güçlendirilmesi, nefret söylemi içeren içeriklerin yayılmasını engellemek için kritik öneme sahiptir. Sosyal medya platformları, kullanıcıların güvenliğini sağlamak ve toplumsal uyumu korumak için daha etkin politikalar ve düzenlemeler geliştirmeli; kullanıcılar ise bu platformları sorumlu bir şekilde kullanmalıdır.

Sonuç olarak, sosyal medyanın toplumsal rolü çok yönlü ve karmaşıktır. Bu platformlar, küresel iletişim ve etkileşim için benzersiz fırsatlar sunarken, aynı zamanda yeni tür zorluklar ve sorumluluklar da getirmektedir. Sosyal medyanın toplum üzerindeki etkilerini anlamak ve yönetmek sürekli bir dikkat ve düzenleme gerektirir. Bu platformların sağladığı fırsatları maksimize etmek ve potansiyel riskleri minimize etmek, toplumun tüm kesimleri için önemli bir görevdir. Sosyal medya platformları, kullanıcıların güvenliğini sağlamak ve toplumsal uyumu korumak için daha etkin politikalar ve düzenlemeler geliştirmeli; kullanıcılar ise bu platformları sorumlu bir şekilde kullanmalıdır. Sosyal medya, bireylerin bilgiye hızlı erişimini sağlamakta, geniş kitlelere ulaşma imkanı sunmakta ve çeşitli konularda görüşlerini ifade etme fırsatı tanımaktadır. Ancak, sosyal medya platformları, farklı kültürlerden gelen bireyler arasında yanlış anlamalar ve önyargılar nedeniyle çatışmaların ortaya çıkmasına da neden olabilir. Sosyal medya, sivil katılım ve politik mobilizasyon için yeni alanlar açmıştır. Ancak, aynı platformlar, nefret söylemi ve yanıltıcı bilgilerin yayılmasına da olanak tanıyarak toplumsal kutuplaşmayı ve ayrımcılığı körükleyebilmektedir.

**Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Arařtırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütölmüřtür.

*The research was conducted by a single author.*

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**Çıkar Çatıřması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

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## Self-Orientalist Islamophobic Discourse: “Vikipedi Türkiye” Case

Orhan DUMAN\*  
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### Öz

The concepts of Islamophobia and self-orientalism have gained prominence in recent years, both in societal events and academic debates. This study aims to explore how the construction of Islam is carried out in articles produced with the key terms "the fundamentals of faith" and "obligations of Islam" on Vikipedi Türkiye, and to examine the relationship between this construction and the self-orientalist Islamophobic discourse. The relevant texts were obtained through the Maxqda program and analyzed using content analysis methodology. As a result of the analysis, it was found that content about the fundamentals of faith and Islamic obligations on Wikipedia was produced in a way that could manipulate users, with references often directed not to the primary sources of Islam but to individuals highlighted in popular discourses in Turkey and worldwide. Moreover, articles were deliberately presented in a manner that could lead to negative attitudes, especially about specific topics (such as jihad, marriage, sects, etc.) among platform users. The study suggests that such platforms, which inform the public, may serve the phenomenon of local Islamophobia or self-orientalism. It also emphasizes the need for these platforms to be supported with accurate content and for followers to approach the information on these platforms with greater skepticism, directing them to authentic sources.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Self-Islamophobia, Vikipedi Türkiye, Presidency of Religious Affairs

## Self-Oryantalist İslamofobik Söylem: “Vikipedi Türkiye” Örneği

### Abstract

İslamofobi veya self-oryantalizm kavramı son yıllarda gerek toplumsal vakalar gerekse akademik düzlemdeki tartışmalarla öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Vikipedi’de İslam’ın temelini ifade eden iman esasları ve farzları ile İslam anahtar kelimesiyle üretilen makalelerde, İslam dinine yönelik insanın nasıl gerçekleştirildiğini ve bunun self oryantalist İslamofobik söylemle ilişkisini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. İlgili metinler, Maxqda programıyla elde edilmiş, veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Yapılan analizler sonucunda; Vikipedi’de iman esasları ve İslami farzlar hakkında kullanıcıları manipüle edecek biçimde içeriklerin üretildiği, bu içeriklerde genellikle İslam’ın ana kaynaklarına değil Türkiye’de veya dünyada popüler söylemlerle öne çıkan kişilere atıflar verildiği ve platform kullanıcılarına yönelik olarak özellikle belli konular hakkında (cihat, evlilik, mezhep vb) olumsuz tutumlara yol açacak şekilde bilinçli bir biçimde makalelerin sunulduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışmada, bu tür kamuoyunu bilgilendiren platformların yerel İslamofobi olgusuna hizmet edeceği fikri öne sürülmekle birlikte söz konusu platformun doğru içeriklerle desteklenmesi ve takip edicilerin bu tür platformlardaki bilgilere daha şüpheli yaklaşması ve sahit kaynaklara yönelmesi gerekliliği de vurgulanmıştır.

**Keywords:** Yerel İslamofobi, Vikipedi Türkiye, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı

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## Introduction

In recent years, the term “Islamophobia” and the actions associated with it have frequently come to the fore in the international arena. Islamophobia essentially refers to hate speech and hostility towards Muslims by non-Muslims. However, this concept has broadened in scope over time. It now encompasses not only the phobic words and actions of non-Muslims towards Muslims but also religious hate speech within Muslim communities themselves, involving some institutions and individuals. Traditional media, as well as social media platforms, play a significant role in the spread of such hate speech.

Wikipedia plays an important role in the disinformation ecosystem. The deliberate distortion of information in Wikipedia articles or the definition of information without using correct references creates disinformation-like situations on Wikipedia. Disinformation is information that misleads individuals and society with the potential to create false beliefs. Wikipedia has become a platform where disinformation is attempted to spread and effectively combated with artificial intelligence tools. While Wikipedia suffers more from social attacks, the rise of deepfakes and clickfarms poses new challenges to editors combating disinformation. In addition, Wikipedia site monitoring efforts have generally focused on detecting malicious behavior by individual users and have not been shown to have sufficient tools to investigate coordinated attacks involving multiple users. The categories used by Facebook's fact-checking agencies to label content reliability include False, True, Mixed, Incorrect Title, Inappropriate, Ridiculousness, Opinion, and Joke Generator. The same classifications are also suggested to be used as a kind of moderation tool for Wikipedia (Saez-Trumper, 2019).

Wikipedia's online presence facilitates access to information, making various types of information available to students and improving information literacy. This opens up the possibility or desire for minority and underrepresented groups to participate in Wikipedia articles. This awareness can lead to higher participation rates in the encyclopedia's work, a positive development for both Wikipedia and the information professions (Luyt, 2015).

On Wikipedia, the history of article authors with other articles, the citations to the article, and the frequency of visits to the article are critical in determining the accuracy or falsity of articles. While Wikipedia can act effectively against fake articles and misinformation, it has been observed that some articles on Wikipedia were later detected as fake, remained published for a long time, and even received many citations. The important issue here is whether the editors of Wikipedia consciously allow the falsehoods hidden in the articles (Kumar etc., 2016). It is important to know to what extent Wikipedia allows fake content and titles or whether it voluntarily turns a blind eye to the misleading content and titles of some titles.

This study aims to reveal the construction process carried out on Islamic principles in articles on Islam on Wikipedia, the structure of the language used here, and how Islamophobic expressions are included in light of the facts revealed from the literature review. The study is important in terms of helping us understand what kind of information is provided about Islamophobic views in the content produced on Wikipedia and in what language and style this information is conveyed (Hopkins, 2008). This study aims to reveal the existence of Islamophobic discourses on Wikipedia, a social media platform, and how it is presented to readers. In the research, the content related to the principles of Islam in Wikipedia Turkey was examined in the context of self-orientalism



discourse. The data of the research was obtained on 10.04.2024. The content related to the six articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam in Wikipedia was analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

### 1. The Concept and Practice of Islamophobia

It is an indisputable fact that with the dissolution of the USSR in the 21st century, Western society wanted to marginalize Islam and Muslim identity and reconstruct it as an enemy. With the waves of immigration that emerged, Westerners began to live with the Muslim immigrants and the religion of Islam, which they had marginalized. This situation, perceived as a threat to Western culture and identity and explained with orientalism, also harms the superior civilization claim that the West attributes to itself regarding religion, ideology, culture and civilization (Karakoyunlu & Yardım, 2023). In this case, it is clear that the structure that Westerners hold most responsible for is Muslims and the Islamic values and representative stance of Islam that they see through them.

Islamophobia, which emerged as a reaction to this stance, has spread over time through media, politics and social communication tools, creating prejudices, discrimination and negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims (Hopkins, 2008). Although Islamophobia emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century, it was a concept that became popular only after September 11 and reflects the deep fear of Islam and Muslims (Türkmen & Özçınar, 2020). The modernist perspective and the Westerners' attempt to justify their superiority over others and their efforts to maintain their dominance over the rest of the world is not surprising when evaluated from the Westerners' white and supremacist perspective (Karaoğlu, 2022). Over time, this perspective has ceased to be an internal process of Westerners alone, and its reflections have evolved into individual and social behavior through various media tools.

Media reflections of this perspective are reflected in various media. Hollywood cinema after September 11 has played an important role in reproducing Islamophobia. Hollywood films contain militaristic narratives and military propaganda, directing young people to the military and portraying Islam and Muslims as a threat. In these films, Americans are depicted as heroes, Muslims as violent and terrorists, and Islamophobic narratives are strengthened with sound and editing techniques (Türkmen & Özçınar, 2020). This perspective, which emerged in Western countries, has been seen to be a behavior that is frequently displayed and criticized in various media tools with a self-orientalist logic in a country like Turkey, where the vast majority is Muslim but which has also turned to the West on the path of modernization.

In Turkey, the orientalist language of traditional media has increased discrimination against Islam and Muslims. For example, it has been observed that Islamophobic language is maintained in the popular T.V. series "Kızılık Şerbeti" by criticizing and mocking Islamic symbols and religious practices with negative language (Arslan & Temel, 2023). In a study conducted by Bani Younes and colleagues (2020), the concepts of Islam and terrorism in news programs broadcast in the Western mass media were examined through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (S.F.L.) theory. The study identified significant differences in terms related to Islam in selected media outlets. The most frequently used terms were "Islamist" and "Jihadist," and it was determined that these terms were generally used in negative contexts. The term "Islamist" was associated with extremism, terrorism, violence and militancy in the selected media outlets. Halliday's S.F.L. theory assumes that

communication involves choices and that the text cannot be separated from the context. That language consists not only of words and sentences, but also of interactive discourse.

## 2. The Relationship Between Social Media and Islamophobia

While the situation has developed in traditional media channels, the concepts of Islamophobia and self-orientalism have become an important part of both academic and social discussions on social media in recent years, and how the content on social media platforms is shaped has become an important research topic. Self-Islamophobia, also considered self-orientalism, spreads through content shared on social media platforms as well as traditional media (Türkmen & Özçınar, 2020). Islamophobic discourses, which are frequently encountered in traditional media, are also spread individually in the online environment and are seen in the form of derogatory and insulting posts towards Islam and Muslims on social media platforms such as Twitter. These Islamophobic contents are generally based on current political polemics and marginalize Islamic concepts and Muslims by containing hate speech under the guise of humor (Tam, 2021). Hate speech and online hate on social media, especially on platforms like Twitter, are contributing to the rise of online anti-Muslim hatred, prejudice, discrimination and threats (Awan, 2014). With the transformation of the Internet into a universal form of communication, hate speech, which had already gained legitimacy, has spread faster and more powerfully (Karaoğlu, 2022). The adoption and increased use of social media by people of all ages, education levels and cultures contributes to the spread of hate speech without being noticed and even without any intention.

Internet memes, known as caps in Turkey or the English term 'meme,' are among the most popular online humor tools. Islamophobia is spread online, especially by far-right actors, through internet memes, and these memes include themes of violence, sexism, stereotyping and dehumanization. These memes associate Muslims with terrorism and portray them with negative stereotypes while rejecting their human characteristics and portraying them as non-human beings (Eskicioğlu, 2022). A study conducted in the U.K. revealed that Islamophobia is widely used on Facebook to incite religious and racial hatred, and Muslims are stereotyped online and encouraged to engage in physical violence. Ignoring online hate messages increases the risk of creating an intolerant society, and these groups use their online support to create offline extremist counter-discourse (Awan, 2016). Therefore, the fact that the same turban and beard are worn for different purposes in different cultures, such as Hindus, has its share of this extremism and hatred. In this context, it is an important fact that after the events of September 11, many Hindus in the U.S.A. were beaten up because they were assumed to be Muslims.

As a social media tool, Wikipedia is one of the largest collaborative online encyclopedias. Wikipedia aims to create a comprehensive, free, and reliable encyclopedia, and its participants contribute to expanding human knowledge. Wikipedia writers and editors work easily and freely, enjoying collaboration in an almost utopian society where achievement, collectivism, benevolence, fame, community, reciprocity, altruism, and autonomy are promoted (Kuznetsov, 2006). Wikipedia offers an alternative solution to the epistemic inequality problem of the contemporary digital world. Unlike other social media platforms, Wikipedia offers more information production and consumption opportunities and contributes to achieving epistemic equality (McDowell & Vetter, 2022). Although the editorial community comprises more than 32 million registered in the English

Wikipedia alone, only a small minority, specifically 127,000 editors, are active editors. Although Wikipedia has several editing guidelines and policies to protect the reliability and quality of the information provided due to the diverse demographic characteristics and interests of editors (Hube & Fetahu, 2018), increasing evidence that trust can be both important and difficult to establish in digital environments also raises doubts on this platform (Rowley & Johnson, 2013). Unlike other social media platforms, Wikipedia is an antique-looking website that is largely moderated by anonymous volunteers, thus combating fake news and misinformation and ensuring the reliability of Wikipedia against fake information through this system (McDowell & Vetter, 2022). Although Wikipedia has certain limitations in terms of accuracy and scope, it is stated that it can be a useful resource for some researchers to meet their needs for quick initial analyses or temporary data (Brown, 2011). However, the lack of argumentation in Wikipedia discussion pages can complicate the writing process by causing unnecessary discussions, and the misrepresentation of opinions can positively or negatively affect decisions about what to include and what not to include in the encyclopedia (Luyt, 2015). This situation causes various problems within the platform.

The different results that emerge when searching for information on Wikipedia cause Wikipedia's reliability to be questioned. In this sense, Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia edited by the public. It is accessed by users for answers to many questions, from complex questions such as health information to high-risk topics. Even for high-risk information such as health, users are seen to conduct searches on Wikipedia (Menchen-Trevino & Hargittai, 2011). Wikipedia generally advocates that information about prescribed medications is accurate but emphasizes that healthcare consumers or providers should not use this information alone. It is known that Wikipedia articles do not contain false or inherently misleading information, but much information is missing (Kupferberg & Protus, 2011). Fitterling's (2014) study revealed that medical information on Wikipedia is inconsistent with physician assessments. Therefore, medical professionals should evaluate online information based on critical and evidence-based sources.

Even in politics, Wikipedia data is generally accurate but contains serious deficiencies. When evaluating Wikipedia's accuracy, it has been observed to have more accurate and deep information about prominent leaders, long-term politicians, and parties with large voter groups (Brown, 2011).

In education, more is needed to know how Wikipedia users understand and interpret the articles and materials they find on the site (Menchen-Trevino & Hargittai, 2011). The accuracy of Wikipedia is assessed based on the information it contains, which is provided by reliable sources. However, it is emphasized that more is needed as a sole source for students and that other reliable primary and secondary sources should be used for serious research. However, Wikipedia can be useful for researchers with limited resources for rapid preliminary analyses and fill temporary data gaps in conference papers (Brown, 2011). It is a fact that the information gaps in these articles should be filled by users' research or comments. However, a user who prefers to take the easy way out in any case will take the comments that suit him as information, which can be an important factor in the incorrect dissemination of information.

A lack of information about how Wikipedia content is created and the outcomes of the content creation process can make it difficult to provide accurate information, especially to uninformed visitors, educators, and technology designers. Wikipedia readers may not trust traditional concepts of source credibility and may have learned how to verify unreliable sources of information on Wikipedia (Menchen-Trevino & Hargittai, 2011). Rowley & Johnson (2013) showed in

their study that trust is critical for successful interactions in digital environments and that this trust is assessed by factors such as the author's expertise, relevance of references, and consistency of information. The study reveals that students tend to use these factors in their digital credibility assessments and that the information evaluation process is complex and adaptable. It has been shown that the sources used and the references attributed are important and play a fundamental role in verifying reliability, but participants have different views on the authority attributed to the referenced sources (Rowley & Johnson, 2013). Again, Messner & DiStaso's (2013) study found that Wikipedia article entries are longer and more positively/negatively framed, especially on certain topics (social responsibility, legal issues, ethical issues, etc.) than Encyclopedia Britannica online entries, and that this situation significantly affects the knowledge production processes and the perception of knowledge in society. In contrast to the neutrality of traditional encyclopedias, Wikipedia has been observed to make more specific and biased framing in the content produced through social media collaboration (Messner & DiStaso, 2013). Wikipedia faces problems such as content gaps and epistemological narrowness due to its homogeneous editorial demographics and difficulties in managing volunteer labor. This situation makes it difficult for new editors to adapt and causes users to experience difficulties regarding trust and participation. The fact that high-level users and expert editors have control over the content on Wikipedia provides a kind of gatekeeping but can also lead to biased information content (McDowell & Vetter, 2022). An encyclopedia like Wikipedia remains in a dilemma of encouraging free user input and constantly monitoring and confirming the accuracy of information produced or added by acting as a threshold guard. There is always a risk of conscious distortion of information, whether it is Wikipedia staff or user input.

In a study conducted on Wikipedia articles in different language versions, it was found that concepts related to major religions, religious figures (*Jesus et al., etc.*), anti-Semitism, and Israel (*Israel, Adolf Hitler, the Holocaust, God, etc.*) are highly controversial in many languages and cultures. English Wikipedia plays a unique role in frequently representing globally controversial themes, and it is seen that evaluations of these concepts are biased and controversial in many Wikipedia language versions, according to countries and languages (Yasseri et al., 2013). It is necessary to propose a solution to this problem by presenting the information that needs confirmation on Wikipedia as if it were real by the platform.

As a platform that offers its users the opportunity to produce content under the slogan "The Free Encyclopedia," Wikipedia also includes information about the religion of Islam and Muslims. Therefore, the reflections of Islamophobia on the Internet and the role of Wikipedia in this regard are important areas of study (Hopkins, 2008). In this context, hate speech created by Westerners in the context of Islamophobia is defined as expressions that encourage violence against different individuals and groups and spread rapidly in the online environment (Eskicioğlu, 2022). Online hate on social media, especially on platforms such as Twitter, causes an increase in online anti-Muslim hatred, prejudice, discrimination and threats (Awan, 2014). While regulations against hate speech need to be strengthened to combat this problem, freedom of expression should also be protected (Awan, 2014). Karaoğlu's 2022 study shows that the content shared with the hashtags #stopislamineurope and #stopislam used in online forums is consciously used as a frame that highlights Europeans and defines Islam in a lower hierarchical position.

### 3. Methodology

While there are studies on Wikipedia and Islamophobia in the international literature (Kozaric & Brekke, 2024; Larsson, 2007), there are studies on Islamophobic content on Twitter (Tam, 2021), Instagram (Karaoğlu, 2022) and social media platforms in general in the Turkish national literature (Ayhan & Çifçi, 2018; Ş. Arslan & Temel, 2023). This study aims to reveal the existence of Islamophobic discourses on Wikipedia, a social media platform, and how it is presented to readers.

In the research, the content related to the principles of Islam in Wikipedia Turkey was examined in the context of self-orientalism discourse. The data of the research was obtained on 10.04.2024. The content related to the six articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam in Wikipedia was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The main purpose of choosing these two titles was to reveal how the most basic Islamic principles were presented to users on Wikipedia Turkey. Here, when choosing Wikipedia, the questions "Who is the Prophet Muhammad? What is prayer, what is fasting, etc." were typed into the Google browser. It was seen that the majority of the first pages that came up were Wikipedia.

Based on these questions, the study was conducted by evaluating the first content, Wikipedia, in terms of how accurate the content is in terms of Islamic principles and whether the presented content includes any phobic situations. In this context, the contents on the page were obtained using the Maxqda program, a qualitative analysis program, and code, and their analyses were carried out using the same program. A series of stages were passed while coding the contents taken from the Wikipedia Turkey page in the Maxqda program. In determining the relevant codes, similar studies in the literature (Cingi, 2018; Temel, 2019; Tam, 2021; Ş. Arslan & Temel, 2023; Tonga, 2023) and suggestions for producing new codes suitable for the research problem were taken into consideration (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A code table was prepared for all the determined codes. Based on the prepared code table and the same data set, two authors carried out the coding process at different times, and the code reliability (*Cohen's Kappa*) was determined to be 98.7% (Graham et al., 2012). As a result of the coding, all codes obtained from the data set were classified under themes (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

#### 3.1. Research Questions

This study, which examines the construction of self-orientalism Islamophobic discourse on Wikipedia, attempts to answer the following research questions (R.Q.).

**RQ1:** Which words are used most in the content related to Islam and the principles of faith in Wikipedia Turkey?

**RQ2:** What kind of definition of Islam has been given on Wikipedia?

**RQ3:** What are the problematic issues attributed to Islam in Wikipedia?

**RQ4:** What criticisms of Islam stand out in the page content?

**RQ5:** What kind of manipulations have been made about Islam and its principles?

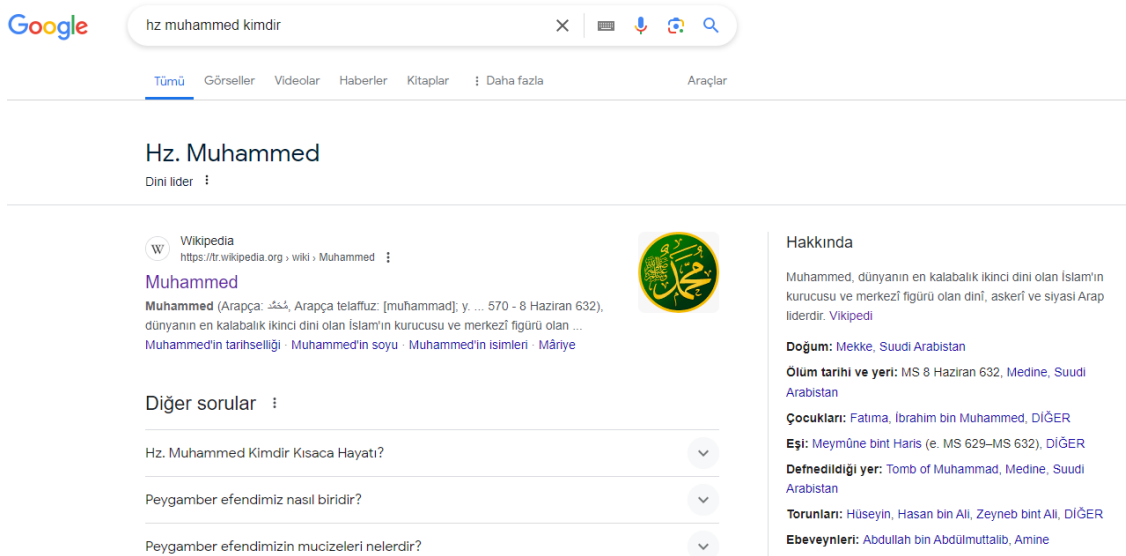
**RQ6:** What are the prominent issues in self-orientalism Islamophobic discourse, and which variables have produced them?

**RQ7:** Which names are cited in the written texts?

## 4. Findings

Wikipedia, which allows its users to produce content on almost every subject with the slogan "Free Encyclopedia," is among the first tools of today's cyber age for obtaining information. The content in the medium in question is produced with user contributions. Here, users are authorized to enrich, develop or change the content related to the scientific publications they cite. The main problem here is how scientific the scientific works cited are and the presentation of false and biased content as pseudo-scientific works.

As in almost every subject, Wikipedia contains content related to Islam and its identity. Considering the time and cost constraints in accessing all subjects, this study examined only the content on the main criteria of Islam and Faith. Before evaluating these contents, searches were conducted on many subjects about Islam and Faith in the Google browser, and it was discovered that users were directed directly to the Wikipedia page on these subjects. Moreover, it was seen that the detailed information provided on the right side of the page was also the content on Wikipedia, even without clicking on the content. Therefore, users are more likely to encounter content on Wikipedia, and many people learn about other subjects, such as the principles of Islam and faith, through this content. Some searches were made on the subject; their screenshots are below.



**Figure 1.** Pages that Appear When the Word Hz. Muhammad is Searched on Google (Google, 2024a)

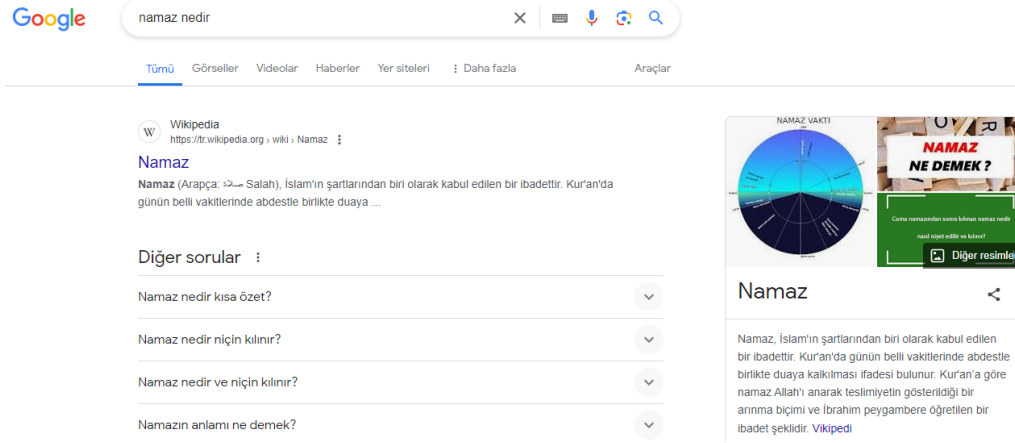


Figure 2. Pages that Appear When the Word Prayer is Searched on Google (Google, 2024b)

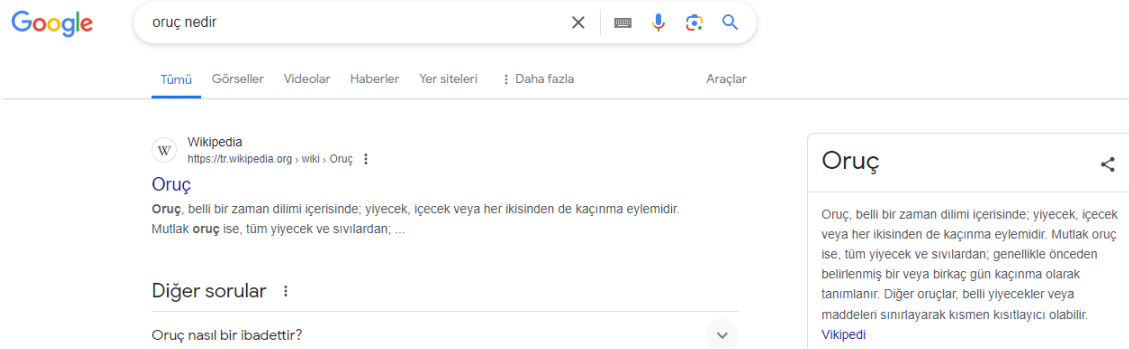


Figure 3. Pages that Appear When the Word Fasting is Searched on Google (Google, 2024c)

The first question of the research is "Which words are used most in content related to Islam and the principles of faith on Wikipedia Turkey?" In the word cloud created via MaxQda, it was determined that Muhammad is the most frequently used word in all related content (769). This word is followed by Islam (616), Quran (599), Allah (298), Muslim (188) and Prophet (160) in that order.

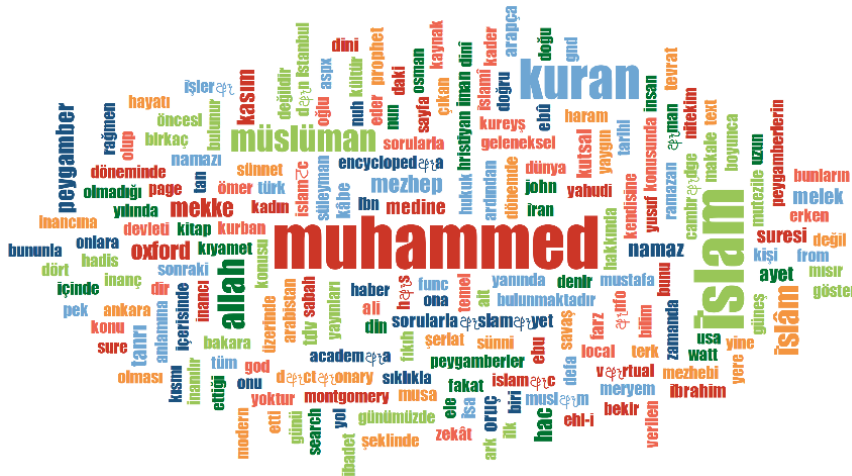


Figure 4. The Density of Words on Wikipedia About Islam

“What kind of definition has been made regarding Islam on Wikipedia?” is the second question of the study. Wikipedia has also made definitions here and there regarding Islam itself, the principles of faith and its obligations. In these definitions, the views that Islam itself and its principles are traditionalist (18) are frequently foregrounded. On the other hand, it has been observed that some principles are evaluated by making a historical narrative (5) and affirmation (4). In the contents of these three variables, it has been observed that Wikipedia tries to present this information by referring to some scientists (*Patricia Crone, Gottfried Leibniz, Muhammed Ahmed Halefullah, etc.*) more frequently.

In the contents written in the context of traditionalism, it is emphasized that Islam has a historical background and that it is a religion that emerged under the influence of some statesmen or cultures. The content states that Islam was a religion developed during the time of Alexander and founded on the laws of the Near East and that Muslims supposedly eliminated and systematized these laws in the name of Allah (*Patricia Crone claims that Sharia law was not founded on the traditions of Muhammad, but on the law of the Near East developed during the time of Alexander. According to her, Muslims eliminated and systematized this law in the name of Allah and stamped it with their own image. This state law, generally used by the Umayyad caliphate and especially by Muawiyah, became the practice we now call Sharia after a long period of adaptation by the ulema*). It is stated that not only religious principles but also the value attributed to women has a place in Islam together with the pre-Islamic cultural heritage (*In Islamic societies, the status of women has been determined not only by the rules of Islam but also by the social and political environment, ethnic structure and the cultural heritage from before Islam*).

In the storytelling about Islam and its principles, the view that the stories in the Quran are described as fairy tales has come to the fore (*The reality of the Quranic stories is also discussed in the Islamic world and theories are produced on this subject. In his thesis study (1950) at Al-Azhar University, Muhammad Ahmed Khalafullah did not hesitate to describe these stories as fairy tales*).

In the positive receptions made, mostly Hz. Muhammad (S.A.V. – Peace Be Upon Him) has been praised (*1. Although the historicity of other Hebrew prophets and even Jesus is debatable, Muhammad is accepted as a "historical figure" by many scientists and historians. 2. The philosopher of faith, Gottfried Leibniz, praised Muhammad for "not deviating from natural religion." In his work Vie de Mahomed, published after he died in 1730, French historian Henri de Boulainvilliers described Muhammad as "a gifted political leader and a just lawgiver" and presented him as a messenger who received revelations from God to astonish the disputing Eastern Christians, to liberate the East from the despotic rule of the Romans and Persians, and to spread the knowledge of the unity of God (tawhid) from India in the East to Spain in the West*). The importance that Islam gives to science has also been highlighted in Wikipedia as a positive definition (*The presence of verses in the Quran that are said to deal with scientific issues and often advise people to think and question, the presence of hadiths praising science - the most famous of which is the hadith "Go and seek knowledge even if it is in China" - and the idea that reason and religion are not in opposition to each other in Islam in general has led to an increase in scientific developments and discoveries in Islamic states that became rich and widespread after the conquests*).



The third question of the research was, "What are the problems attributed to Islam on Wikipedia?" It was observed that the most emphasized topic in various problems attributed to Islam was disagreements/doubts (51). This was followed by sects/schools (39).

Regarding the related disagreements/doubts about fate (*fate is one of the most debated topics among theologians. In addition to whether fate should be included in the definition of faith, issues such as the power of human will against fate, whether fate can be changed, and the responsibility of man against fate has caused long debates*), zakat (*there is a debate among Muslims whether zakat is a tax or a form of worship*) and jihad have come to the fore (*The principle is a matter of debate between jihadist fundamentalists and reformist Islamists. Mainstream Islamists argue that the duty belongs to governments and that anarchy will result if individuals attempt to fulfill this duty one by one. In jihadist fundamentalism, "commanding good and forbidding evil" is an obligation equivalent to fard kifayah. If the political authority does not take action to eliminate the issues that religion deems evil, this duty becomes the responsibility of every individual who has the power*).

The page also emphasizes the sectarian differences many times. Here, not only the sectarian differences that vary from country to country but also the divisions related to the Alevi-Sunni tradition in Turkey were emphasized (*In Islam, it is believed that believers have certain religious obligations regarding worshipping Allah. However, these obligations vary from sect to sect*).

The fourth question of the research was, "What criticisms of Islam are prominent in the page content?" Accordingly, It was determined that the criticisms made on Islam and its principles on Wikipedia included the categories of Sharia (13), non-modernity (11), women's rights (8) and unscientificity (4).

In the Sharia heading, which is the focus of the criticisms, the punishments given to criminals were discussed extensively. It is emphasized here that the punishments given lead to human rights violations (*While classical Sharia practices consider the abandonment of obligatory acts of worship as apostasy and impose severe punishments up to death for them, with the development of the concept of human rights, more secular or partial sharia practices in Islamic countries, where the punishment or reward of worships are evaluated as otherworldly, have come to the fore. Some classical sharia practices include serious violations of human rights*). In addition to punishments, it has been seen that the issue of hijab, the incompatibility of Sharia with the Western understanding of the law, and worship issues are conveyed to the readers from a negative perspective.

Under the theme of criticism, another category, non-modernity, is also discussed in the context of human rights (*the ethical consequences of practices based on the Quran are also problematic in today's approaches. For example, surgical intervention on the body of a minor without a medical justification (circumcision) has been questioned in this context*). On the other hand, content has been produced with the titles of concerns about enslaved people and concubines and religious wars (*Initiating and organizing religious wars and, as a result, using civilians who are considered as spoils of war as enslaved people and concubines openly for sexual acts - which was seen as the natural right of the masters - can be considered as war crimes, and if implemented systematically, as crimes against humanity*).

Recently, ideas about women's rights have been presented on Wikipedia and in various other media. It has been determined that such ideas generally contain negative judgments (*1. It is the attitude of those who perceive the Quran as a text that reflects the prejudices of the patriarchal Arab*

society and confines women to a second-class status; 2. In autocratic societies where the understanding of individual freedom and values has not developed, where the understanding that the Quran consists of the commands and prohibitions of Allah and the culture of Sharia and obedience are constantly engraved in the social memory, the hijab can turn into a new tool of violence and religious tyranny).

The last item under criticism was unscientificity. Here, the thesis is that the events in the stories of the prophets contradict science (1. Modern scientific consensus is that Moses is a legendary figure; 2. The story of the universal flood does not conform to today's scientific and geological data), that the narratives in the Qur'an do not have a miraculous aspect (Although Muslims believe that the content and narration of the Qur'an is a unique and inimitable literary miracle, there are also studies that point to a style, narrative style and grammatical errors in the Qur'an in addition to its content), and that the formation of the universe and the origins of human life contradict science is again brought to the agenda (The explanations and statements in the Qur'an regarding the creation of the universe and the world, the origins of human life, biology, natural sciences and similar issues are criticized by scientists for being self-contradictory, unscientific and contradictory to developing scientific theories. Apart from this, many scholars who are experts on ancient Arabic and Arabic culture criticize the Qur'an on the grounds that, although it claims to be a clear and understandable book, it does not contain these features and has parts that are constantly repetitive, meaningless and incomprehensible).

The fifth question of the study was designed as “What kind of manipulations have been made about Islam and its principles?” Some manipulations were also detected in the posts made about Islam and its principles. Under the manipulation theme, the variables of wrong association (15), use of negative concepts or adjectives (8) and taking out of context (8) were included.

In the erroneous association, ideas were included about the concept of jinn, which is one of the populist concepts (in jinn schools and mythological narratives, they interact with people), angels (Hadiths suggest that angels may get confused in their duties due to external conditions. For example, an angel does not enter a house with a dog in it) and the location of Mecca (According to Gibson, the words "Bekke" or "Mekke" mentioned in the Quran were also words expressing Petra. The first qibla should not have been the Masjid al-Aqsa but the cubic structure used as the Al-Lat temple in Petra. According to Dan Gibson's claim, this structure was destroyed by catapults during the Abdullah ibn Zubayr Revolt, which Muslims describe as the Second Fitna (680–692), and Ibn Zubayr took the black stone with other sacred objects from the Kaaba and carried it to the location of today's Mecca, away from the Umayyad attacks, and built the new temple there).

In the negative definition, the Muslim identity, Islamic life rituals and Sharia practices in Islamic countries are included on the page (Although Sufism or Sufism is not a sect, it has found a place in many different sects; it is a religious order or Islamic movement with ascetic, sometimes esoteric, monistic or pantheistic aspects).

The sixth question of the research is, "What are the prominent issues in self-orientalist Islamophobic discourse and in relation to which variables are these produced?" Three headings were identified in self-orientalist Islamophobic discourses that emerged in Wikipedia Turkey. The first of these is Arabism (16), the second is fear/anxiety (11), and the last is terrorism (8).

It has been emphasized that the religion of Islam is an Arab tradition rather than a religion or that it is identified with the Arabs (1. *Although the Quran abolished some polytheistic worship, it did not conflict with the deep-rooted Arab sanctities; on the contrary, it largely continued these rituals; 2. In determining the halal and haram foods, except for special cases, some jurists such as Shafi'i and Ibn Qudama limited the criteria of haram and halal to "conformity and contradiction to the nature of the Arab"*).

In the fear/anxiety category, The punishments in Islam are processed in a way that will cause fear or anxiety in the reader in the context of Sharia, as if they were applied everywhere and at all times (1. *These actions have material or spiritual equivalents in the understanding of Sharia. Abandoning actions considered fard, wajib, and sunnah, as well as committing actions considered makruh and haram, are punished (as hadd or tazir punishments). For example, beating, imprisoning and killing those who insist on not praying can be considered within this scope; 2. There is no punishment gradation according to the severity of the crime. In the Quran and hadith, except for the aggressor-victim in sexual crimes and the killing that can occur between two Muslims in murder-injury crimes (the Quran An-Nisa, 4:92), there is no distinction between intentional and unintentional as in other traditions. There is no legal basis (principle of legality) in many crimes classified as tazir, and there are no obligations such as proving the crime for the judges or giving the same punishment for the same crime among the punished people).*

It can easily be stated that the most severe phobic attitude towards the Muslim identity after the September 11 attacks was the terrorist label (Akkir & Özkir, 2022, p. 300). The study also showed that this phobic attitude was maintained on Wikipedia. In the content, the subtext has been tried to convey to the reader that the Muslim identity or Islam is related to terrorism (1. *Radical Islamists, whose roots are based on the Kharijites, are groups that aim to establish an Islamic state with extreme interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence and a society structure that complies with such Sharia and to impose this on other people and often resort to terrorist methods for this purpose. Radical Islamists accuse Muslims of sects other than their own of heresy, blasphemy and polytheism, and since they do not accept them as Muslims, they see them as part of jihad and see no harm in killing them; 2. Some recent tensions have led some fundamentalist Muslims to interpret jihad in a fundamentalist way and consider defending their beliefs through conflict as a religious duty).*

When we look at the subcategories that Islamophobic discourses are related to, it has been determined that terrorism, fear/anxiety and Arabism are more intensely associated with other variables, respectively. It has been found that Sharia, non-modernity and traditionalist understanding of religion are highlighted in the phenomenon of terrorism. In fear/anxiety, it was determined that the readers were trying to be scared of Islam by emphasizing Sharia, and the impression was given that non-modern practices were included in this religion. Finally, in the title of Arabism, the judgment that this religion was a religion of the Arabs in the Middle East was tried to be imposed on Turkish readers.

Figure 5. Self-Orientalist Islamophobic Discourse on Wikipedia

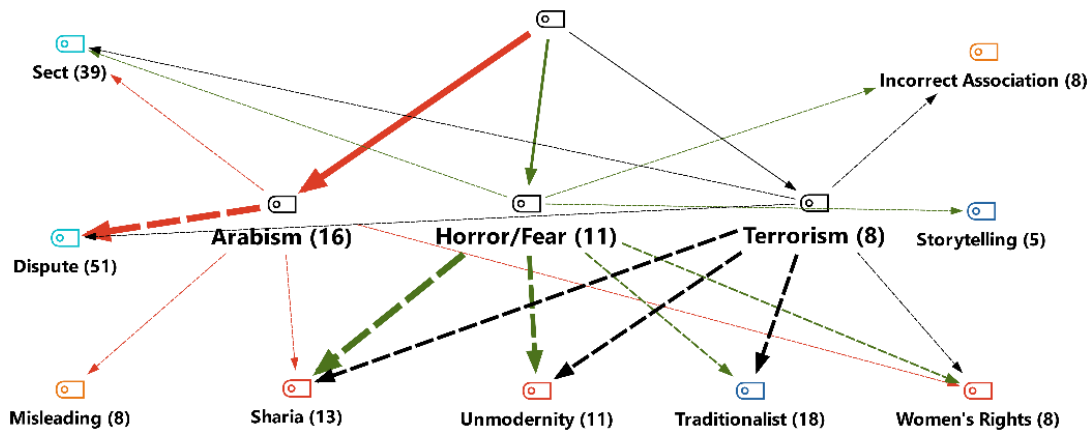
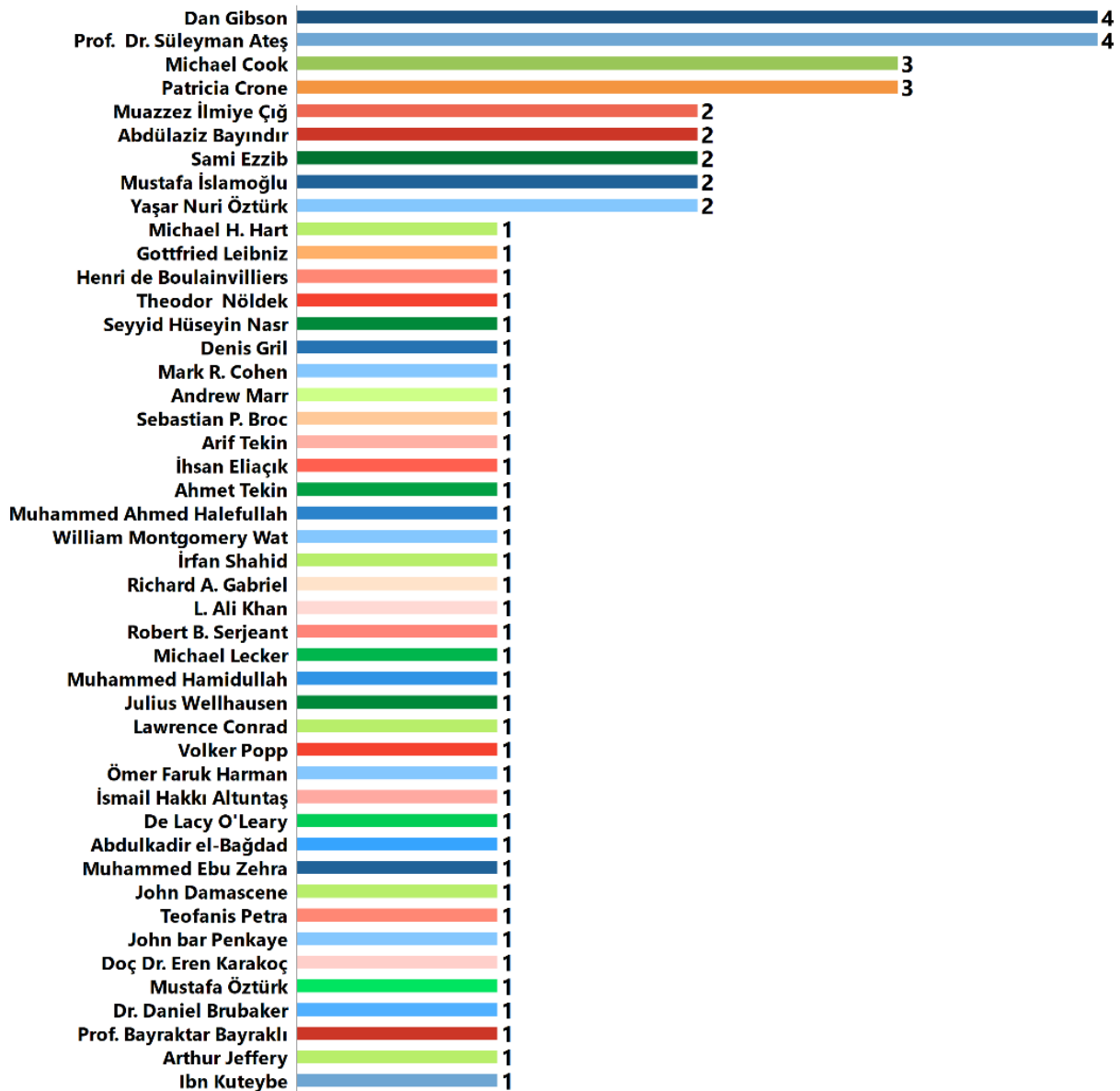


Figure 6. Quoted Names in Texts



The final question of the study was, "Which names are cited in the written texts?" In the published content, Dan Gibson and Süleyman Ateş were cited four times each, Michael Cook and Patricia Crone three times each, and Muazzez İlmiye Çığ, Abdulaziz Bayındır, Sami Ezzib and Mustafa İslamoğlu were cited twice each. The people cited once each are shown in Figure 6.

The most obvious thing that stands out in the citations is that people known for their orientalist personalities are frequently described as scientists, theologians, historians, philosophers or American scientists, famous German scientists and theologians, Iranian professors and presented in the texts. With such an approach, the persuasiveness of the texts was increased.

## Conclusion

This study covers Wikipedia, which can be accessed from almost anywhere in the world and serves its users with a wide range of content. The texts related to the main principles of Islam in Wikipedia Turkey were examined with content analysis in the context of Islamophobia.

The first observation regarding the study was that Wikipedia came up first when many subjects related to Islam were searched on Google. Therefore, it can be said that Wikipedia Turkey is one of the first stops for Turkish users to get information on Islamic subjects. Based on this, it also becomes necessary to question the existence of the contents presented in this medium.

In the study, it was seen that the word Muhammed was frequently used in Wikipedia's contents. Despite providing publication activity in an Islamic country, the first striking element here was the absence of the prefix Hz. and the final prefix S.A.V./A.S.M (PBUH- Peace Be Upon Him). Indeed, while the people named in the references in the texts were presented with certain titles, the personality of Hz. Muhammed (S.A.V.) was tried to be presented as an ordinary person. On the other hand, it has been observed that the word God is occasionally used instead of the word Allah to describe Allah.

The most obvious definition made about Islam on Wikipedia is the perception that it is a traditionalist religion. The content acts with a perception that the principles of Islam are the continuation of what pre-Islamic societies did. In addition to traditionalism, definitions have also been made that the stories in the Quran have a story-like or fairy-tale aspect. In these two definitions, the values of Islam are presented to the reader from a negative perspective. However, the texts also have positive content regarding the innovations brought by Hz. Muhammad (S.A.V.) as being beyond the era approaches and the importance given to knowledge. In presenting this perspective, an attempt is made to process the phenomenon of religion with the argument that it is actually a cultural tradition.

On the Wikipedia site, some problematic issues regarding the fundamental principles of faith and Islamic obligations have been referred to. Here, doubts and sects have been prioritized. The language of the medium here has a negative attitude, especially regarding Sharia, while at the same time, the conflict regarding belief in fate is mentioned. It has also been observed that a negative message is given in the content presented in the context of sects or schools. It can be stated that in the problematic issues attributed to Islam, there are predominantly negative discourses and neutral expressions.

The greatest criticisms made by users towards Islam are classified under four headings. These are Sharia, non-modernity, women's rights and non-scientificity. In the evaluations on the subject

of Sharia, almost most of the texts deal with some issues (punishment, violence, individual freedoms, etc.) in a negative context. Another negative attitude is about Islam being non-modern and unscientific. The prominent issues here are human rights, Sharia practices, the inability to prove the stories in the Quran in a scientific sense, and the inability to find scientific content about the formation of the universe and the world and the history of humanity. It has been observed that the Orientalist perspective is dominant in all these contents. Therefore, it can be said that the values or practices of Islam are evaluated with a Western eye and that the West and Western cultures are tried to be polished. Based on this, it can be stated that another factor underlying the Islamophobic phenomenon is derived from the comparison or conflict between the East and the West. Moreover, with the principle of scientificity, an attempt has been made to create a perception in the readers that Islamic principles are nonsense. Although the evidence on how the universe or humanity was formed is still at a theoretical level, these theories are presented to the reader in a sub-context as if they were laws that are completely proven scientifically. Therefore, it can be argued that one of the basic tools used in Islamophobic discourses is the principle of scientificity.

The main focus of the study, self-orientalism, has brought three elements to the forefront in the construction of Islamophobic discourse on Wikipedia. The first of these is Arabism, the second is fear/terror, and the last is terrorism. By prioritizing ethnic identity, a perception has been put forward that a Muslim person is an Arab and that Islam is a religion of Arabs living in the Middle East. In the phobic situation created, the statements that Islam is the continuation of Arab culture, that Islamic rules are presented in a way that is in line with the Arab traditions of that period, and that it was intentionally constructed for the Arab people by Prophet Muhammad (S.A.V.), who was also an Arab, have come to the fore. The content includes false and misleading guidance that Muslim Arabs are superior to other Muslim societies. Another issue in Islamophobic discourse is the presentation of content in an emotional context that includes fear/terror regarding Sharia and Sharia practices. Here, it is stated that the texts in the Quran domesticate its own subjects through intimidation. Under the title of terrorism, the argument has been put forward that Islam is a threat to the Western world in relation to the word jihad. Therefore, it can be said that the phobic situations are processed in a similar way to the above with the West-East dichotomy. In addition, another issue that stands out in Islamophobic discourse here has been tried to be given in the context of racism or ethnicity. In recent times, the targeting of Arab-origin citizens in our country, especially by some politicians, and the attacks made on people of this origin can be read in this context.

It has been determined that references to Islam and its principles on Wikipedia, which claims to be scientific, include scientists known for their orientalist identities. In addition, the views of people who have caused problems in Turkey with their rhetoric and statements about Islam have been tried to be given as if they were the main principles of Islam. In the content, there have been times when the authors have presented their claims, doubts or theories in the name of Islam to align with their consciously expressed mistakes. For example, while local sources and people of information put forward that a rooster could be sacrificed for the sacrifice event or that prayers were limited to three times, attempts were made to dictate the assumptions of sources and people of information abroad regarding the years and place where Prophet Muhammad lived or that there was no such person. In the citations, Islamic principles dictated the doubts about the religious

rulings by Muslim scientists or religious figures, while non-Muslim scientists were accused of being unscientific.

It is thought that Wikipedia content, which acts with the motto of "Free Encyclopedia," is presented here by real experts on the subject or ordinary users without going through filters within the framework of the main texts, causing the subject to contain such phobic elements. In this context, it can be said that it is important to ensure that the content is controllable. Taking only one side of the events or giving a certain part of the written texts by taking them out of context can mislead the reader and can also mediate the adoption of phobic attitudes. Here, it is emphasized that Wikipedia should provide clearer guidelines and give importance to educational initiatives and academic collaborations to create a more tolerant community and reduce the gatekeeping effect (McDowell & Vetter, 2022).

In the study, In addition to the controllability of Wikipedia content, it is recommended that the media literacy level of the readership is increased and that ordinary users on social media platforms share ideas that they consider scientific so that other users are skeptical of such content, that accurate and authentic sources and works of scientists be contributed to such social media platforms, and that the Islamic world conducts its internal accounting of the criticisms directed at it and the emergence of such phobic situations. Moreover, it is thought that conducting such academic studies on other social media platforms and various forum sites in the national and international arena will be useful in revealing the other pillars of the issue.

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## Self-Oryantalizm İslamofobik Söylem: Vikipedi Türkiye Örneği

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### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

Son yıllarda uluslararası alanda "İslamofobi" kavramı ve onunla ilişkilendirilen eylemler sıklıkla gündeme gelmektedir. İslamofobi, temel olarak gayrimüslimlerin Müslümanlara yönelik nefret söylemi ve düşmanlığını ifade etmektedir. Ancak zamanla bu kavramın kapsamı genişlemiştir. Artık bu kavram sadece gayrimüslimlerin Müslümanlara yönelik fobik söz ve eylemlerini değil, aynı zamanda Müslüman toplulukların kendi içlerinde de bazı kurum ve kişileri kapsayan dini nefret söylemlerini de kapsamaktadır.

Ortaya çıkan göç dalgalarıyla birlikte Batılılar, Müslüman göçmenlerle ve ötekileştirdikleri İslam diniyle birlikte yaşamaya başladılar. Batı kültürü ve kimliğine yönelik bir tehdit olarak algılanan ve oryantalizmle açıklanan bu durum, Batı'nın din, ideoloji, kültür ve medeniyet açısından kendisine atfettiği üstün medeniyet iddiasına da zarar vermektedir (Karakoyunlu & Yardım, 2023). Bu duruşa tepki olarak ortaya çıkan İslamofobi, zamanla medya, siyaset ve iletişim araçları aracılığıyla yayılarak İslam'a ve Müslümanlara karşı önyargı, ayrımcılık ve olumsuz tutumlara yol açmıştır (Hopkins, 2008). Batılı toplumlarda ortaya çıkan ve giderek yayılan İslamofobi ile günümüz Türkiye'sinde de karşılaşılmaktadır.

İslamofobi ve self-oryantalizm kavramları son yıllarda hem akademik hem de toplumsal tartışmaların önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Self-oryantalizm olarak da değerlendirilen yerel İslamofobi, geleneksel medyanın yanı sıra sosyal medya platformlarında paylaşılan içerikler aracılığıyla da yayılmaktadır (Türkmen & Özçınar, 2020). Geleneksel medyada sıklıkla karşılaşılan İslamofobik söylemler, sosyal medya platformlarında İslam'a ve Müslümanlara yönelik aşağılayıcı paylaşımlarla kendini göstermektedir. Bu İslamofobik içerikler, genel olarak güncel siyasi polemiklere dayanmakta ve mizah kisvesi altında nefret söylemi içererek, İslami kavramları ve Müslümanları ötekileştirmektedir (Tam, 2021).

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Vikipedi çevrimiçi bilgiye erişim sağlamada önemli bir işleve sahiptir. Burada mecra, çeşitli türdeki bilgileri kullanıcıların erişimine sunmaktadır. Ağın pozitif yönü, özellikle bilgi okuryazarlığını geliştirmesi, azınlıkların ve yeterince temsil edilmeyen grupların Vikipedi makalelerine katılma olasılığını veya arzusunu artırmasıdır (Luyt, 2015).

### Yöntem

Literatürde uluslararası alanda Vikipedi ve İslamofobi ile ilgili çalışmalara rastlanırken (Larsson, 2007; Kozaric & Brekke, 2024), yerel literatürde de Twitter (Tam, 2021), Instagram (Karaoğlu, 2022) ve sosyal medya platformlarının genelindeki İslamofobik içeriklerle ilgili çalışmalar bulunmaktadır (Ayhan & Çifçi, 2018; Arslan, 2019). Bu çalışmada, Vikipedi’de İslam’ın temelini ifade eden iman esasları ve farzları ile İslam anahtar kelimesiyle üretilen makalelerde, İslam dinine yönelik inşanın nasıl gerçekleştirildiğini ve bunun self oryantalist İslamofobik söylemle ilişkisini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır.

Araştırmada, Vikipedi Türkiye’deki İslam esaslarıyla ilgili içerikler self-oryantalizm söylem bağlamında incelenmiştir. Vikipedi’de yer alan imanın altı şartı ve İslam’ın beş farzına ilişkin içerikler nitel içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Bu iki başlığın seçilmesindeki temel amaç en temel İslami esasların Vikipedi Türkiye’de kullanıcılara nasıl sunulduğunu ortaya koymak olmuştur. Vikipedi’nin seçilmesindeki temel neden ise “Hz. Muhammed kimdir, namaz nedir, oruç nedir?” gibi soruların Google tarayıcısına yazılması sonucunda ilk başlarda çıkan sayfaların çoğunluğunun Vikipedi olmasıdır.

### Bulgular

Araştırmaya dair içerikler değerlendirilmeden önce İslam ve İman hakkındaki pek çok konuda Google tarayıcısında aramalar gerçekleştirilmiş ve bu konular hakkında kullanıcıların direkt olarak Vikipedi sayfasına yönlendirildiği keşfedilmiştir. Dahası içeriklere tıklanmadan dahi sayfanın sağ tarafından verilen detaylı bilgilerin de yine Vikipedi’deki içerikler olduğu görülmüştür. Dolayısıyla Vikipedi’de yer alan içeriklerle kullanıcıların karşılaşma olasılığının daha yüksek olduğu ve bu içerikler yoluyla pek çok kesimin İslam ve İman esasları gibi diğer konularda bilgi edindiği savı geliştirilebilir.

Maxqda üzerinden yapılan kelime bulutunda ilgili tüm içeriklerde en çok geçen kelimenin Muhammed (769) olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Bu kelimeyi İslam (616), Kur’an (599), Allah (298), Müslüman (188) ve Peygamber (160) sırasıyla takip etmiştir. Vikipedi’de İslam’ın kendisi, imani esaslar ve farzlara ilişkin yer yer tanımlamalar da yapılmıştır. Bu tanımlamalarda sıklıkla İslam’ın kendisi ve esaslarının gelenekselci (18) olduğuna dair görüşler ön planda tutulmuştur. Öte yandan burada tarihsel bir hikâyeleştirme yolunun (5) ve olumlama (4) yapılarak bazı esasların değerlendirildiği görülmüştür. Bu üç değişkene ait içeriklerde Vikipedi’nin özellikle bazı bilim adamlarını (*Patricia Crone, Gottfried Leibniz, Muhammed Ahmed Halefullah vb.*) daha sık referans alarak bu bilgileri sunmaya çalıştığı görülmüştür.

Platformda İslam’a dair atfedilen çeşitli sorunsallarda en çok üzerinde durulan konunun ihtilaf/şaiyeler (51) olduğu görülmüştür. Bu durumu mezhepler/ekoller (39) takip etmiştir. Öte yandan İslam ve esaslarına ilişkin yapılan eleştirilerde; şeriat (13), modern dışılık (11), kadın hakları (8) ve bilim dışılık (4) kategorileri öne çıkmıştır. İslam ve esasları hakkında yapılan paylaşımlarda birtakım manipülasyonlar da tespit edilmiştir. Manipülasyon teması altında hatalı ilişkilendirme (15), olumsuz kavram veya sıfatların kullanımı (8) ve bağlamdan koparma (8) değişkenleri yer almıştır.

İslamofobik söylemlerin ilişkili olduğu alt kategorilere bakıldığında burada terörizm, korku/endişe ve Arabizmin sırasıyla daha yoğun bir biçimde diğer değişkenlerle ilişkilendirildiği tespit edilmiştir. Terörizm olgusunda şeriat, modern dışılık ve gelenekselci din anlayışının öne çıkartıldığı bulgulanmıştır. Korku/endişede; yine şeriat vurgusuyla okuyucuların İslam'dan korkutulmaya çalışıldığı ve modern dışı uygulamaların bu dinde yer aldığı vurgusu göze çarpmıştır. Son olarak Arabizm başlığında ise bu dinin Ortadoğu'daki Arapların bir dini olduğu yargısı Türk okuyucularına sunulmuştur.

Yayınlanan içeriklerde; Dan Gibson ve Süleyman Ateş dörder, Michael Cook ve Patricia Crone üçer ve Muazzez İlmiye Çığ, Abdulaziz Bayındır, Sami Ezzib ve Mustafa İslamoğlu ikişer defa atıf verilen kişiler olmuştur. İslam ve esaslarına ilişkin atıflarda özellikle oryantalist kimlikleriyle bilinen bilim adamlarına yer verildiği saptanmıştır.

### Sonuç

Bilimsel olma iddiasıyla yola çıkan ve “Özgür Ansiklopedi” mottosuyla hareket eden Vikipedi'deki İslam ve esaslarına ilişkin atıflarda özellikle oryantalist kimlikleriyle bilinen bilim adamlarına yer verildiği tespit edilmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra Türkiye'de gerek söylemleriyle gerekse İslam'la ilgili verdiği demeçleriyle sansasyonel olmuş kişilerin görüşleri İslam'ın ana esaslarıymış gibi verilmeye çalışılmıştır. İçeriklerde yazarların iddiaları veya kuşkuları ya da tam anlamıyla teorileriyle uyumlu olması adına, bilinçli bir şekilde ifade ettikleri yanlışları İslam adına sundukları da olmuştur. Örneğin; kurban olayına ilişkin bir horozun kurban olabileceği ya da namaz kılmanın üç vakitle sınırlı olduğuna dair yerel şahıslar öne sürülürken, yurt dışındaki şahıslarında Hz. Muhammed'in yaşadığı yıllar ve yaşadığı yere ya da böyle bir şahsiyetin olmadığına dair varsayımlar öne çıkmıştır. Atıflarda İslami esaslar; Müslüman olan bilim veya din adamlarınca dinin ahkamlarına yönelik şüpheleri dikte ederken, Müslüman olmayan bilim adamlarının da bilim dışılık suçlamalarına maruz kalmıştır.

“Özgür Ansiklopedi” mottosuyla hareket eden Vikipedi içeriklerinin alan uzmanlarından ve temel metinlerden ziyade sıradan kullanıcıların ve toplama metinlerin sunumuna açık olmasının konuya ilişkin fobik karakterin şekillenmesine etki ettiği ifade edilebilir. Bu bağlamda içeriklerin denetlenebilirliğinin gerçekleştirilmesinin önem arz ettiği söylenebilir. Sadece olayların bir tarafının alınması ya da yazılı metinlerin belli bir kısmının bağlamından kopartılarak verilmesi de okuyucuyu yanlış yönlendirebildiği gibi fobik tutumların takınılmasına da aracılık edebilmektedir.

Çalışmada; Vikipedi içeriklerinin denetlenebilirliğinin yanı sıra, okuyucu kesimin medya okuryazarlık seviyesinin artırılması, sosyal medya platformlarında sıradan kullanıcıların kendilerince bilimsel olarak düşündükleri fikirleri burada paylaşmaları nedeniyle, diğer kullanıcıların bu tarz içeriklerde şüpheli davranması, doğru ve sahipsiz kaynaklar ve bilim adamlarının eserleriyle bu tarz sosyal medya platformlarına katkı sağlanması ve İslam dünyasının yöneltilecek eleştiriler ve bu tarz fobik durumların ortaya çıkmasındaki iç muhasebesinin yapılması önerilmektedir. Dahası bu tür akademik çalışmaların ulusal ve uluslararası alandaki diğer sosyal medya platformları ve çeşitli forum siteleri üzerinden yapılmasının yararlı olacağı düşünülmektedir.

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Yazarların alıřmadaki katkı oranları eřittir.  
Authors' contribution rates in the study are equal.

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# MEDİAD

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## Islamophobia Agenda in Islamist Magazines in Türkiye: A Content Analysis

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### Abstract

The presence and capabilities of religious groups in Turkey, particularly in terms of their propaganda power, is an undeniable reality. These groups have a well-established institutional infrastructure in magazine publishing, and the magazine industry has successfully transitioned into the digital realm. However, there is a lack of sufficient studies in the literature concerning the role of Islamist magazines in Turkey in addressing Islamophobia on a global scale. Religious groups in Turkey have historically and culturally established strong ties with society, particularly in utilizing magazines as a tool for propaganda. In this context, the study examines the theme of Islamophobia, which has become increasingly widespread globally, especially in Europe and the United States, in the magazines published by religious groups in Turkey. Using a qualitative methodology, the article analyzes the publications of the five major religious groups in Turkey, focusing on the concept of Islamophobia. The data collected has been examined through semiotic analysis and content analysis techniques. The findings of the study reveal that religious groups exhibit shortcomings in publishing articles that generate counterarguments to Islamophobia and in utilizing global language in their magazine publications. It is believed that this study will contribute to future research on the relationship between religious groups, Islamophobia, propaganda, and digital communication.

**Keywords:** Digital Communication, Magazine, Islamophobia, Propaganda, Semiotics, Religious Groups

## Türkiye'deki İslamcı Dergilerde İslamofobi Gündemi: Bir İçerik Analizi

### Öz

Türkiye'de propaganda gücü bakımından dini grupların varlık ve imkanları yadsınamaz bir gerçektir. Türkiye'de dini gruplar dergi yayıncılığında köklü bir kurumsal altyapıya sahiptir ve dergicilik dijital süreçlere başarıyla evrilmiştir. Ancak Türkiye özelinde İslamcı dergilerin global ölçüde karşı karşıya kalınan İslamofobi ile mücadeledeki konumu ile ilgili literatürde yeterli sayıda çalışmaya rastlanmamıştır. Dini gruplar ülkemizde, sosyolojik olarak propaganda tekniklerinde dergiciliği kullanma bakımından toplum ile tarihsel ve kültürel açıdan güçlü bağlar kurmuştur. Bu kapsamsa çalışmada, Türkiye'de bulunan dini gruplara ait dergi yayınlarında son zamanlarda özellikle Avrupa ve Amerika başta olmak üzere global olarak yaygınlaşan İslamofobi teması incelenmektedir. Nitel yöntemin kullanıldığı bu makalede ülkemizin önde gelen beş dini grubunun internette okurlarına açık olan dergilerindeki yayınları, İslamofobi kavramı etrafında ele alınmış, elde edilen veriler göstergebilimsel açıdan ve içerik analizi tekniğiyle incelenmiştir. Araştırma ile gerçekleştirilen çözümlenmeler ve elde edilen veriler sonucunda dini grupların dergi yayıncılığında, İslamofobi ile ilgili karşı argüman üretebilmiş makaleler yayımlama ve global dil kullanma konularında eksikliklerinin olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışmanın dini gruplar, İslamofobi, propaganda ve dijital iletişim ilişkisi bağlamında ileride yapılacak çalışmalara kaynaklık edeceği düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dijital İletişim, Dergi, İslamofobi, Propaganda, Göstergebilim, Dini Gruplar

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## Introduction

Today, it is crucial for communication studies and the representation of religion to examine the ways in which religious groups in Türkiye respond to Islamophobia through their media. Despite the changes that attempted to mitigate the place of religion in social life with the establishment of the Republic in Türkiye and ensured that the country was separated from the Islamic world and became part of the Western world, religious communities and groups continued to maintain their importance in the social and political arena with their institutional structures (Akyön Çelik, 2019, p. 77). In addition to many sects, there are also religious groups and communities in Türkiye that have emerged as representatives of a particular understanding of Islam and have changed and developed their structure and organizational style over time in accordance with the changing socio-political structure (Çakmak, 2013). We can evaluate all terms of congregation or sect within the framework of the definition of religious groups. In this context, the religious discourse formed by religious groups strengthens its existence by using the media in its social power struggle with other discourses (Sarı, 2023). Religious groups use newspapers, radio, television and magazines as propaganda tools (Efe, 2017). While the media is in a position to explain and convey religion to the audience, it also presents some representations of religiosity (Şener, 2019).

Historically, the first use of the concept of propaganda was the Holy Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which was founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, the religious leader of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican, according to Yağmurlu, who cites many Western authors as sources (2018, p. 4). In Turkish history, in the Ottoman Empire, those who first provided communication and propaganda for the government are known simply as town criers (Güngörmez, 2002). Propaganda includes all practices aimed at influencing communities in a particular direction through various techniques, with the aim of making them adopt the desired ideas and values. Different tools such as newspapers, books, magazines, television and posters can shape our thoughts, behaviour and values (Çifci & Kaplan, 2020, p. 318). The media uses propaganda methods to influence the audience (Salihi, 2019). Propaganda targets masses rather than individuals. Propaganda also attempts to influence the targeted masses in the desired direction. Propaganda is a communication-oriented persuasion effort (Çakı, 2018). Nowadays, propaganda is mainly carried out by the media. It is possible to encounter all kinds of social, cultural and religious propaganda in the media. In this context, media studies provide insights into the widespread social attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, which is an important topic of global discussion today (Politzer & Alcaraz, 2023). Media shape the perspectives of its followers by providing them with information and facts about what is happening in the world and how these events affect them (Tariq & Abdul Hanan, 2018). Media play a crucial role in the production and reproduction of stereotypes, influencing public opinions regarding different groups and minorities (Cervi et al., 2021). Today, public hostility towards Muslims appears to be on the rise in the Western States and the world. The most common explanation for this growing antipathy focuses on the perceived link between Muslims and terrorism. Many blame the media for reinforcing this association in the western public consciousness (Terman, 2017). Individuals and groups have contributed to or countered the rising trend of Islamophobic discourse by effectively using social media and traditional media platforms for propaganda purposes (Ahmanideen & Iner, 2024).

This article investigates the publications on Islamophobia in the magazines of leading religious groups in Türkiye. This article aims to shed light on how and to what extent religious



groups with Islamic sensitivity in Türkiye have responded to the widespread Islamophobic propaganda, particularly in Europe and America, through the magazines they have been publishing for years.

The concept of propaganda is defined as political, religious and intellectual persuasion in daily use. It can be said that the most used communication or propaganda tool of religious groups within the Islamist thought in the 20th century was the magazine (Yakışır, 2019). Magazine publishing creates an extremely favorable medium for the dissemination of criticism and objections to the political order among the masses (Karadeniz, 2021, p. 33). Magazines are tools that enable the target audience to discover spaceless simultaneity by breaking the time-space connection in everyday life. They foster a sense of belonging by enabling a conversational content. The magazine connects the past and future of the target audience, enabling them to share a common origin and destiny. Following these tools, typically presented in monthly periods, becomes routine and ensures continuity in action (Thompson John, 2008). Periodical publishing has the opportunity to evaluate current events and situations directly, while they are still on the agenda, and to convey these evaluations to its readers in a short time. This makes magazine publishing one of the most important sources to be consulted in order to understand the changing and transforming world of the mind during the period (Şahin, 2020).

Although magazine publishing, which began in the West in the 17th century, came to our country two hundred years later in the 19th century, there has been a significant increase in the types of magazines (Gönenç, 2007, p. 64). It is difficult to determine which magazines are Islamist, which are conservative and which are purely religious publications. However, if we define Islamism as the attempt to build social relations, politics, law and economy on religious foundations, it is possible to make a classification. Within the framework of this definition, it can be said that many magazines aimed at creating an alternative social, economic and political system were published after 1980 (Doğan, 2019). From the late Ottoman period to contemporary Türkiye, magazines have played an important role in the formation and development of Islamist thought and constituted one of the most important components of Islamist publishing. In this context, the Islamist Magazines Project created a Magazine Library with 393 magazines, 23020 issues, and 794402 articles (Sunar, 2018).

After 1960, with the quantitative increase in magazine publishing, many groups, associations and foundations stepped into the magical world of the internet with their legal entities from the late 90s to the 2010s, when the internet started to be used in Türkiye (Sarı, 2023). Due to economic fluctuations and increasing costs of paper, distribution and printing, many magazines have turned to digital platforms. As a cost-saving measure, the number of magazines transitioning to digital platforms has surged. With the widespread use of the Internet and the development of digital communication, digital magazines have started to replace traditional magazines (Öztürk Göçmen & İpek, 2021). Today, the field of magazine publishing utilizes all kinds of technological possibilities (Gönenç, 2007). The Internet has provided non-state actors, particularly religious groups, with the opportunity to engage with wider audiences (Salihi, 2019). In this context, web-based digital communication provides an effective place-making environment for religious groups, bringing together communication tools on a single platform, facilitating access and accelerating communication (Dereli, 2019; 2022). Websites also enable international promotion (Güçdemir, 2015). In the digital age, where the viewers and listeners of all these institutional structures turn

into followers, there is also the existence of internet accounts of religious groups. In these digital communication environments, the religious discourse of the groups is also shared (Sarı, 2023). Indeed, the Information Technology Revolution has a significant impact on both Islam and Muslims in the present era (Lawrence, 2008, p. 333).

In the Islamist community, there are many religious groups (Naqshis, Nurists, Suleimanists, Qadiris) and intellectual circles with different activities (Aytepe, 2016, p. 181). Among these religious groups, the Erenköy Community, which is an important branch of the Naqshis, is active in the media and has magazines, radio and television broadcasting organs such as Erkam publications, Altınoluk, Şebnem and children's magazines; Erkam radio, İLAM TV (Açık, 2020, p. 7). The Erenköy Community also has digital accounts for all its media outlets on the internet and websites. The Hudayi Foundation, to which the congregation is affiliated, is known to carry out various activities and projects both in Türkiye and in other parts of the world, such as Africa, America, Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, and Europe (Abibu Mohammed, 2020). After the death of Mahmut Sami Ramazanoğlu in 1984, there were some divisions and disagreements within the community. While the Altınoluk-Hudayi line continued to predominate, the Yahyalı Hasan Efendi line is known to have continued its work with the Safa Foundation and Yeni Dünya magazine, centered in the city of Kayseri (Açık, 2020).

Abdullah Büyük went his own way in the early years, differentiating his group with the Ribat magazine. Today, the Community gathered around this magazine, centered in Konya, both maintains its different structure and continues its loyalty (Açık, 2020, p. 14). Under the patronage of Abdullah Büyük, the Ribat magazine began publication in 1982 and continues to this day (Arslan, 2023). On the other hand, under the auspices of the Erenköy religious group, Altınoluk magazine published its first issue in March 1986. The editor-in-chief of the magazine was Osman Nuri Topbaş. Altınoluk magazine has described its purpose of publishing the magazine as introducing Allah to people and inviting them to goodness. The magazine has maintained the same line since 1986. The magazine, which has a Sufi content, continues its publishing life in Istanbul (Açık, 2020). Today, the magazine maintains a website where readers can access both the current issue and the archive of its issues since its first publication.

Nurism and its founder Said Nursî are undoubtedly the most important movements emerged with the Republic and whose impacts continue in some way today (Aytepe, 2016, p. 181). Genç Yorum magazine belongs to the Yeni Asya group, an important branch of Nurism (Yakışır, 2019). The Yeni Asya group is working to ensure that the Risale-i Nur Collection and its author Said Nursi are introduced and better understood (Yakışır, 2019). Another religious group which is active today is the Suleimanists (Aytepe, 2016). Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, the founding leader, is a person who stands out with his “scientific and spiritual” identity (Çağlar, 2016, p. 6). Süleymanism refers to the followers and students of Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, who continue his teachings. Süleymanism adhered to the traditional Islamic line and defended the Sunni-Sufi tendency (Aytepe, 2016). Yedi Kita magazine, which belongs to Suleymanism, is a magazine that covers historical and cultural issues. Yedi Kita started publishing in 2008. In 2010, Yedi Kita, which has a digital magazine format, both diversified its publications and changed its magazine design in the second half of the year. In this context, it can be assessed that the Twitter, Facebook and Instagram posts of the readers are carried to the magazine under the title of “Social Magazine” every month in digital publishing, initially through letters and more recently through social media (Yakışır, 2019).

Among the terms related to Islam, which is the reason for the existence of religious groups today, the term is being discussed and researched globally today is Islamophobia, which is used in the sense of anti-Islamism and hostility. Despite the fact that Islam now includes many communities of different colors and styles and is the fastest growing major religion in the world, Muslims face increasing hostility to their religious beliefs in their daily experiences (Deroo, 2021). The Oxford English Dictionary defines Islamophobia as a deep-seated hatred or fear directed specifically towards Islam (Suryandari & Arifin, 2021). Systemic racism against Muslims and the lived experiences of discrimination against people perceived as Muslims constitute Islamophobia (Najib & Teeple Hopkins, 2020). As is evident in the word itself, Islamophobia refers to a fear or hatred of Islam and Muslims (Rana, 2007). Like all forms of racism, Islamophobia manifests through both structural or systemic forms of discrimination and targeting, as well as the "direct" racist words and actions of individuals and groups, with the former facilitating the latter (Ali & Whitham, 2021, p. 11). The media's influence has caused the human rights violations of the past to manifest in various forms in the 21st century. Recently, anti-Islamism has emerged as the most significant of these violations. This is commonly referred to as Islamophobia and is related to the terms of anti-Islam and hostility towards Islam (Yıldız et al., 2019). Islamophobia is a combination of the words Islam and phobia (Temel, 2020). In the most succinct terms, Islamophobia means the fear of Islam and Muslims. This fear then leads to hatred, hostility and discrimination (Akıner & Mencet, 2016). According to the Runnymede Trust report, the term of "Islamophobia" emerged approximately at the end 1980s (Baharuddin & Baharuddin, 2022). While Patel dates Islamophobia back to earlier times (Patel, 2022), Russian literature dates Islamophobia back to much earlier times (Tarín Sanz, 2017, p. 9). The Muslim community in Russia is now 25 million people strong and continues to grow (Fırıncı, 2018). On the other hand since 2014, observers of Chinese society have noted an upsurge in Islamophobic sentiment among China's ethnic majority Han. China's Muslims, in particular those who identify as Hui and Uyghur, report an increase in harassment, both online and in person (Stroup, 2021). In Spain, the situation started in 711 with the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and continues to persist today, particularly due to immigration (Corral et al., 2023). Similarly, the identification of Bosnian Muslims as a 'racial' group led to their 'ethnically cleansing' (Modood, 2020). Considered a visible reflection of behaviors and attitudes that are incompatible with human dignity, such as racism, xenophobia, or discrimination, Islamophobia is the latest example of the intolerance of people, especially Westerners, towards anyone outside their own group (Yel, 2018).

Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia of UK, produced the document *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* in 1997. Their definition of Islamophobia highlights the distorted perception of Islam not only as an inferior 'other', but also as monolithic, static and unresponsive to change (McGinty et al., 2013). In the following years, the attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001, which resulted in the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City, significant damage to the Pentagon, and the downing of a plane over Western Pennsylvania, effectively sparked a campaign of fear-mongering against Muslims by influential commentators in the media and elsewhere (Johnston, 2016, p. 166). The United States government's declaration of the war on terrorism following the events of 9/11 created a new dynamic in the fight against intolerance, particularly Islamophobia (Caro, 2019). Reports estimate that the post-9/11 wars have directly caused the deaths of between 174,000 and 220,000 civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Mcqueeney, 2014). During the post-9/11 period, US policies and propaganda warfare created a perception that Islam and terrorism were closely linked, leading to a shift in the rise of

xenophobia in Europe towards Islamophobia (Göknel, 2015). Although they are phenomena about which thick books and large reports have been written after the September 11 incident, the roots of both Islamophobia and anti-Islam go back to the Middle Ages (Hıdır, 2007). In fact, Islamophobia, which has been present in Europe since the Middle Ages, has been strengthened and reinforced by the new opportunities and channels provided by the media (Gölcü & Çuhadar, 2017, p. 72). Islamophobia, which has become an important hate crime in the West, has become a global phenomenon, especially with the provocation of global powers that control the media for certain political interests, and the Muslim identity has been represented as terror, aggression, barbarism or, to put it mildly, as a potential criminal (Mencet, 2018). The media's hostility towards Islam has led to the development of radical terminology in Islamic societies and the spread of this style in media channels belonging to Islamic societies (Widiawati, 2020).

Medial practices such as television shows, films, literary texts, performances, videos, and Internet blogs are known to craft and circulate Islamophobia, a cultural phenomenon (Furlanetto & Mehring, 2020). The most important turning point in the reflections of Islamophobia in the media were the cartoons published about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the debates about which continue to this day (Yıldız et al., 2019). Charlie Hebdo published a headline titled, Muhammad (pbuh) Overwhelmed by Fundamentalism, which was accompanied by an illustration of the Prophet carrying a bomb in his turban, similar to a cartoon published by the Danish daily newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in September 2005 (Yoo, 2018). The cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) published in Charlie Hebdo, Europe's most popular humor magazine, resonated around the world. The hatred and fear of Muslims was revealed implicitly with an attitude of superiority through ridicule (Kaya & Akinci, 2018). Denmark and Norway published caricatures in 2005 and 2006, respectively (Önal, 2018). Everything seems to indicate that this is indeed the reality in the so-called "Western world" (Bravo López, 2017).

The predominant conception of Islamophobia defines it as anti-Muslim racism (Ejiofor, 2023). Negative stereotypes fuel the hatred towards Muslims and their discrimination. In this case, racism is not only about the race but also ethnicity, language, culture, and religion (Sutkuté, 2019). Anti-Muslim sentiment then spread gradually in European countries such as Germany, Austria, the UK, the Netherlands and France (Aktaş, 2014). Sentiments against Muslims in Western societies have escalated in areas such as anti-veil and anti-hijab campaigns, the killing of immigrants, the migration of Turkish people to Germany, the presence of men with beards, the use of Arabic language, and the establishment of Islamic institutions in the West (Batool et al., 2020). Another example of Islamophobia is the terrorist attack in New Zealand in 2019 in which 50 Muslims lost their lives in a mosque (Yıldız et al., 2019). Issues relating to the accommodation of specific Muslim rights and practices are at the center of political debates in Western societies. People often perceive restrictions on Islamic dress in public spaces as an indication of Islamophobia (Badea, 2023, p. 98). On September 14, 2010, the French Parliament passed a resolution banning the wearing of face-covering clothing in public spaces. According to this decision, it became illegal to wear the burqa and veil almost everywhere except places of worship and residences (Behram Özdemir, 2012). Attacks on Muslim women occurred in the West (Göknel, 2015). Verbal and physical attacks against religious people wearing symbolic elements such as headscarves, veils and beards have created pressure on religious people (Gür, 2024). Islamophobia even affects children (Inman et al., 2012).

According to the data of CCIF, which fights against Islamophobia, 414 Islamophobic acts were committed in France alone in 2012 (Behram Özdemir, 2012).

A number of orientalist appear before us in the effort to associate Islam with negative images in Western thought. The influence of American orientalist such as Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington and H. A. R. Gibb on the activation of Islamophobia is undeniably important (Büyüktopçu & Gündoğdu, 2019, p. 94). A popular work of the time was Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations". The author evaluates Islam as an implacable enemy for Western civilization. He claims that culture, not economics or politics, is driving a new cold war. He continues that Islam, with its innate propensity to violence, poses the most serious threat to Western civilization (Saeed, 2007). Bernard Lewis, another orientalist, perceived Islam as a constant threat to the West and perpetuated Islamophobia by keeping its intellectual infrastructure alive (Gökhan Genel, 2014, p. 112). In addition, many recent academic studies define Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism (Bayraklı & Güngörmez, 2018; Hajjat, 2021). Scientific studies first used the word Islamophobia in 1991 (Önal, 2018). Boyraz has determined that there are 26 books and 62 graduate theses on the subject in Türkiye. (Boyraz, 2021). In this sense, the number of studies on the existence of Islamophobia in Türkiye is quite limited (Mencet, 2018, p. 192).

### **Significance, Hypothesis, Method and Limitations of the Research**

The research holds significance as it sheds light on the extent to which Islamic religious groups, who assert their commitment to Islam during a period of intense attacks, are grappling with this opposition and hostility. A review of the relevant literature (Dereli & Eken, 2024) revealed a lack of research on this topic.

The research hypothesis posits that religious magazines closely associated with the Islamic faith, included in the study to combat Islamophobia, a phenomenon with a long history and a recent resurgence, actively produce publications and articles in digital content.

Answers were sought to the following problems.

1. How much have magazines published on Islamophobia?
2. Which magazines have published the most on Islamophobia?
3. Is there a difference between magazines in terms of their publications on combating Islamophobia?
4. What are the most commonly used words in publications on Islamophobia?

The research employed a qualitative model to uncover the characteristics of a specific activity. I used semiotic analysis and content analysis to look at the Altınoluk magazine from the Erenköy Community, the Yedi Kıta magazine from the Suleimanists, the Yeni Dünya magazine from the Kayseri Yahyalı Community, the Ribat magazine from Konya, and the Genç Yorum magazine from the Yeni Asya Nur Community. We selected the magazines on the basis of their continuity and their status as digital magazines on the Internet.

Semiotics became known all over the world in the 19th and 20th centuries thanks to the work of Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure and American Charles Sanders Peirce. The ways of interpreting signs proposed by these two scientists were developed and made more understandable by Frenchman Roland Barthes (Çakı, 2018, p. 82). In the data analysis phase, the statistical program

Maxqda 2020 was used. The program also applied content analysis to the data. In content analysis, the researcher attempts to determine the presence of a particular word or concept in the text or group of texts. The relationships between words or terms are analyzed and inferences are drawn from the words or terms (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009). The research identified and included specific codes related to the topic. In qualitative research, the code is often defined as a word or short phrase that summarizes, captures, reflects the essence and/or symbolically describes language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2023, p. 4). Content analysis, a technique for collecting and analyzing textual content, refers to any message conveyed through words, meanings, symbols or images (Neuman, 2014).

When collecting data in the research, especially for the magazines *Altınoluk* and *Ribat*, the data were only available by paying an annual subscription fee. All magazines were analyzed from the first to the last issue. The fact that all the selected magazines have made all their issues available on the Internet for free or for a fee was one of the greatest conveniences for the research. Purposive sampling was used to select the material analyzed. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects and analyses information-rich situations according to the purpose of the research (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009). Different researchers also evaluated and coded the content of the publications according to the principles of pretesting and reliability. The pre-testing and reliability process resulted in largely reliable data.

The research focuses only on the magazines and their articles. Further studies should examine the websites and social media applications of the groups to which the magazines belong. Investigate these websites and social media channels for a more in-depth study. There are dozens of free books in many different languages on these websites. An in-depth analysis of these books is needed. The research did not include discussions or issues related to Islamophobia in Türkiye. The research focused on the agenda and discussions about Islamophobia outside Türkiye, centered in Europe and America.

### Results

It has been observed that the names of the magazines have a content that transcends the borders of Türkiye. *Altınoluk* magazine was named after the historical gutter located at the upper corner of the Ka'bah (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 2024). The magazine was spatialized with the slogan “Let's meet in *Altınoluk*” based on the idea of all Muslims gathering around the Kaaba and the formation of an ummah horizon there (Yakışır, 2019).



Figure 1. *Altınoluk* Magazine Logo

The name *Yedi Kıta* (Seven Continents) refers to the number of continents in the world as seen in Figure 2 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2024).



Figure 2. Yedi Kita Magazine Logo

The name Yeni Dünya, as can be understood, points to a new world in the global sense (Yeni Dünya Magazine, 2024).



Figure 3. Yeni Dünya Magazine Logo

Ribat is a word of Arabic origin that means to stand guard along the borders to prevent enemy attacks as seen in Figure 4 (Ribat Magazine, 2024).



Figure 4. Ribat Magazine Logo

The name Genç Yorum has a simple but general message that can be interpreted as the interpretation of young people (Genç Yorum Magazine Name Logo, 2024).



Figure 5. Genç Yorum Magazine Logo

Analyzing the names of the magazines, it is simple to see that three of the five magazines directly express a global meaning and goal. Considering the simple meanings of Ribat and Genç Yorum magazines, we can interpret them as emphasizing a global perspective.

When the word Islamophobia is searched on the website of Altınoluk magazine, a total of 47 items are found. Yeni Dünya magazine found 3 items, Ribat magazine found 16, and Genç Yorum magazine found 14. No publications on the word Islamophobia were found in Yedi Kita magazine.

According to Saeed, visual sources serve as an excellent method for explaining theories of media representation (Saeed, 2008). The Altınoluk magazine publishes more intensively on issues related to Islamophobia than other magazines. It even seems to have made Islamophobia a cover issue in its publications. The covers of the June and July 1987 issues of Altınoluk show the relationship between Islam and society with the expressions “An Islamic Environment for Living Islam” (Altınoluk Magazine, 1987b) and “The European Community and Islam” (Altınoluk magazine, 1987c). As shown in Table 1, figures 1 and 2, one cover conveys a message with an image of a mosque wedged between high-rise buildings, resembling a minaret in silhouette. On the other

cover, a Turkish flag in the shape of a question mark in Europe, symbolized by the flags of European countries, draws attention.

As seen Table 1, Figure 3, on the cover of its 110th issue, the magazine targeted the NATO organization. With the expression “NATO is a Threat to Islam” (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1995a), the magazine accuses the organization of being anti-Islamic. In Table 1, figure 4, in the October 1993 issue of *Altınoluk*, with the cover story “İslam'ı Vuran Yaftalar (Labels Shooting Islam)” (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1993), the magazine wanted to express that the West accuses Islam of fundamentalism, panislamism and radicalism and tries to discredit Islam in the eyes of societies and humanity.

In its publications and magazine covers, *Altınoluk* also puts the oppressed geographies of the Islamic world on the agenda. In Table 1, figure 5 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1995d), figure 6 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1995c) and figure 7 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1995) the covers were devoted to the wars in Chechnya and Bosnia, which were in the midst of a great war and victimization at the time. The photographs of soldiers prostrating themselves in prayer on the June cover, a veiled woman in difficulty on the July issue, and a veiled Muslim woman crying beside her children with tears on the August issue convey the magazine's intended message to both the West and the East.

The 11th issue of the magazine in January 1987 was published with the cover “Şeytan Hizbinde Telaş” as seen in Table 1, figure 8 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1987a). The cover featured a selection of news headlines cut from newspaper clippings, along with terms such as the Koran Course and the headscarf, both of which are elements of Islam. These elements were linked to the concept of reactionism, a concept mentioned in another newspaper clipping, to suggest that the intended message was not accurate.

In the December 1990 issue, the expression “Enmity against Islam” as seen in Table 1, figure 9 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1990) was used on the cover and a cover photograph of a prayer rug with a turban and traces of blood dripping on it was used to express to readers that Islam was being attacked. The March 1992 cover of the magazine featured Algeria in Table 1 figure 10 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1992), , while the May 1991 issue featured the cover of Captive Turkish provinces in Asia in Table 1 figure 11 (*Altınoluk Magazine*, 1991).

**Table 1.** *Altınoluk Magazine Covers*

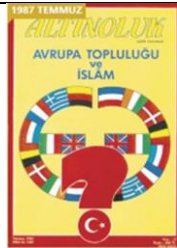



Figure	Cover	Explanation	Figure	Cover	Explanation
Figure 1		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 17, July 1987	Figure 2		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 16, June 1987
Figure 3		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 110, April 1995	Figure 4		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 92, October 1993





Figure 5		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 114, August 1995	Figure 6		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 113, July 1995
Figure 7		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 112, June 1995	Figure 8		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 11, January 1987
Figure 9		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 58, December 1990	Figure 10		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 73, March 1992
Figure 11		Altınoluk Magazine Cover, Issue 63, December 1991			

The Genç Yorum magazine has chosen Islamophobia as its cover subject and has shared the solution with its readers, asserting that "True Islam is the solution." The cover presents the crescent moon, widely accepted as the symbol of Islam, against a cloudy blue sky, informing readers that the magazine contains articles on the subject. The 126th issue of the magazine published this cover in February 2015, as shown in Table 2 figure 1 (Genç Yorum Magazine, 2015).

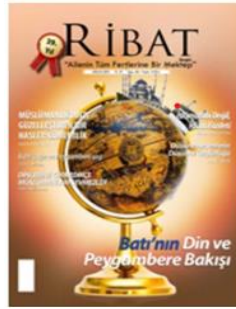
In the January 2021 issue, it is understood that the magazine wants to give a global message, albeit indirectly, with the expressions "Global Criminal Complaint, Call for Remorse", with the world on its palms and a sunrise on its side as seen in Table 2 figure 2 (Genç Yorum Magazine, 2021).

**Table 2.** Genç Yorum Magazine Covers

Figure	Cover	Explanation	Figure	Cover	Explanation
Figure 1		Genç Yorum Magazine Cover, Issue 126, February 2015	Figure 2		Genç Yorum Magazine Cover, Issue 197, January 2021.

Although Yeni Dünya magazine engages its audience with publications centered on Islam and Sufism, it notably lacks a comprehensive study addressing Islamophobia. In contrast, Ribat magazine, in its 456th issue from December 2020, presents the statement “The West's View of Religion and Prophet,” accompanied by images of mosques depicted on a world map, as illustrated in Figure 6 (*Ribat Magazine*, 2020).

It is significant to observe that Yeni Dünya, a magazine originating from Kayseri in Anatolia, lacks a cover story addressing Islamophobia, despite the pervasive attacks and insults directed at the Quran and the revered figure of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the Prophet of Islam, occurring globally, particularly in Europe.



**Figure 6.** Ribat Magazine Cover


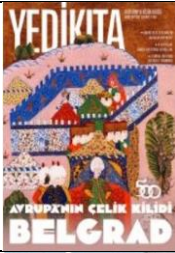
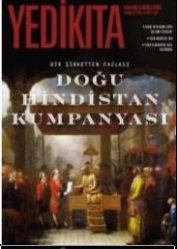
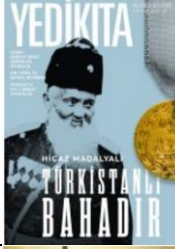



Although Yedi Kıta magazine does not have a publication in which Islamophobia is mentioned, it is seen that the magazine shares historical situations and events from different parts of the Islamic geography with its readers at various times. The magazine, which publishes content on Islamic and Turkish culture and history, almost never uses terms of Islamophobia, particularly Islamophobia, anti-Islam, or Islamic hostility.

In the 136th issue of 2019, “Bahadır from Turkistan with Hijaz Medal” in Table 3 figure 4 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2019), in June 2021, “East India Troupe” in Table 3 figure 3 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2021a), in the 159th issue in November 2021, “Belgrade, the Steel Lock of Europe” in Table 3 figure 2 (*YediKıta Magazine Issue 159 Cover Image*, 2021) and in the 164th issue in April 2022, “Muslim Sicily” in Table 3 figure 1 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2022).

It is seen that Yedi Kıta Magazine put its finger on the problems and troubles experienced in the Islamic world with the cover topics of Crimea in May 2014, 69th issue in Table 3 figure 7 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2014), Algeria in April 2015, 80th issue in Table 3 figure 5 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2015) and Palestine in August 2016, 96th issue in Table 3 figure 6 (*Yedi Kıta Magazine*, 2016).

Except for the issue where Algeria is the cover story as seen in Table 3 figure 5, the contents of all the Magazines can be accessed on the Yedi Kıta Magazine's website. It is not known whether the reason for not being able to access this issue, although all issues of the Magazine are accessible, is due to a technical reason or another reason.

**Table 3.** Yedi Kita Magazine Covers

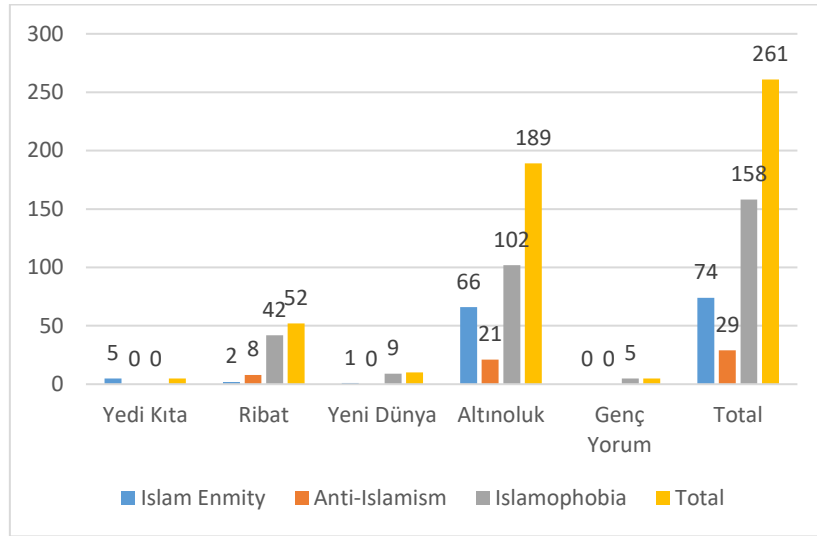
Figure	Cover	Explanation	Figure	Cover	Explanation
Figure 1		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, Issue 164, April 2022	Figure 2		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, November 2021.
Figure 3		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, Issue 154, June 2021	Figure 4		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, Issue 136, December 2019
Figure 5		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, Issue 80, April 2015	Figure 6		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, Issue 96, August 2016
Figure 7		Yedi Kita Magazine Cover, Issue 69, May 2014			

The visual analysis of the Magazines' covers reveals a predominant use of images depicting poverty and war. The cover scans and analyzes of the Magazines were revealed by conducting retrospective research one by one.

Apart from this study, the publications obtained by typing the word Islamophobia into the search buttons of the websites of the Magazines were analyzed using content analysis and frequency tables using Maxqda 2020 statistical program. We scanned the expressions of anti-Islamism in the magazines that did not contain the term "Islamophobia." ed. We scanned the magazines for the expression "Islam Enmity," which may have the same meaning as Anti-Islamism, and analyzed the publications obtained.

Using various models with Maxqda, we analyzed the data from these three terms across all magazines and presented the results visually.

Graphic 1. Magazines and Islamophobia Frequencies



When the expressions of Islam enmity, anti-Islamism and Islamophobia were typed into the search engines of the magazines' websites, the results showed that Altınoluk magazine used the expression Islamophobia 102 times, followed by Ribat, which used it 42 times, Yeni Dünya, which used it 9 times, and Genç Yorum, which used it 5 times. No expression related to Islamophobia was encountered in Yedi Kita magazine. The expression Islam enmity was encountered 5 times in Yedi Kita magazine. Yeni Dünya and Genç Yorum magazines did not use the expression Anti-Islamism at all, and Genç Yorum magazine did not contain the expression Islam Enmity.

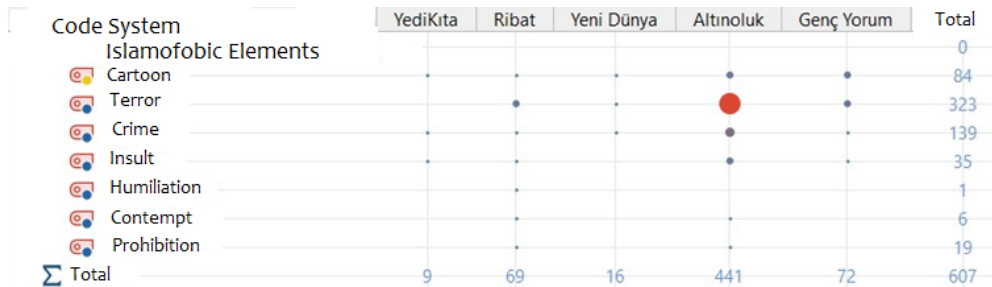


Figure 7. Islamophobic Behavior Codes and Magazine Frequencies Display

When we code Islamophobic elements such as cartoons, terror, crimes, insults, humiliations, contempt, and prohibitions, we find that the word terror has the highest frequency among them. It can be seen that Altınoluk magazine uses this term more often than others. The size of the dot and the darkness of the color in Figure 7 show the frequent use of the word. Used 323 times, the term terror is followed by the terms crime (139 times), cartoon (84 times), insult (35 times), prohibition (19 times), contempt (6 times) and humiliation (1 time).

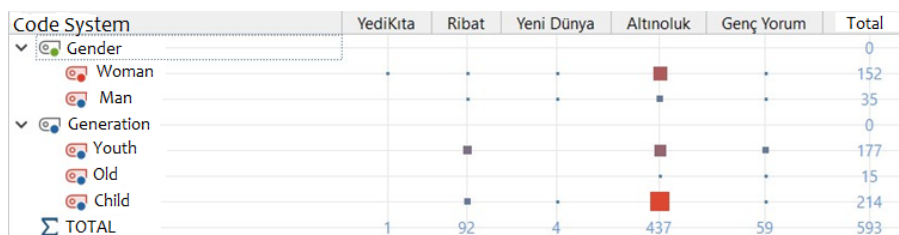
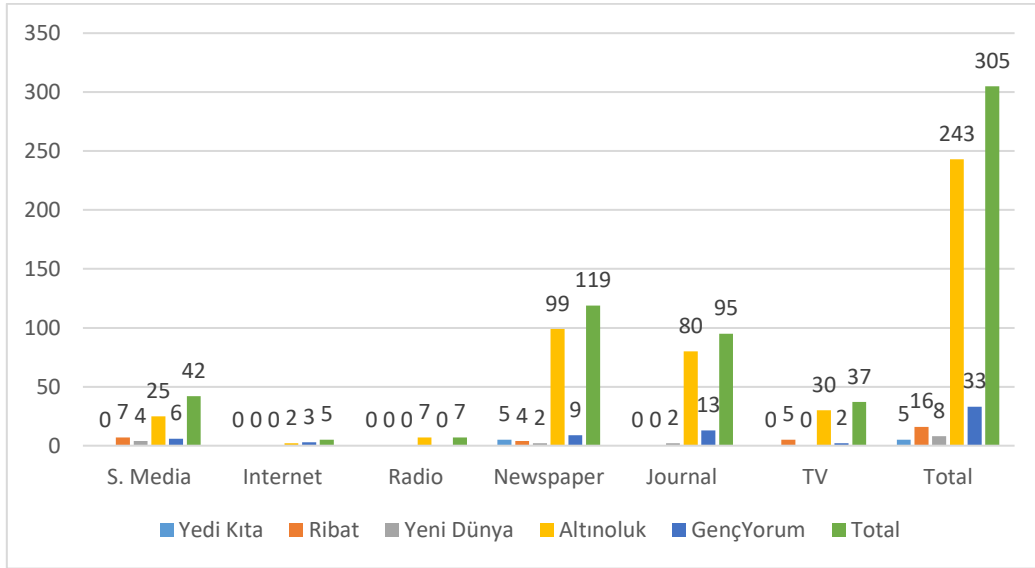


Figure 8. Gender and Generational Code Matrix Browser with Magazines

Figure 8 shows the results of the Code Matrix Browser for magazines, gender, and generations. Examining the results of the Code Matrix Browser, which calculates the symbol size between gender-based codes and magazine publications, as well as between generation and magazine publications, we can see that the majority of these publications were written by women. Across all generations, the word "children" appears in the majority of coding publications. These publications were mostly made in Altınoluk magazines, followed by Ribat and Genç Yorum magazines, Yeni Dünya magazines, and Yedi Kita magazines.

Graphic 2. Media and Communication Frequencies Used in Magazines and Islamophobia Publications



In the case of magazine publications, the newspaper is the most frequently used medium for publications containing expressions of Islamophobia, anti-Islamism or Islamophobia, with 119 expressions. Magazines come second with 95 expressions, followed by social media with 42, television with 37, magazines with 7 and the Internet with 5. The intensive use of newspapers in magazine publications on Islamophobia is due to the fact that this expression was used 99 times by Altınoluk magazine. It is assumed that the term 'newspaper' appears as an intensively used code due to the fact that Altınoluk magazine's archive is old and its historical past, which spans half a century, is included in our analysis.



Figure 9. Magazines and Oppressed Geographies Frequency Display

When the country names mentioned in the magazine publications on Islamophobia are coded, and the magazine publications and these country names are evaluated according to the

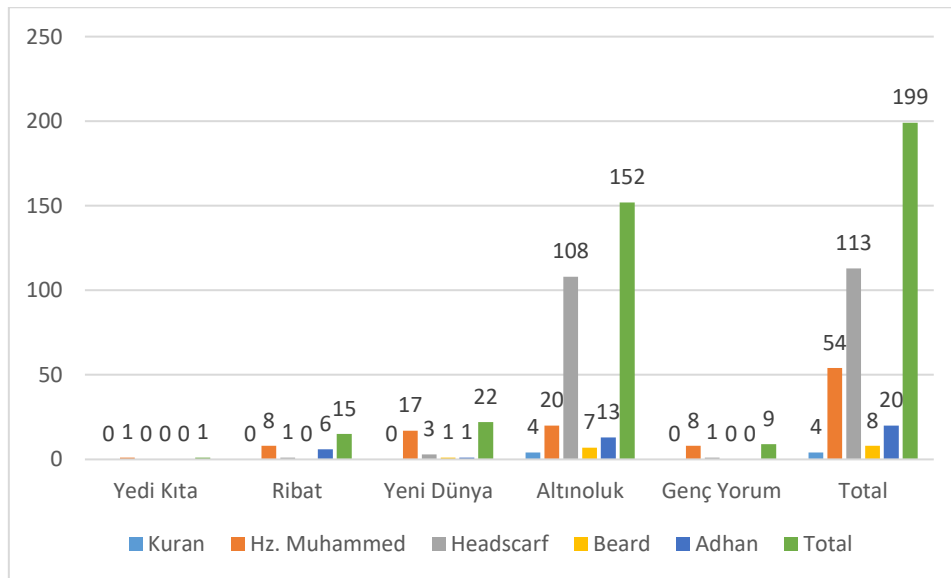
Code Matrix Scanner analysis, it becomes clear that the country names Palestine and Afghanistan are used most, with very close numbers. These countries are followed by Arakan, Bosnia, Myanmar, Central Asia, Kashmir, Chechnya, Uighur and Moro. The most striking situation here is that of the Uyghur Turks. While there are many publications on Islamophobia in the media about Uyghur Turks, it is significant that only two publications on this topic in the magazines we have included in our research are in Altınoluk magazine and there are no publications or articles on this topic in other magazines.



Figure 10. Frequency Display of Ideology Members Used in Magazine Publications

The broadcasts most frequently use communist (45 times) and socialist (26 times) concept codes. The fact that both expressions reject religions and religious structures, including Islam, has led to their frequent use in these publications. We determined that the liberal or capitalist perspective, which is more tolerant of all religions, including Islam, than communism and its derivative ideologies, used these expressions a total of 28 times.

Graphic 3. Frequency of Magazines and Islamic Values



When the terms related to Islamophobia in publications containing Islamophobia are coded as “Quran” when the incident of burning the Quran is considered, when cartoon drawings aimed at humiliating our Prophet Muhammad are coded as “Hz. Muhammed” and “our prophet”, when the headscarf that women cover their heads are coded as “headscarf” and “turban”, when men's beards are coded as “beard” and when the ban on the call to prayer is coded as “adhan” (call to prayer); it is seen that the code with the highest frequency is “headscarf”. This code, which has a total frequency of 113, is followed by the codes Hz. Muhammed with 54, Adhan with 20, Beard with 8 and Quran with 4. It has been determined that the Islamophobic behavior of Quran burning,

which has recently intensified in Europe, has not been sufficiently covered in magazine publications.

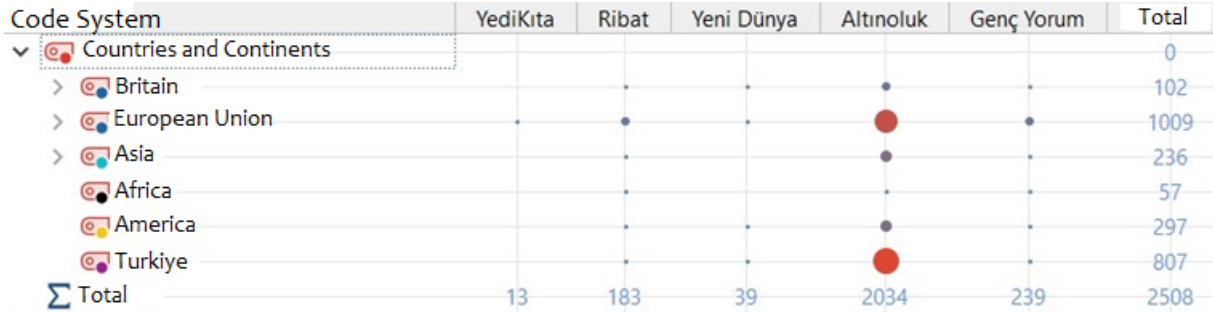
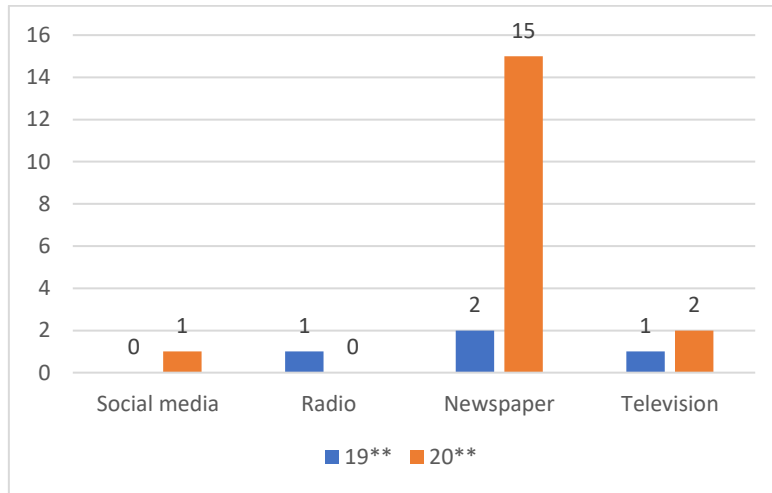


Figure 11. Magazines and Country Continent Frequency Display

When the matrix of countries and continents mentioned in magazine publications is analyzed with the code matrix scanner, it is seen that the European Union is the most frequently used frequency, followed by Türkiye, America, Asia, Great Britain, and Africa. The code defined here as the European Union also includes the sub-codes Europe, Sweden, Denmark, France, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

The Maxqda program transcribes the details of the Interactive Citation Matrix in Figure 10 to produce an 831-page report. Due to space constraints, we cannot publish this report here. However, this analysis has led to the intense emergence of Türkiye. Upon detailed examination of the report, we find that Türkiye has experienced Islamophobia at a high frequency, aligning with the definition of a country that experienced Islamophobia prior to two millennia and struggled with it after that period.

Graphic 4. Code Matrix Scanner Findings Across Time and Media in Magazine Publications



The code relationship browser visualizes the intersections of codes within a single document or group of documents in our research. This allows us to identify connections and relationships between codes.

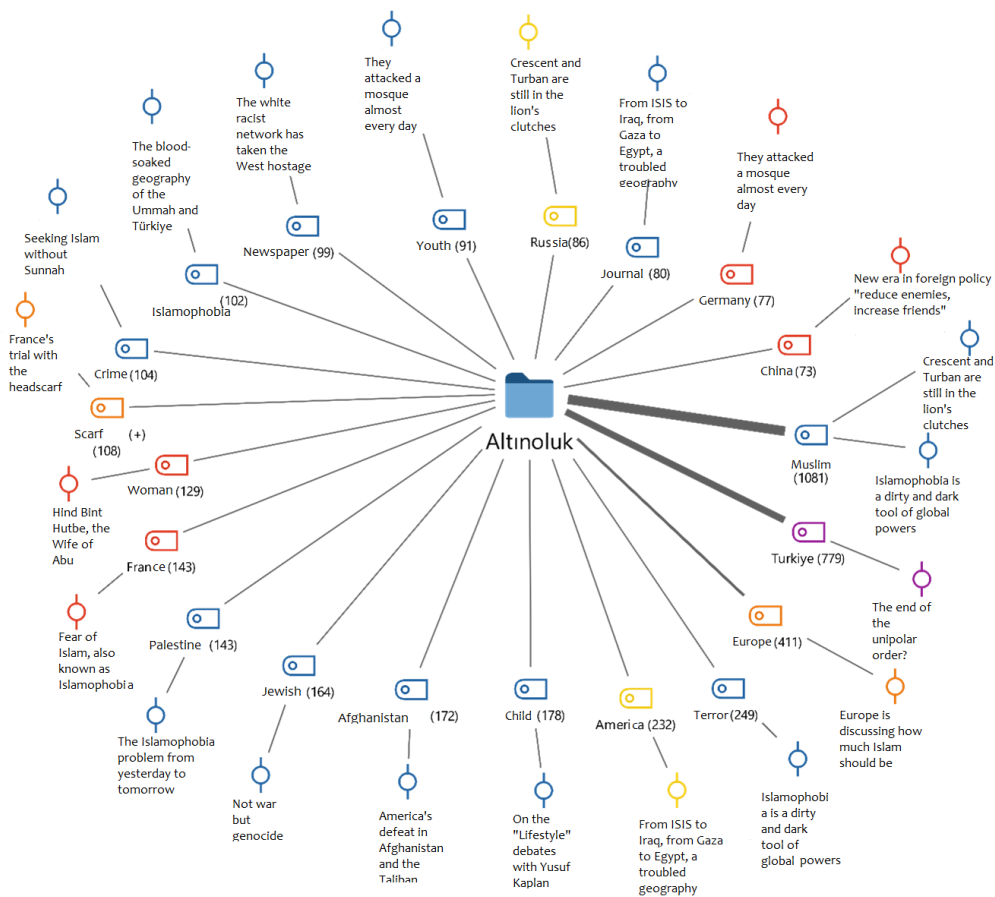
When examining the intersections between codes, time, and media using the code relationship browser, we found that the "social media" code intersected once with the "2000s" code, 15 times with the "newspaper" code, and twice with the "television" code. For the "1900s", the "radio" code intersected once, the "newspaper" code twice, and the "television" code once.

Based on these findings, we conclude that magazine publications, especially in recent times, have not significantly addressed the numerous Islamophobic incidents that occur in new media and on the Internet, resulting in a lack of substantive publications on the topic.

**Table 4.** Country/Continent and Islamic Values Code Relationships Scanner Findings

Code System	Koran	Hz. Muhammad	Headscarf	Beard	Adhan
Britain	0	0	1	0	0
European Union	1	1	1	1	1
Asia	0	0	0	0	0
Africa	0	0	0	0	0
America	0	0	0	0	0
Türkiye	0	0	1	0	1

Looking at Table 4, which shows whether there is a relationship between codes in the code relationship scanner (1 indicates the presence of a relationship, 0 indicates the absence of a relationship), we see that there is a relationship between Great Britain (including Australia, New Zealand, England) and only the headscarf among countries and Islamophobic situations, while there is a relationship between the European Union and all Islamophobic situations. While there is no relationship between Islamophobic situations in Asia, Africa and America, there is a relationship between Türkiye and headscarf and adhan situations.



**Figure 12.** Findings of the Single Case Model of Altınoluk Magazine



Figure 12 shows the analysis result of the 20 most used codes in Altınoluk magazine according to the Single Case Model. Accordingly, the frequency of use of the codes Muslim, Türkiye and Europe in the magazine's publications on Islamophobia is higher than the others. The line width reflects the code frequency in the Single Case Model. These are followed by the word codes Terror and America, respectively. The figure also shows a title from one of the magazine articles related to the codes.

In the articles on Islamophobia, the word "Muslim" appeared 1081 times. The magazine most frequently used the word "Muslim" in conjunction with the concept of Islamophobia. The article titles "Islamophobia: Dirty and Dark Instrument of Global Powers" and "Crescent and Turban Still Under the Lion's Claw" in Figure 12 both use the word Muslim.

The magazine frequently used the word Türkiye in its articles on Islamophobia, with a frequency value of 779. The magazine's agenda includes Türkiye because it is the most active country in the fight against Islamophobia and has experienced Islamophobic incidents prior to the 2000s. Figure 12 includes the article title "The End of the Unipolar Order".

The third most-used word in the Altınoluk magazine was Europe. In the magazine's articles on Islamophobia, the concept of Europe appeared 411 times. In addition to this word code, the names of various European countries also appeared in publications at lower frequencies, as illustrated in Figure 12. Figure 11 shows the article title of the European magazine, "Europe Discusses How Much Islam Should Be."

Figure 11 shares the word codes with the highest frequencies in the magazine's articles on Islamophobia and the sample news title they appear in.

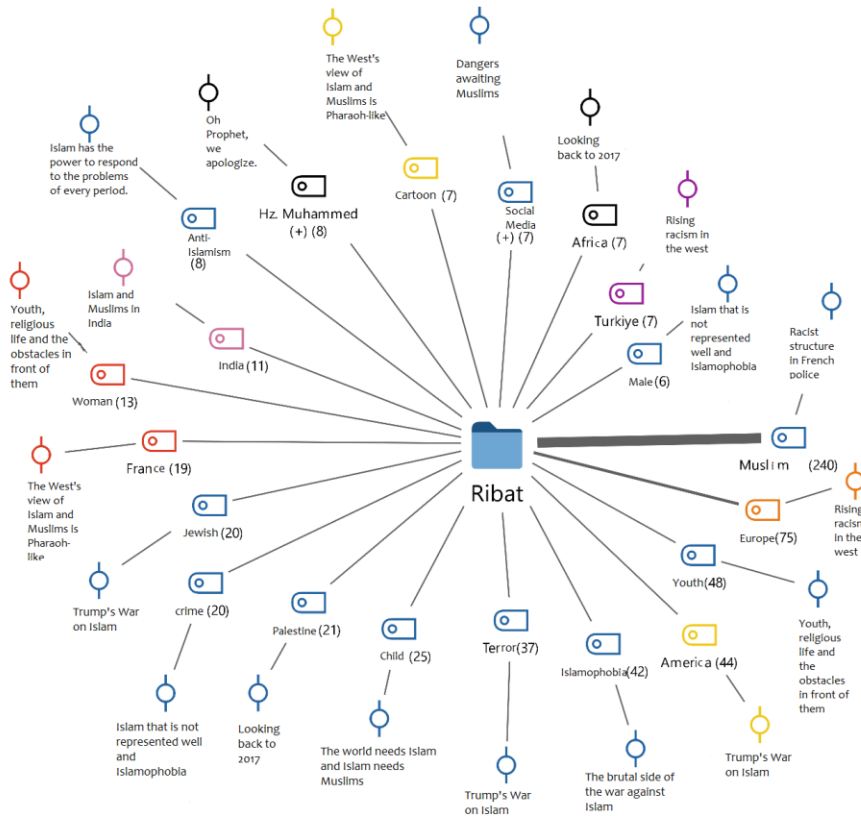


Figure 13. Ribat Magazine Single Case Model Findings

When Ribat magazine is examined according to the Single Case Model, it will be seen that the most frequently used word code, like Altınoluk magazine, is Muslim. This is followed by the word codes Europe, Young, America, Islamophobia and Terror, respectively. The distribution of word codes according to the single case model of Ribat magazine is similar to Altınoluk magazine, but the word code Türkiye is at the bottom in terms of frequency in this magazine. It is seen that Europe and America are at the top in both magazines. In Figure 13, the title of the magazine article in which the word Muslim is used with the highest frequency (240) in Ribat magazine is “Racist Structure in the French Police”.

The other most frequently used word is Europe. The magazine draws attention to Islamophobia in its article 'Rising racism in the West', in which the word Europe is used.

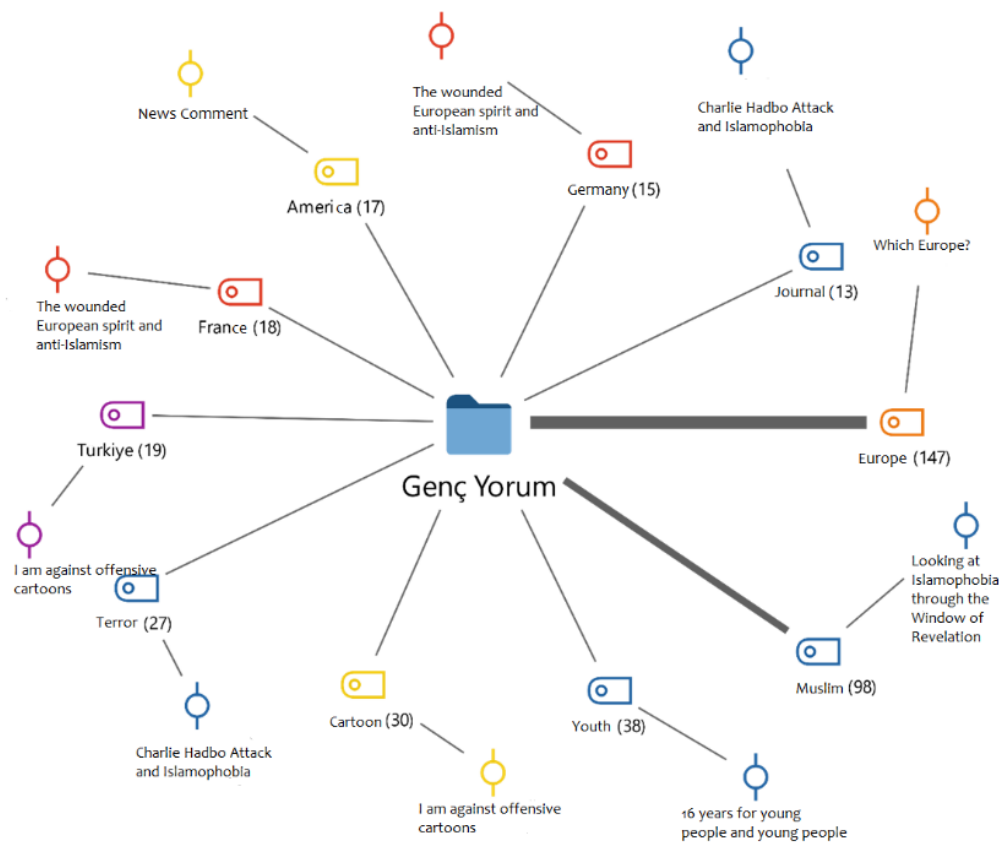


Figure 14. Genç Yorum Magazine Single Case Model Findings

When we look at the situation that emerged with the 10 most frequently used codes in the single case model of Genç Yorum magazine, it is seen that the most frequently used word code is Europe, followed by the word codes Muslim, Young, Cartoon, Terror, Türkiye, France, America, Germany and magazine, respectively.

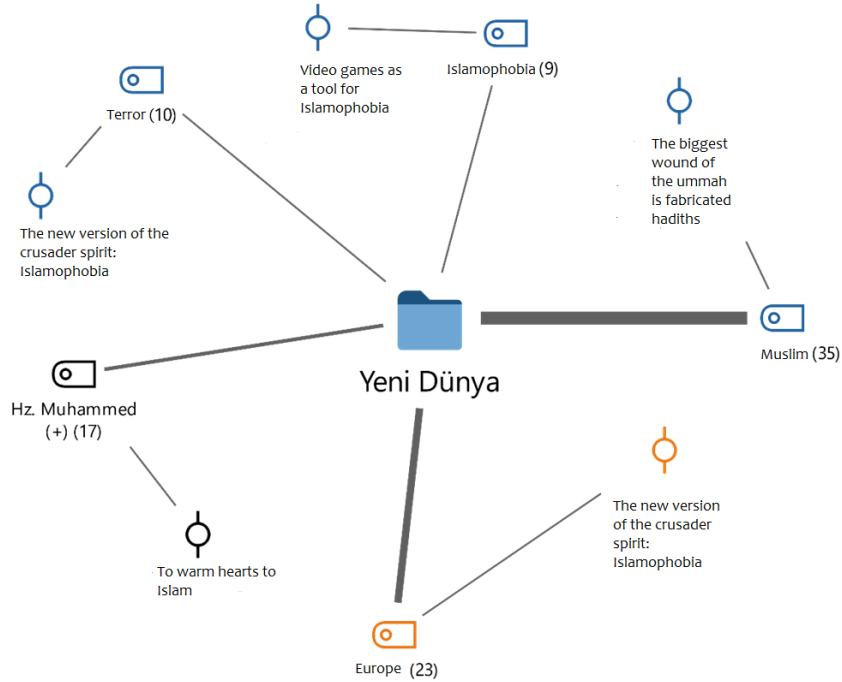


Figure 15. Yeni Dünya Magazine Single Case Model Findings

When we look at the single case model of the Yeni Dünya magazine, it is seen that the word code with the highest frequency in the table formed by the 5 most coded codes is the expression Muslim, as in other magazines. The word codes that follow this word code in order are Europe, Hz. Muhammad, Terror and Islamophobia.

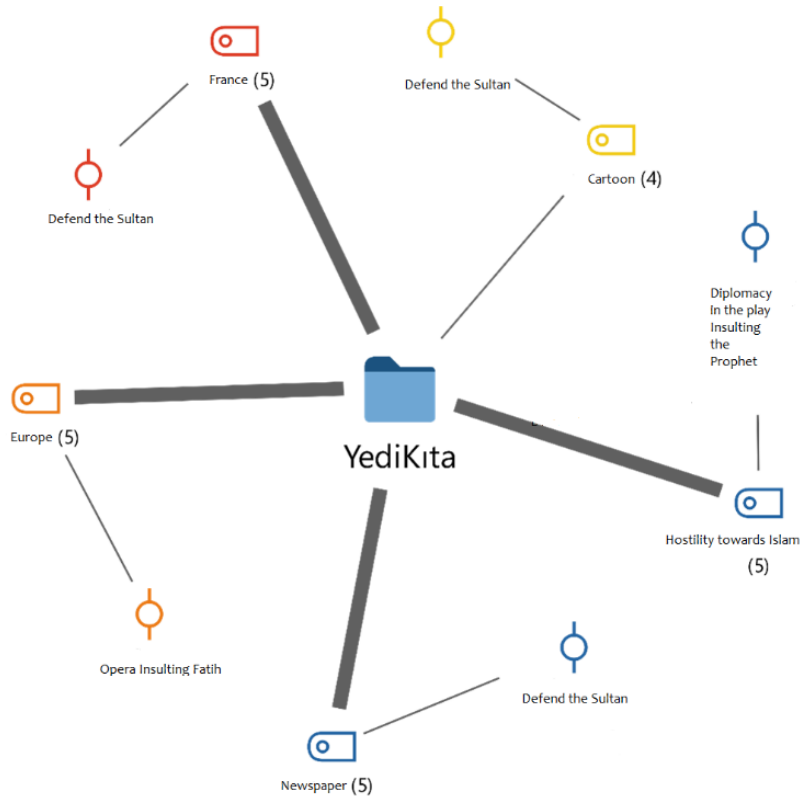


Figure 16. Yedi Kita Magazine Single Case Model Findings

Yedi Kita magazine is the only magazine that does not contain a word related to Islamophobia. Our research includes articles that correspond to hostility towards Islam in this context. Examining the results of the single case model using the coding created within this framework reveals that the most frequently occurring word codes are those related to hostility towards Islam, Europe, France, newspapers, and cartoons.

The expression hostility towards Islam, which is repeated five times, is shown in Figure 15 as “diplomatic success in the play insulting the Prophet”. The words newspaper, Europe, France also appear in the articles titled “Defending the Sultan” and “Opera Insulting the Fatih” with a frequency value of 5.

In Figure 15, it is seen that the expression cartoon is also used in the article titled “Defending the Sultan” with a frequency value of 4.

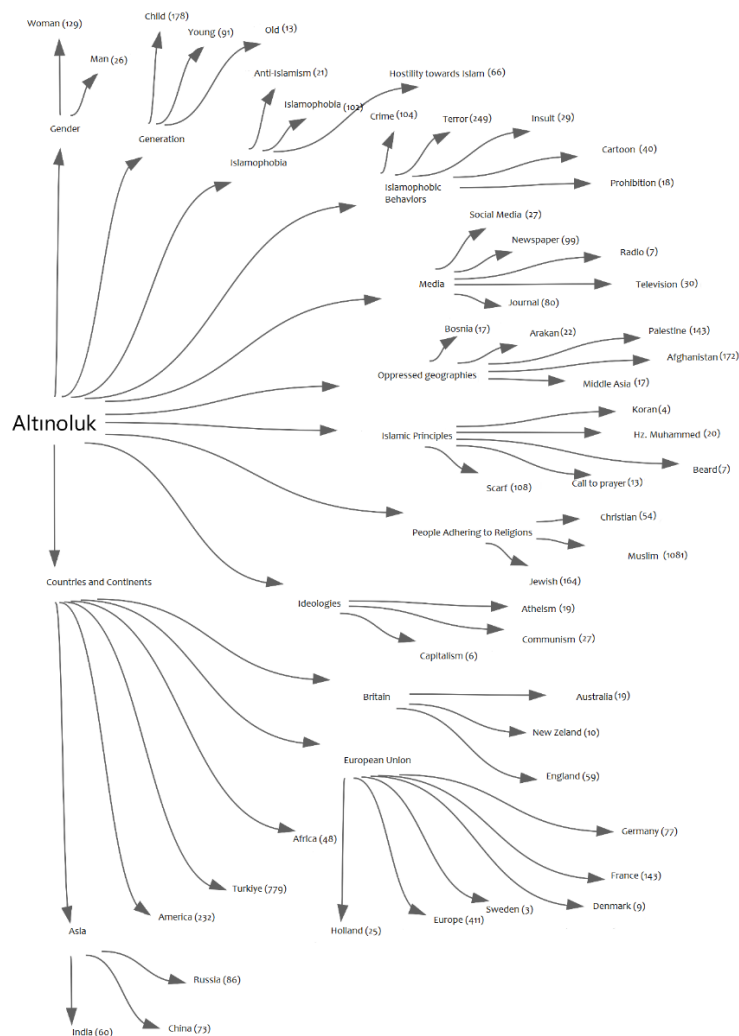


Figure 17. Altınoluk Magazine Single Case Model Code Hierarchy Frequency Findings

Figure 17 shows the Altınoluk magazine single case model code hierarchy table with frequency values. In this table, the codes are shown by the program in the context of the code hierarchy and with frequency values. The code hierarchy in this analysis is similar to other

magazines, only the frequency values differ or some coded words are not found in their own publications.

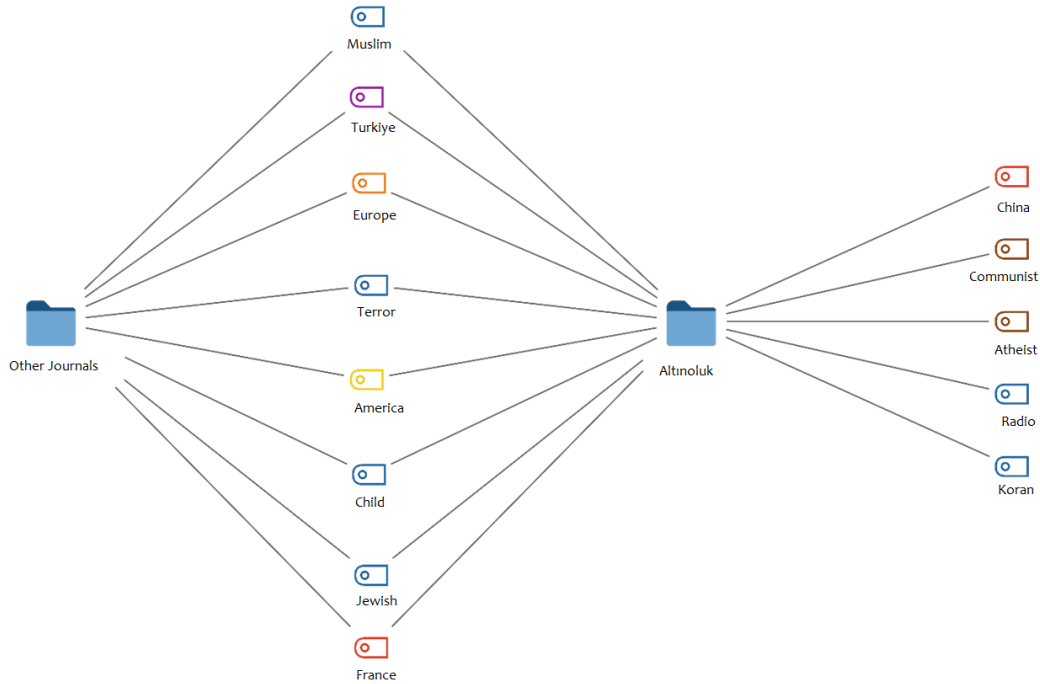


Figure 18. Two Case Model Findings Between Altınoluk and All Other Magazines

Figure 18 shows the analysis of the two-case model based on the comparison of the magazines. Consequently, we can identify the common and non-common codes within the magazines. When we take the Altınoluk magazine on one side of the model, since it has more publications than the other magazines, and all the publications of Yedi Kıta, Genç Yorum, Ribat, and Yeni Dünya magazines, which are the subjects of our research, on the other side, under the title of “Other Magazines,” it turns out that the codes in the Altınoluk magazine that are not in the other magazines are China, Communist, Atheist, Radio, and Quran.

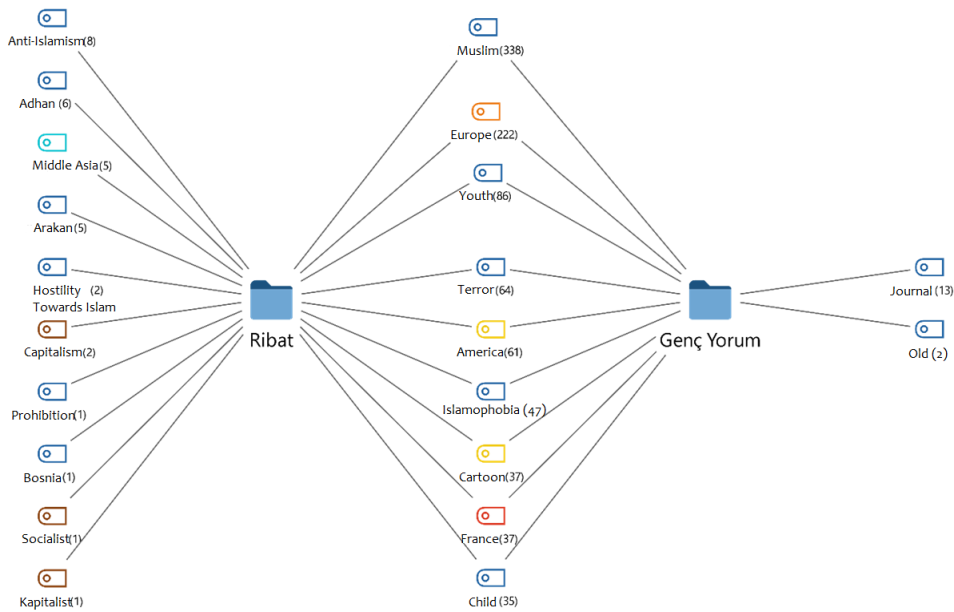


Figure 19. Findings of Two Case Models Between Ribat and Genç Yorum Magazine

When the Two Case Model table is examined between the magazines Ribat and Genç Yorum, which have similar numbers in terms of coding frequencies, it is revealed that there are only magazine and old codes in Genç Yorum but not in Ribat; while there are ten different codes in Ribat but not in Genç Yorum such as Islamophobia, Adhan, Central Asia, Arakan, Islamophobia, Capitalism, prohibition, Bosnia, socialist, capitalist.

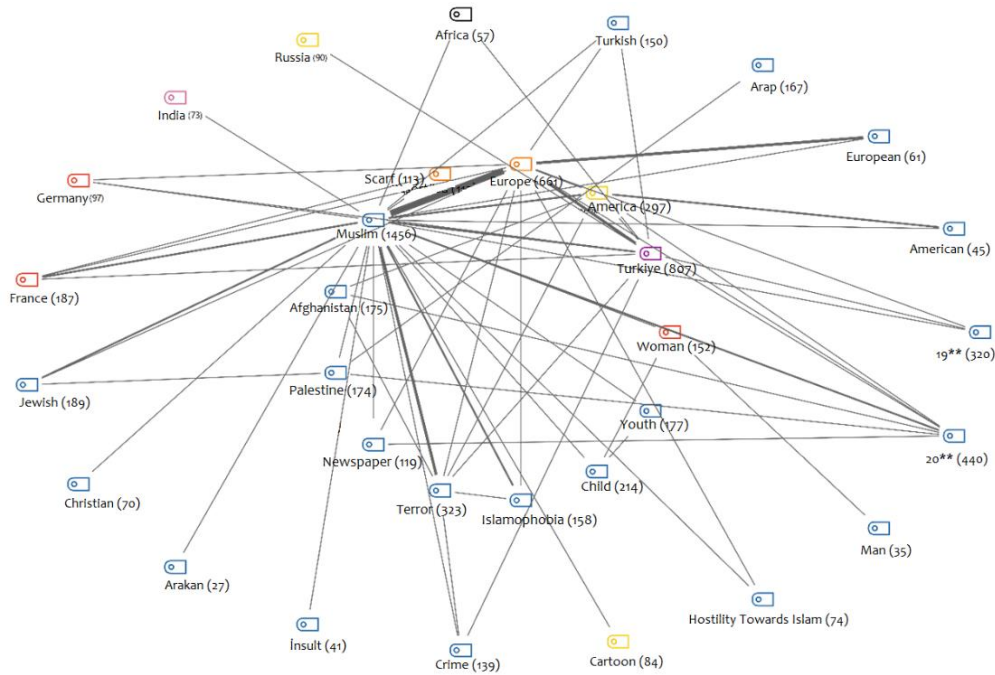


Figure 20. Code Co-occurrence Model Overlapping Codes Analysis

When we determine the minimum number of co-occurrences as 10 and create the model based on the line width that reflects the frequency of co-occurrences, Figure 20 presents the result. Figure 20 reveals the overlap model between all codes, yielding a mixed image; however, a simpler and more understandable analysis emerges (Figure 21) when we create a second model with a minimum number of co-occurrences set at 50. This analysis reveals a strong relationship between Muslims and Europe in the context of five magazines' publications on Islamophobia, and similarly, a strong relationship emerges between Europe and Türkiye.

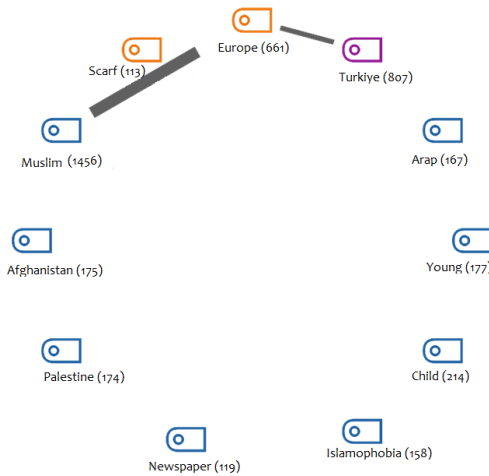


Figure 21. Code Co-occurrence Model Overlapping Codes Analysis



Figure 23 shows the coded section-based code sub-code section model scheme of how often the relevant codes occur in all documents in the publications of Altınoluk and Ribat magazine, which use the concept of Islamophobia the most. Figure 23 presents the incidents in which Islamophobia, primarily Islamophobia and its synonyms Islamophobia and Islamophobia, were mentioned in the Altınoluk and Ribat magazine, which use the concept of Islamophobia the most.

### Conclusion

Our research on the websites of Altınoluk, Ribat, Yeni Dünya, Yedi Kita and Genç Yorum magazines in the digital environment identified publications and articles related to Islamophobia. We found that the religious groups we studied, which are prominent in Türkiye with their institutions and media outlets, have embraced the digital transformation in magazine publishing and to this day publish all magazine issues online. We found that religious groups regularly and periodically share their magazine issues with their readers in a digital environment, either for a fee or for free.

We used the statistics programme Maxqda to look at the results of typing 'Islamophobia', 'Islamophobia' and 'anti-Islamism' into the magazines' search engines. The results showed that the magazine Altınoluk, which is published by the Nakşi religious group, has the most publications. The magazine Yedi Kita, which is published by the Suleymancı Religious Group, has the fewest publications.

It was determined that Yedi Kita magazine does not use the term Islamophobia in any of its publications. Despite numerous incidents of Islamophobia in Europe in recent times, the magazine did not publish any articles on this subject. The magazine's history-themed nature should be considered in this. We included the magazine in our research because its publications express hostility towards Islam. We were able to identify only a few articles in this context.

Genç Yorum was the only magazine that used the expression Islamophobia in large fonts on its cover. The magazine, emphasizing true Islam as the solution by sharing it with its readers in bolder and larger fonts on its cover, consistently published articles related to the subject in its content.

The research revealed a strong link between the term of Islamophobia and the terms and codes of Europe. The magazines evaluated their publications on Islamophobia by comparing them with events that took place in Europe. It also emerged from the magazines' publications that Islamophobia is a global problem. Our research is in line with Kawtar and Carmen's research as it mentions different countries, especially in Europe and globally, that are struggling with Islamophobia (Inman et al., 2012). Furthermore, our research shows that the term Muslim is one of the most frequently used terms in publications, a significant finding as it is directly related to the meaning of Islamophobia. The research also revealed the terms headscarf and cartoons, leading to the conclusion that these topics were the focus of the magazines' publications.

The two case model revealed that only the Altınoluk magazine regarding Islamophobia used the word "Quran" concerning Islamophobia. Especially in Europe, burning the Quran has recently attracted attention as an Islamophobic behavior. Interestingly, no publications on Islamophobia in magazines other than Altınoluk explore this topic.



The West attempts to combine the terms of Islam and terror. Magazines publishing on Islamophobia have demonstrated that they combine the terms of Islamophobia and terror to address this issue. Particularly in the publications of Altınoluk magazine, the conclusion that Islamophobia is an act of terror has emerged.

Magazines that focus on Islamophobia tend to focus more on women than on men, and on children more than on the young and old. While the headscarf bans have made the presence of Islamophobia in women more evident, the idea that Islamophobia and lack of faith will occur in future generations has also led to the frequent use of the concept of child in publications. The results of Inman and his friends' research (Inman et al., 2012) align with the emergence of the terms of child and Islamophobia in our study. Publications, particularly Altınoluk magazine, reveal the prevalence of this situation.

No publications with Islamophobia content have been found in magazines regarding the Uyghur Turks, where Islamophobia has been experienced very intensely for years. The Altınoluk magazine only used the terms Uyghur Turks and Islamophobia twice. We believe it would be significant to highlight the sensitivity towards Palestine and Afghanistan in publications about Uyghur Turks and their problems and Islamophobia. It was observed that the terms China, Atheist and Communist were not used in publications about Islamophobia in all of the magazines we included in our research, except for the Altınoluk magazine.

When examining the relationship between Islamophobia and political ideologies, the terms communism and socialism appeared in the majority of publications. Both ideologies appear to be in opposition to Islam and irreligion, suggesting a parallel situation. We found fewer publications using liberalism and capitalism, which appear to be relatively more moderate to Islam, than communism and socialism.

It was determined that in all of the Islamophobia publications of the magazines, no intensive study was carried out against the publications on Islamophobia in the New Media. It has been observed that the publications of the magazines on Islamophobia do not have sufficient sensitivity in addressing many Islamophobic behaviours that are widely seen especially in social media. However, today, social media feeds young people and children.

Although there is an undeniable need for magazines to educate their readers about combating Islamophobia, our research reveals the lack of comprehensive publications on this issue. The names of the magazines mentioned in our research have a global target and are expected to publish more actively on Islamophobia, which is discussed as a global problem. It is seen that magazines with global names such as Yedi Kita and Yeni Dünya do not publish enough publications and articles on Islamophobia, which is a global problem. Readers of these global names expect these magazines to carry out more collective and intensive studies on behalf of the religious groups they are affiliated with, within the framework of their own identities. The magazines examined in our research not only serve the religious group they are affiliated with, but also attract readers and followers from outside the country. It is known that Muslims and magazine readers with group and religious affiliations, especially in Europe, will want to see the publications of magazines they read with them while struggling against Islamophobia, of which they are also victims. All the magazines we analysed in our research function as the media platform of a particular religious group. Despite their international connections, the fact that these magazines do not publish in English is an

important deficiency in the fight against Islamophobia. It is a fact that articles and publications in a language other than Turkish should respond or react to Islamophobia, given that they are largely of foreign origin. The magazines exhibit a content that deviates significantly from this reality.

Charlie Hebdo, Europe's most popular humor magazine, has brought Islamophobia to the forefront of our discourse by publishing a cartoon about our Prophet. Despite all the provocative publications of Islamophobic magazines, it is seen that magazines published in Türkiye give or try to give rational answers. We can easily say that our research does not support Widiawati's (Widiawati, 2020, p. 173) definition of global radicalization in the media. No evidence of terrorism or vandalism against Islamophobic individuals was found in any of the magazines included in our research.

Most of the structures and organizations fighting against Islam are of Western origin. In our research, we analyzed the magazines of the religious groups we included in our sample. We should also investigate how much space the Diyanet Magazine, which has been the publication organ of the Presidency of Religious Affairs for many years, devotes to Islamophobia. We can complete this research by conducting another study on the extent to which Islamophobia is covered in the publications and magazines of religious groups in Europe and America.

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## Türkiye'deki İslamcı Dergilerde İslamofobi Gündemi: Bir İçerik Analizi

Mücahit Sami KÜÇÜKTIĞLI\*

### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

İslamofobi'ye karşı Türkiye'de var olan dini grupların kendi yayın organları olan dergilerde nasıl bir propaganda ile karşılık verdikleri, iletişim araştırmaları ve dinin temsili anlamında önemlidir. Dini gruplar, propaganda aracı olarak gazete, radyo, TV ve dergileri kullanmaktadır. Dini grupların 20. yüzyılda en fazla kullandıkları iletişim aracının dergi olduğu söylenebilir.

1980 sonrasında alternatif bir toplumsal, ekonomik ve siyasal sistem oluşturmayı hedefleyen çok sayıda dergi yayınlandığı söylenebilir. Diğer yandan internetin, dini gruplar başta olmak üzere devlet dışı aktörlere daha büyük kitleler ile buluşma şansı verdiği görülmüştür. Bu bağlamda web tabanlı dijital iletişim, dini gruplar için etkili bir mekân oluşturma ortamı sağlamaktadır. Tüm bu kurumsal yapıların izleyici ve dinleyicisinin takipçiye dönüştüğü dijital çağda, dini grupların internet hesaplarının varlığı söz konusudur.

İslamcı camiada farklı etkinliklere sahip pek çok dini grup (Nakşiler, Nurcular, Süleymancılar) varlık göstermektedir. Yahyalı Hasan Efendi çizgisi Safa Vakfı ve Yeni Dünya dergisiyle Kayseri şehri merkez olmak üzere çalışmalarına devam ettiği bilinmektedir. Abdullah Büyük, *Ribat* dergisi ile grubunu farklılaştırmıştır. Abdullah Büyük'ün himayesinde *Ribat* dergisi 1982 yılında yayın hayatına başlamış olup yayın hayatına devam etmektedir. Diğer yandan Erenköy dini grubu himayesinde *Altınoluk* dergisi 1986 Mart ayında ilk sayısını çıkarmıştır. Derginin başyazarlığını, Osman Nuri Topbaş yapmaktadır. Cumhuriyetle birlikte ortaya çıkan ve etkileri bugün de bir şekilde devam eden akımların başında hiç şüphesiz Nurculuk gelmektedir. Genç Yorum Dergisi, Nurculuğun önemli bir kolu olan Yeni Asya grubuna aittir. Günümüzde faaliyet gösteren diğer bir dini grup Süleymancılar. Süleymancılar ait olan Yedi Kıta dergisi, tarihi ve kültürel konuları işleyen bir dergidir.

### Araştırmanın Önemi, Hipotezi, Yöntem ve Sınırlılıkları

Araştırma, İslam'a saldırıların çok yoğun olduğu bir dönemde İslam adına yola çıktığını ifade eden İslami dini grupların bu karşıtlık ve düşmanlıklar ile ne ölçüde mücadele ettiğinin ortaya çıkartılması bakımından önemlidir.

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Araştırmanın hipotezi, tarihi olarak çok büyük geçmişe sahip İslam düşmanlığı ve son dönem adlandırılmasıyla İslamofobi ile mücadele kapsamında araştırmaya dahil edilen İslam inancı ile yakından ilgili dini gruplara ait dergilerin dijital içerikteki yayın ve makaleler ile yoğun çalıştıklarıdır.

Bu çalışmada aşağıdaki araştırma problemlerine cevaplar aranmıştır:

1. Dergiler İslamofobi ile ilgili ne kadar yayın yapmıştır?
2. En fazla hangi dergi İslamofobi ile ilgili yayın yapmıştır?
3. Dergilerin bu yayınları arasında fark var mıdır?
4. Dergilerin bu yayınlarında en fazla kullanılan kelimeler nelerdir?

Araştırmada, belirli bir etkinliğin niteliğini ortaya koyabilmek için nitel yöntem kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada Erenköy Cemaatine ait *Altınoluk* dergisi, Süleymanlılara ait *Yedi Kıta* dergisi, Kayseri Yahyalı Cemaatine ait *Yeni Dünya* Dergisi, Konya merkezli *Ribat* dergisi ve Yeni Asya Nur cemaatine ait *Genç Yorum* dergileri gösterge bilimsel analiz metodu ve içerik analizi ile incelenmiştir

Veri analizi aşamasında Maxqda 2020 istatistik programı kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada konu ile ilgili olan belirli kodlar belirlenmiş ve araştırmaya dahil edilmiştir.

Araştırmada verilerin toplanmasında özellikle *Altınoluk* ve *Ribat* dergileri için yıllık abonelik ücreti ödenerek verilere ancak ulaşılmıştır. Bütün dergilerin ilk sayılarından son sayılarına kadar tamamı analiz edilmiştir.

Araştırma, söz konusu dergiler ve bu dergilerde yer alan makaleler ile sınırlıdır. Daha derinlikli analiz yapılabilmesi için dergilerin ait olduğu grupların farklı internet siteleri ve sosyal medya uygulamalarının da araştırılması gerekmektedir ki bundan sonraki çalışmalar için bu mecralar önemli hale gelmektedir. Söz konusu sitelerde pek çok farklı dilde onlarca ücretsiz kitap bulunmaktadır. Bu kitapların detaylı bir analize tabi tutulması yerinde olacaktır. Araştırmada ayrıca Türkiye içinde meydana gelmiş İslamofobi ile ilgili tartışma ve konular mevzu edilmemiştir. Araştırmada, Avrupa ve Amerika merkezli, Türkiye dışında mevzubahis olan İslamofobi ile ilgili gündem ve tartışmalar üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır.

### Bulgular

Dergilerin isimlerinin Türkiye sınırlarını aşan bir içerik arz ettiği görülmüştür. *Altınoluk* dergisinin ismi, Kabe'nin üst köşesinde yer alan tarihi oluktan almıştır. Dergi, bütün Müslümanların Kabe'nin etrafında bir araya gelmesi ve orada ümmet ufkunun oluşması düşüncesinden yola çıkarak "Altınoluk'ta buluşalım" sloganıyla mekânlaştırılmıştır. *Yedi Kıta* dergi ismi dünyanın mevcut kıta sayısına işaret etmektedir. *Yeni Dünya* ismi de anlaşılacağı üzere global anlamda yeni bir dünyaya işaret etmektedir. *Ribat*, düşman saldırılarını önlemek için sınır boylarında nöbet tutmak anlamında Arapça kökenli bir kelime olarak dikkat çekerken, *Genç Yorum* ismi ise gençlerin yorumu anlamına gelecek basit ama genel bir mesaja sahiptir. Dergi isimlerinin analizi yapıldığında beş dergiden üçünün doğrudan global bir anlam ve hedef ifade ettiği kolayca anlaşılmaktadır. *Ribat* ve *Genç Yorum* dergilerini de yalın anlamları ile düşünersek bu dergi isimleri de global bir bakış açısına vurgu yaptıkları yorumu ortaya çıkabilir.

*Altınoluk* dergisi internet sitesinde İslamofobi kelimesi arama yapıldığında toplam 47 içeriğe ulaşılmaktadır. *Yeni Dünya* dergisinde 3 içeriğe ulaşılırken bu rakam *Ribat* dergisinde 16, *Genç Yorum* dergisinde 14 olmaktadır. *Yedi Kıta* dergisinde İslamofobi kelimesi ile ilgili herhangi bir yayına rast gelinmemiştir.

Dergilerin kapak görsel analizleri yapıldığında yokluk ve savaş görüntülerinin çoğunlukla kullanıldığı görülmektedir. İslamofobi kelimesinin dergilerin ait oldukları internet siteleri arama butonlarına yazılması ile elde edilen yayınlar içerik analizi ve frekans tabloları Maxqda 2020 istatistik programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. İslamofobi ifadesinin bulunmadığı dergilerde İslam karşıtlığı ve İslam düşmanlığı ifadeleri taranmıştır ve elde edilen veriler analiz edilmiştir.

Dergilerin İslamofobi, İslam düşmanlığı ve İslam karşıtlığı ifadeleri, dergilerin internet siteleri arama motorlarında yazıldığına çıkan sonuçlara göre en fazla İslamofobi ifadesini 102 defa *Altınoluk* dergisinin kullandığı görülürken bunu sırasıyla 42 kez kullanan *Ribat*, 9 kez kullanan *Yeni Dünya*, 5 kez kullanan *Genç Yorum* dergileri takip etmektedir. *Yedi Kıta* dergisinde İslamofobi ile ilgili bir ifadeye rastlanılmamıştır.

İslamofobik davranışlar, karikatür, terör, suç, hakaret, küçük düşürme, aşağılama, yasaklama olarak kodlama yapıldığında bu kodlardan terör ifadesinin en fazla frekansa sahip kelime olduğu görülmektedir. Bu kavramın en fazla *Altınoluk* dergisi tarafından kullanıldığı görülmektedir.

Cinsiyete dayalı kodlar ile dergi yayınları arasında ayrıca nesil ile dergi yayınları arasında sembol büyüklüğü hesaplaması ile kod matris tarayıcısı sonuçlarına bakıldığında cinsiyet bağlamında en fazla yayının kadınlar için yapıldığı görülürken, nesiller arasında ise en fazla kodlamaya dair yayının çocuk kelimeleri ile yapıldığı ortaya çıkmıştır.

İslamofobi içerikli yayınlarda, en fazla frekansa sahip kodun “başörtüsü” olduğu görülmektedir. Toplamda 113 frekansa sahip bu kodu sırasıyla, 54 ile Hz. Muhammed, 20 ile Ezan, 8 ile Sakal ve 4 ile Kuran kodları takip ettiği görülmektedir.

Kod matris tarayıcısı ile dergi yayınlarında geçen ülke ve kıtalar ile dergi yayınları matrisine bakıldığında en fazla kullanılan frekansın Avrupa Birliği olduğu görülürken bunu Türkiye, Amerika, Asya, Britanya ve Afrika'nın takip ettiği görülmektedir.

İki Vaka Modeli dergilerin kıyaslanmasına dayanmaktadır. *Altınoluk* dergisinde olup diğer dergilerde bulunmayan kodların Çin, Komünist, Ateist, Radyo ve Kuran olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır.

Kod Birlikte Oluşma Modeli Çakışan Kodlar analize Müslüman ile Avrupa arasında güçlü bir ilişki ve yine Avrupa ile Türkiye arasında güçlü bir ilişki ortaya çıktığı görülmektedir.

Araştırma Kelime Bulutuna göre en çok kullanılan kelimenin İslam olduğu görülürken bunu Türkiye, Avrupa, Müslüman, Batı, ABD kelimelerinin takip ettiği görülmektedir.

## Sonuç

Türkiye’de kurumları ve medya organları ile güçlü olan araştırmamıza konu edindiğimiz dini grupların dergi yayıncılığında dijital dönüşümü sağladıkları ve dergilerin bugüne kadarki sayılarının tamamını internette paylaşımına açtıkları tespit edilmiştir. Dini grupların düzenli ve periyodik bir biçimde dergi sayılarını okurları ile ücretli veya ücretsiz olarak dijital ortamda paylaştıkları görülmüştür.

Araştırmamızda İslamofobi, İslam Düşmanlığı ve İslam karşıtlığı terimlerinin, dergilerin arama motorlarında yazılması ile elde edilen sonuçlar üzerinde Maxqda istatistik programı ile gerçekleştirilen analizler sonucunda en fazla yayına Nakşi Dini Grubunun himayesinde olan *Altınoluk* dergisinin sahip olduğu, en az yayına sahip olan derginin ise Süleymancı Dini Grubuna ait *Yedi Kıta* dergisi olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır.

*Yedi Kıta* dergisinin hiçbir yayınında İslamofobi ifadesini kullanmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Bunda derginin tarih temalı olmasının etkisi düşünülmelidir. İslamofobi ifadesini büyük puntolar ile derginin kapağında kullanan tek dergi *Genç Yorum* olmuştur.

Batı'da İslam kavramı ile terör kavramı bir araya getirilmek istenmektedir. Dergilerin İslamofobi yayınlarında ise adeta buna bir cevap niteliğinde İslamofobi ile Terör kavramlarının bir arada kullanıldığı ortaya çıkmıştır.

#### **Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

*The research was conducted by a single author.*

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

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## Islamophobia in Japan: Possibilities and Controversies

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Hatice ACAR\*\*

### Abstract

The impact of socio-political developments on a global scale has led to an increased effectiveness of the counter-theological perspective on religions and cultures in print and broadcast media, especially since the early modern period. Even in regions where there has been no significant historical or religious interaction, the influence and imprint of different religious traditions on a particular religion can be discerned. In this context, theological or religious negative approaches to Islam in Japan can be evaluated within the framework of an influence that emerged in the West with modernity and has its roots in Christian religious traditions. Conversely, an examination of the historical development of Islam in Japan reveals that the country's multicultural and religiously pluralistic structure precludes the possibility of any religious group being perceived negatively on a collective level. However, it is important to acknowledge that the process of Western-style modernisation has occasionally led to negative cultural perceptions of other religions within Western societies. Considering the historical development of Islam in Japan, the country's multicultural and religiously pluralistic structure renders the collective portrayal of any religion as negative implausible. Consequently, the potential for Islamophobia in Japan today and the grounds for the discussions around it continue in this context.

**Keywords:** History of Religions, Japan, Islam, Japanese Islam, Islamophobia

## Japonya'da İslamofobi: İmkân ve Tartışmalar

### Öz

Dünyada sosyo-siyasî gelişmelerin etkisiyle, erken modern dönemde başlayan yazılı ve görsel yayınların, dinlere ve kültürlere yönelik karşı-teolojik bakış açısının etkinliğinde bir artış gözlemlenmektedir. Tarihî ve dinî olarak ciddi bir etkileşimin bulunmadığı bölgelerde dahi belirli bir dine yönelik farklı dinî geleneklerin bakış açılarının etki ve izleri görülebilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Japonya'da İslâm'a yönelik teolojik veya dinî nitelikteki negatif yaklaşımlar, Batı'da modern dönemle birlikte ortaya çıkan ve kökleri Hristiyan dinî geleneklerine dayanan bir etki çerçevesinde değerlendirilebilir. Öte yandan İslâm'ın Japonya'daki dinî tarihi dikkate alındığında, ülkenin çok kültürlü ve dinî çoğulcu yapısı, herhangi bir dinin varlığının kolektif anlamda olumsuz bir imaja sahip olmasını mümkün kılmamaktadır. Bununla birlikte tarihi süreçte Batı tipi modernleşme, beraberinde Batı kültürünün diğer dinlere yönelik olumsuz-kültürel bakışını da beraberinde getirmiştir. Ancak İslâm, toplumsal dinî zeminde faaliyet alanı bulmuş ve Japon toplumu açısından farklı-olumlu dinî bir değer olarak görülmüştür. Günümüzde Japonya'da İslamofobi'nin imkânı ve etrafındaki tartışmaların zemininin bu bağlamda sürdürüğü söylenebilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dinler Tarihi, Japonya, İslâm, Japon İslâmı, İslamofobi

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## Introduction

The current estimate of the Muslim population in Japan is approximately 190,000. However, it is anticipated that the number of Muslims visiting or residing in Japan will increase in the future. While research has been conducted on the development of the Muslim community in Japan, there has been limited discourse on perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan. (Yamagata, 2019, p.1). The history of the Muslim community in Japan is inextricably linked to Japan's opening to the West following the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the subsequent modernisation process, which resulted in a significant influx of foreign individuals. Indeed, the history of the Muslim community in Japan is inextricably linked to the broader history of Japan, which refers to its relationship with the West. The initial cohort of Muslim immigrants was predominantly comprised of merchants. In the early twentieth century, representatives of the Ottoman Empire and other Muslim countries (Egypt, Iran) established diplomatic and trade relations with Japan. Following the Second World War, there was a notable increase in the number of Muslim workers immigrating to Japan, which contributed to the gradual growth of Muslim communities in the country. The contemporary Muslim community in Japan is comprised of individuals from a diverse array of ethnic and national backgrounds, including those of Indonesian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Turkish, and other Middle Eastern and South Asian origin. In this regard, Japan is exhibiting an enhanced capacity for multicultural coexistence. The term *tabunka kyōsei*, which translates as "multicultural life", has become a widely used term in Japanese society. The popular understanding of the term has been largely shaped by its adoption by the government, particularly local municipalities, as a policy to deal with the growing number of immigrants. In this context, it is perceived as an optimal state of "coexistence" between Japanese and non-Japanese individuals within local communities (Okai & Takahashi, 2023, p. 268).

In order to meet the religious and social needs of the Muslim community, mosques and Islamic centres have been constructed in Japan. With regard to perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in Japan, there is a paucity of evidence to suggest an increase in negative attitudes. Conversely, Japan is perceived as a welcoming environment for Muslims (Komai, 2001, p. 80). While there are occasional examples of surveillance and conservative activism, these do not reflect specific discriminatory policies towards Muslims. While media portrayals of Muslims in Japan are generally neutral and informative, negative perceptions do occasionally emerge as a result of events such as terrorist attacks. However, this is not a common phenomenon in mainstream media portrayals. (Takahashi, 2021, p. 174).

This study aims to examine perceptions of Islam in Japan in the context of historical developments and to identify factors that contribute to the potential for Islamophobia, particularly in the contemporary era. The study includes an examination of the position of Islam in the context of the socio-religious dynamics of Japanese society, as well as an examination of perspectives on other religions. Using historical and phenomenological comparative methods specific to the discipline of the history of religions, the study analyses the perception of Islam in the socio-cultural context of Japan and the factors that shape this perception. In this context, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing an analytical perspective and a basis for further research on the phenomenon of Islamophobia in Japan.

## 1. Muslim-Japanese Relations in Japan

During the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), Japan pursued a policy of 'national isolation', which effectively cut the country off from the rest of the world. Towards the conclusion of this period, however, Japan initiated direct diplomatic negotiations with foreign countries, particularly those in the West. Concurrently, the reopening of Japan to the international community in 1853 resulted in the arrival of Western traders. It is thought that the Japanese were introduced to Islam during this period through commercial interactions with India, China and Russia. They were cognizant of Islam as a religion and its geographical reach. Nevertheless, the extant evidence pertaining to Islam in Japan remains inconclusive. Furthermore, there is a paucity of documentation concerning the extent and consequences of these interactions (Levent, 2020, p. 165). Conversely, some scholars posit that Japan and Muslims may have engaged in commercial activities as early as the 8th century AD. These contacts occurred along the renowned Silk Road, which linked the Middle East, Central Asia and East Asia (Fathil & Fathil, 2011, p. 132).

Moreover, it had an impact on Japan's geopolitical outlook, prompting the Japanese military to regard the Silk Road regions as a prospective buffer zone against the Russian and potentially Chinese empires (Esenbel, 2017, p.11). The Silk Road route necessitated traversing Egypt, which was then under Ottoman control, via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. During their time in Egypt, the Japanese observed the existence of mixed courts (Levent, 2020, p. 165). Since the early 1900s, the presence of Muslim missionary activity in Japan has been limited to the individual efforts of Muslims from various countries, especially Indian Muslim merchants. The dearth of substantial, meticulously documented missionary activities during this era has rendered their incorporation into the historical record a challenging endeavor (Sat, 2018, p. 115). Islam's initial penetration into Japan occurred through diplomatic relations with Muslim countries, in addition to commercial interactions. The initial notable documented contact transpired following the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century (Anis, 1998, p.331).

### 1.1. First Period (1890-1947)

The Meiji period (1868-1912) was a time when Japan initiated the process of modernisation, with significant integration of Western influences into the domestic landscape of the country in the political, economic and social spheres (Meyer, 2022, p. 164). During this period, a number of initiatives were launched by European missionaries with the objective of disseminating Christianity in Japan. In addition to their religious activities, the missionaries were also engaged in commercial, political and social pursuits. During this period, Christian missionaries instructed the Japanese in the tenets of Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism from a Christian theological perspective (Teeuwen, 2017 p. 43). The missionaries were principally active in port cities such as Nagasaki. A pamphlet distributed in Nagasaki, entitled "Nagasaki Rumours - The Story of Satanic Doctrine", was designed to alert the public to the increasing activities of the missionaries. This booklet identified Islam as "the religion of Muhammad" in conjunction with Western religions (Kocalan, 2021, p. 62). Meanwhile, the Life of the Prophet Muhammad was translated into Japanese in 1877, which facilitated the integration of Islam into Japanese intellectual discourse (Anis, 1998, p. 331). However, Western sources portrayed Islam as a militant religion spread by the sword, which created prejudice against Islam (Esenbel, 2011, p. 59).



Japan established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, these interactions were predominantly limited to the realms of politics and strategy. These relations were shaped by the Ottoman Empire's efforts to increase its influence in Asia and Japan's desire to pursue a balanced foreign policy against the Western powers (see Kuşçulu & Karaoğlu, 2022). The inaugural phase of diplomatic relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire commenced with the visit of Prince Komatsunomiya Akihito to Istanbul in 1887. Akihito's visit to Istanbul served to increase the Ottoman Empire's interest in Japan and to foster a more cordial relationship between the two countries. In 1889, Sultan Abdülhamid II dispatched the frigate Ertuğrul to Japan with the objective of presenting a medal to the Japanese Emperor Meiji. The objective of this diplomatic mission was to reinforce the bonds of friendship and diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Japan. However, in September 1891, the frigate Ertuğrul was sunk by a typhoon off the coast of Wakayama Prefecture. The disaster resulted in the deaths of over 500 Ottoman sailors, with only 69 survivors. The Japanese warships Hiei and Kongo were dispatched to retrieve the survivors, who were subsequently conveyed back to Istanbul. The sinking of the Ertuğrul precipitated a marked intensification of relations between Japan and the Ottoman Empire, reinforcing the bond between the two countries. In 1891, a delegation from Japan was dispatched to Istanbul with the survivors of the incident (Levent, 2020, p.166).

The journalist 野田 正太郎 Shōtarō Noda (1868-1904), who was employed by the *Jiji Shinpō*, converted to Islam as a consequence of his participation in the team that visited Istanbul. Shōtarō Noda was the inaugural Japanese Muslim. He subsequently adopted the name Abdulhalim. Additionally, he gained insight into Islamic and Ottoman history (Misawa & Akçadağ, 2007, p. 98). Nevertheless, historical evidence suggests that he repudiated his Islamic faith upon his return to Japan in 1893, following a two-year sojourn in Istanbul. In contrast, Yamaoka Kotaro was the first Japanese individual to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. He served as a Russian translator during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Subsequently, he was commissioned by the Japanese military authorities to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. At that time, he was not a Muslim. However, while serving in Mumbai, India, he underwent a religious conversion to Islam after learning from fellow Muslims that non-Muslims were forbidden to enter Mecca (Misawa, 2011, p. 122). A conversion to Islam is indicative of a comprehensive understanding of the religion, including the Five Pillars of Islam and the Six Pillars of Faith. However, Yamaoka interpreted the phrase "Allahu Akbar", which translates as "Allah is the greatest", as "Amaterasu Ōmikami". This interpretation demonstrates that Allah is identified with Shinto deities (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 176).

Tanaka Ippei, a Muslim during this period, underwent a conversion to Islam while in China and even undertook the translation of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang Zhisheng Shilu* (The True Biography of the Last Islamic Prophet) into Japanese. Tanaka's identification of Allah with the Shinto god Ame no Minakanushi (Heavenly Sovereign) represents a divergence from Yamaoka's approach as early as 1925. He advanced the proposition that the Japanese spirit was compatible with Islam (Krämer, 2014, p. 624). During his pilgrimage to Mecca, he became aware of the concept of syncretism between Shintoism and Islam. He advanced the idea that Shintoism, Buddhism, and Islam could coexist peacefully, establishing links between these religions and Confucianism. Tanaka's outlook was influenced by two seminal traditions: Japanese Shinbutsu Shūgō (Shinto-Buddhist syncretism) and Chinese Kai-ju or Hui-ru (Islamic Confucianism) (Misawa, 2011, p. 124).

Ariga Amado (Ahmed) (1868-1946) underwent a conversion to Islam in India at the age of twenty-five. Similarly to Yamaoka and Tanaka, Ariga advocated a form of cultural nationalism that integrated pan-Asianism with a religious mission. In 1933, he advanced the proposition that Japan should "conquer the world" through Islam, proposing that Islam was the most suitable religion for the Japanese spirit of 大和魂 (Yamato Damashii). At that time, the religious environment in Japan was characterised by the prevalence of folk beliefs. The prevailing religious orientation was reflected in Japan-specific sects of Buddhism, including Zen, Nichiren and Shingon. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of Buddhist monks dedicated themselves to theoretical pursuits, thereby neglecting the practice of ritual. Ariga considered the principle of non-violence espoused by Buddhism to be incongruous with the national character of Japan and incompatible with the teachings of Christianity. Consequently, he proposed Islam as a more suitable choice, citing its disapproval of the wars of the time and its lack of fear of death. Ariga sought to disseminate Islam in Japan, translate the Qur'an and establish an organisation of Japanese Muslims to lead the global Muslim population. He perceived this as an opportunity for Japan to assume a leadership role among the yellow race, that is to say, the East Asian countries (in contrast to the white race – in contrast to the West), and for the Imperial House to be held in high esteem by all the nations of the yellow race. Ariga's critique of religion did not extend to Shintoism, which he characterised as an essentially pagan sect centred on the imperial dynasty and national heroes. Ariga identified a typological parallel between Allah and the Shinto deity Ame no Minakanushi. This syncretic approach was reflected in the 1938 translation of the Qur'an, which drew on earlier European translations and used the term "Great God" to translate Allah. Prior to 1945, however, Shinto interpretations of Islam and the Qur'an were not prevalent in Japan. Conversely, a Buddhist-inspired interpretation of Islam gained greater currency in Japanese culture. This phenomenon can be observed in the works of Ōkawa Shūmei and Izutsu Toshihiko (Krämer, 2014, p. 626).

The period following the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 represents a significant juncture in Japan's engagement with Muslim communities. Information derived from intelligence and travel reports, in conjunction with the establishment of strategic alliances with Uighurs and Chinese Muslims, constituted the foundation of Japan's pan-Asian ideology. The concepts of kokutai (national policy) and hakkō ichiū (universal brotherhood) are of great importance in the context of Japanese nationalism and have had a central influence on the political and ideological development of modern Japan. These concepts have served to shape the foundations of Japan's national identity and foreign policy, with an emphasis on the uniqueness and superiority of Japanese society and state (Kimitada, 2007, p. 22). In particular, the concepts under discussion are Pan-Islamism, which posits the unification of the Asian continent under a single administration, and Japan's leading position within the scope of the Greater Asia Policy (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 173). The triumph in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 served to further reinforce Japan's standing in the Islamic world, augmenting its influence and intensifying intercultural ties. Indeed, Japan's Asian strategy in the early 20th century was aligned with its efforts to cultivate alliances with anti-Western movements in Asia and to capitalise on the geopolitical opportunities presented by ethno-religious conflicts in these regions. The establishment of organisations such as the Asiatic League demonstrated Japan's imperial aspirations, reflecting a comprehensive strategy to expand its regional and global influence. Accordingly, the objective was to establish the Muslim population of Asia as a unified community under Japanese governance (Dündar, 2006, p. 95). Japan's realisation of this policy was made possible by the Ottoman Empire and the institution of the caliphate. Indeed, during the first

half of the 20th century in Japan, Islam was integrated with Japanese religious traditions, influencing the development of Pan-Asian ideology (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 173).

The initial Muslim communities in Japan were constituted by Turkish immigrants who settled in the country, predominantly in Tokyo and Kobe. Moreover, a contingent of Muslim merchants from India and other regions arrived in Kobe and proceeded to establish a Muslim community there. In 1935, the Kobe Mosque was constructed with the assistance of Indian merchants. This was preceded by the establishment of the Tokyo Mosque by the Muslim community in Tokyo in 1938. Despite the relatively small number of non-Japanese Muslims in both Kobe and Tokyo, the establishment of the Kobe Mosque and the Tokyo Mosque became emblematic of the presence of Islam and Muslims in Japan (Nouh, 2012, p. 3).

The phenomenon can be traced to the arrival of hundreds of Turkmen, Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and other Turkic-Tatar Muslim refugees from Central Asia and Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) during the First World War (1914-1918). During the First World War, there was a notable expansion and development of Islamic organisations and activities in Japan. The military government established organisations and research centres with the specific purpose of studying Islam and Muslim countries. This was due to the presence of sizeable Muslim communities in China and Southeast Asia, which were occupied by the Japanese military. In total, over one hundred books and journals on Islam were published in Japan between 1935 and 1943. In 1952, the inaugural Islamic organisation in Japan, the Japan Muslim Association, was established, marking a pivotal moment in the dissemination of Islam in Japan (Anis, 1998, p. 331).

As a result of a combination of historical and geographical factors, including political relations with China and Russia, the effects of World War I, and Japan's geographical remoteness, it was only in the early 20th century that Islam was officially recognized as a religion in Japan. Until the end of the 20th century, only a modest proportion of the Japanese population had the opportunity to interact with Muslims, which resulted in a lack of knowledge and understanding of Islam and Muslims in Japan. This presented a considerable obstacle to the advancement and acceptance of Islam in Japan (Yulita & Ong, 2019, p. 52). Subsequently, the Japanese government implemented a colonial policy in northwestern China and later in Southeast Asia. Prior to and throughout the First World War (1914-1918), individuals of Japanese descent who were not Muslim promoted Islam as a means of advancing the Japanese government's Islamic policy. It can be argued that this period saw the spread of Islam by non-Muslim Japanese individuals. Indeed, the propagation of Islam was endorsed as a state policy.

Consequently, a considerable number of bureaucrats, politicians and military personnel within the Japanese government converted to Islam. Conversely, the acceptance of Islam as a religion was not as prevalent among the general population as it was among the government. In 1939, at a time when the relationship between Asianism and Islam was being debated in the context of opposition to communism and the Soviet Union, a new religious law (宗教団体法, Shūkyō dantai hō) was being considered in the Diet. The question was whether Islam should be recognised as one of Japan's official religions, alongside Buddhism, Shinto and Christianity. In fact, Islam was not considered a religion per se. Rather, it was seen as the basis for an international movement capable of countering communism (Esenbel, 2011, p. 11). However, since the conclusion of the First World War, Japanese Muslims have been attempting to disseminate the tenets of Islam in Japan without

the influence of external entities. The first reason is that Islam is presented to Japanese society as a Japanese policy; the second reason is that Islam is perceived as a foreign religion; and the third reason is that there are theological issues. It can be argued that the theological principles of Islam are challenging to comprehend within the context of Japanese religious and cultural traditions. The translated works on Islam from Western sources that have been made available in Japanese since the 1870s exhibit certain deficiencies. The initial issue is that translations from European languages into Japanese, as opposed to those from the original Arabic, impede an accurate comprehension of Islam. Consequently, Sakamoto's 1899 biography portrays the Prophet Muhammad as a hero who literally carried the Qur'an in his left hand and a sword in his right. A second negative aspect is that the concepts employed in the translations of the Christian deity are considered to be valid for Islam. In the context of Islamic doctrine, the term 'deity' is considered to be a valid concept within the Islamic tradition. This is evidenced by the fact that the Arabic word 'Allah' was translated into Japanese as 'Kami', which is the term used for God among Japanese Christians at the time. This rendered the concept of Allah as a universal one. However, it is also important to note that the term was also used to refer to Shinto deities and was elucidated in Buddhist religious terms (Krämer, 2014, p. 621).

Until the 1890s, the assessment of Islam was conducted from a position of neutrality. During this period, Islam was perceived as a religion that was contingent on political and social circumstances, and thus was regarded as an artificial religion. However, it is evident that between 1890 and 1950, there was a shift in the evaluation of Islam from a neutral to a negative stance, influenced by translated and copyrighted works. In this context, it can be argued that the foundations of Islamophobic thinking about Islam in Japan were established during this period. Conversely, Japan has been highly active and successful in developing Islamic studies. As a non-Western society, Japan offered an alternative perspective to Western Orientalism and was not involved in colonialism in the Muslim world (Buskens, 2016, p. 259). The Institute for the Study of the Islamic World (Kaikyoken Kenkyujo), established in Japan in 1938, conducted significant academic research on the Islamic world. The Institute's most notable publication is the academic journal *Kaikyoken*, which was established with the aim of publishing research on the Islamic world. The journal offers a critical perspective on Western centrism and colonialism (see Suemori, 2019).

### 1.2. Second Period (1947-2001)

In the period preceding and extending throughout the Second World War, individuals of non-Muslim Japanese nationality played a role in the promotion of Islamic political ideologies. However, following the conclusion of the Second World War, Japanese Muslims were compelled to pursue the dissemination of Islamic teachings in Japan on a civil and autonomous basis, without the benefit of state support. At that time, Japanese Muslims were primarily concerned with the socio-political aspects of Islam, rather than its religious principles. Consequently, the foundations of Islam in Japan were established in collaboration with foreign Muslims who were engaged in studies or employment in Japan at the time. Similarly, the 1973 oil crisis resulted in an increase in the number of Japanese Muslims, largely due to an influx of individuals employed in the oil industry in the Middle East and those pursuing studies in Islamic countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The formation of a formally recognised Muslim community in Japan became evident as young Japanese began to travel to Arab and other Muslim countries (Anis, 1998, p. 332).

Since then, the growth of the Muslim population in Japan and the situation of migrant workers has been particularly evident, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, Japan's economic growth and labour needs created opportunities for migrant workers from Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran. These migrants played an important role in the Japanese economy, particularly in sectors such as construction and manufacturing (Yamagata, 2019, p. 6).

The conclusion of the Second World War marked the resurgence of academic inquiry in Japan. However, this process of revival remained subject to the residual effects of the war and the potential for changes in foreign policy. In particular, Japan's international relations and foreign policy exerted a significant influence on the course and scope of academic research in the post-war period. The Institute of Islamic World Studies, which had been temporarily suspended during the war, resumed its research activities on the Islamic world. The Institute of Islamic World Studies continued its mission of conducting objective and unbiased research on the Islamic world (Suemori, 2019).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a distinctive Islamic organisation, the Japanese Islamic Congress (JIC), emerged as a notable phenomenon in the history of Islam in Japan. The group was successful in converting approximately 1,000 Japanese individuals to Islam within a relatively short period of time (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 173). In the 1980s, the JIC emerged as a potential new religious movement in Japan, combining Islamic and Buddhist concepts and engaging with the wider society. Subsequently, the JIC experienced a period of rapid growth, reaching a membership of over 50,000 in the 1980s. This was a notable achievement for an Islamic organisation in Japan, establishing the JIC as one of the largest Islamic organisations in the country. The JIC fostered connections with Muslim-majority countries and prominent figures in Japan, engaging in a range of activities. The majority of these activities were concentrated in the medical and political fields (Obuse, 2017, p. 242).

In this process, a movement designated as "Japanese Islam" emerged, founded upon the tenets of "Mahayana Islam." In his publication, *The Religion of Islam*, Haruo Abe, the leader of the Nihon Ishuramu Kyodan (Japanese Islamic Movement), draws a comparison between the characteristics of this ideology and those of Hinayana Buddhism. Abe posits that both Mahayana and Hinayana possess intrinsic values, yet that Hinayana is more susceptible to stagnation and has a more circumscribed universal scope. He further postulates that there may be an inherent proclivity towards Hinayana Buddhism among Muslim communities. Abe expresses concern that Japanese Muslims unduly emphasise the formal aspects of Islamic doctrine (Karaoğlu, 2023, p. 178).

In the late 1980s, Islamic society in Japan underwent a significant process of change. This occurred concurrently with Japan's accelerated economic expansion and the influx of foreign individuals seeking economic advancement. Furthermore, a notable number of Muslims from a variety of Islamic countries relocated to Japan. Of these countries, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh were particularly prominent. This was due to the fact that visas were not required for entry into Japan from these countries at that time. It was not uncommon for foreign Muslims who migrated to Japan as part of the labour force to remain in the country for an extended period of time. The growth of the Muslim population in Japan has also created opportunities for many Japanese people to gain insight into Islamic teachings. The precise number of Japanese Muslims is unclear; however,

there has been a gradual increase in the number of Japanese individuals converting to Islam. These conversions can be classified into two principal categories. The initial cohort is comprised primarily of male individuals who have developed an understanding of Islamic culture through the pursuit of Islamic studies or the study of the Arabic language, or through direct contact with Muslims while travelling, studying or working in Islamic countries. The second group is comprised primarily of women who have married foreign Muslims. This group constitutes the majority of Muslim women in Japan. The children of these marriages are considered to be Muslim by birth, resulting in an increase in the Muslim population in Japan (Sakurai, 2008, p. 76).

The growth of the Muslim population in the country has resulted in the emergence of specific demands, which have been shaped by the unique circumstances of this particular demographic. To illustrate, the Muslim population has petitioned for the establishment of facilities for the preparation and consumption of halal food, the construction of places of worship, the creation of educational institutions and the provision of cemeteries. While some of these demands have been met, new challenges have emerged. It would, however, be a misrepresentation of the facts to suggest that these challenges are a reflection of Islamophobic sentiment among the Japanese population. Moreover, the absence of sectarian or communal disputes among Japanese Muslims demonstrates that Japanese individuals are capable of maintaining harmonious relationships. However, new Muslims frequently encounter difficulties in gaining the understanding of their families and friends, who are deeply rooted in Japanese culture and traditions, making it challenging for them to maintain their religious practices (Anis, 1998, p. 341). It has been documented that there have been instances of discord with the local community during the planning stages of mosque construction. However, it has been observed that these conflicts tend to occur in mosques that are built with the assistance of Muslim university students who have immigrated to the area. The principal reason for this is that university students have only recently arrived in Japan and are therefore not yet well acquainted with the customs and regulations of Japanese society. Consequently, their actions may be regarded as unacceptable by Japanese society, which could potentially give rise to conflict. Conversely, immigrant Muslim communities who have resided in Japan for an extended period and are well-acquainted with the local population, customs, and regulations will conduct themselves in an appropriate manner when seeking to construct a mosque, thereby circumventing the aforementioned conflicts. In the construction of mosques, long-term resident Muslims prioritise addressing the concerns of their Japanese neighbours. This may include adherence to local regulations regarding waste disposal or the minimisation of noise pollution (Kocalan, 2021, p. 76).

Islam was persistently regarded as a foreign religion within Japanese society and in the broader context of religious understanding. Islam was gradually accepted as a religion in Japan, despite being defined by the Japanese as a religion with a Christian perspective shaped by Western culture. As the Muslim population in Japan grew, the image of Islam shifted from neutrality to a dual image of cultural neutrality and positive neutrality. Prior to 2001, Islam was perceived as a culturally foreign religion, although it did not attract nationwide attention. The negative image of Islam is largely attributed to a lack of information and cultural differences.

### 1.3. Third Period (2001-Present)

Since 2001, there has been a notable surge in Islamophobia not only in the United States but also in Japan, where American cultural influence is pervasive. This is largely attributed to the proliferation of media and propaganda narratives that portray Islam as a violent religion. Subsequently, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September, the government initiated a series of research projects on Islam. This led to an increased focus on this area of enquiry within Muslim associations, particularly at the university and research institute levels. Consequently, a plethora of conferences on Islam have been conducted in collaboration with national and international organisations. The focus on the shared values between Shinto, Buddhism and Islam is intended to facilitate a more constructive engagement between the Japanese and Muslim communities. To provide an example, the Japanese Association for Religious Studies convened an international conference in August 2002. During the course of the conference, it was observed that a dialogue between Islam and Japanese Buddhism might prove a fruitful avenue for further research. Consequently, the Centre for Monotheistic Religions at Doshisha University (CISMOR) was established with the objective of conducting research and engaging in dialogue with the three monotheistic religions, as well as Eastern religions such as Buddhism. CISMOR has initiated a number of research projects and conferences with the objective of promoting a deeper understanding of monotheistic religions, including Islam. In 2006, the conference "World Religions for Peace" was held in Kyoto. The conference was attended by representatives of various religions, including Japanese Buddhism and Islam (Mateen & Sher, 2016, p. 52).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Muslims residing in non-Muslim societies, including Japan, frequently encountered suspicion and discrimination. Consequently, members of the Muslim community have begun to experience feelings of vulnerability as a result of their religious activities. This new challenge has reportedly had a significant impact on some individuals within this group. Nevertheless, there is currently no evidence to suggest that this population has been radicalised or poses a threat to Japanese society (Sakurai, 2008, p. 87). It is of the utmost importance that Muslims in Japan have access to contemporary Islamic literature in the Japanese language. A number of organisations, including the Islamic Centre, the Islamic Cultural Association, and the Muslim Association of Japan, have sought to address the dearth of reliable literature on a range of topics, including Islamic beliefs, values, and contributions to humanity and the Islamic world. These organisations are currently engaged in the publication and distribution of books, including Japanese translations of the Qur'an, as well as magazines and newspapers in Japan. For instance, the Islamic Centre alone distributes over 300,000 books annually. It has also produced or translated over 30 publications, including books and pamphlets, and distributed them to educational institutions and various organisations for Muslims and non-Muslims in Japan. Moreover, the Centre provides assistance and support for Islamic publications produced by a diverse range of scholars, including both Muslim and non-Muslim experts. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the demand for Islamic literature in Japan, particularly among Japanese youth and business professionals. This growing interest in Islam and the Muslim world can be attributed to the proliferation of negative stereotypes about Islam in the wake of the events of 11 September. Consequently, Japanese Muslim scholars are keen to produce new, engaging, useful and relevant literature on a range of topics related to Islam (Mateen & Sher, 2016, p. 49).

The role of religion in the cultural landscape of contemporary Japan is not a prominent one. While Japanese people do not hold any particular prejudices against Islam or other religions, they

may find many religious practices to be unfamiliar. Furthermore, the perception of individuals of diverse religious affiliations as "the other," irrespective of their specific religious identity, contributes to the formation of misperceptions about Islam in Japan. Consequently, Islam in Japan is frequently regarded as an alien cultural phenomenon rather than as a religious identity in its own right. Furthermore, Muslims are frequently regarded as a monolithic foreign entity, rather than as a faith community comprising individuals from diverse cultural and national backgrounds (Abidoğlu, 2023, p. 297). Consequently, from the perspective of the Japanese police, Muslims are perceived as a distinct other on two levels. In addition to being perceived as belonging to a foreign and unfamiliar religion, Muslims are also regarded as alien to Japanese society. This further contributes to their reluctance to assimilate. It has been proposed that even if a foreign-born Muslim is granted Japanese citizenship, they will continue to be viewed by non-Muslim Japanese individuals as an enigmatic 'other' whose affiliation remains uncertain (Takahashi, 2018, p. 203).

Notwithstanding the considerable growth in the number of Muslims in Japan in recent times, they continue to constitute a relatively minor proportion of the total population, representing less than 0.2% based on the findings of the aforementioned surveys. However, the ageing population in Japan is creating a demand for foreign labour. A greater openness to foreign workers could potentially result in an increase in the population of the Muslim community in Japan, both in the medium and long term. There is a pervasive lack of knowledge about the Muslim community in Japan. This lack of visibility presents certain challenges that require further investigation. However, the lack of visibility of the Muslim community also presents potential advantages. Such advantages include the facilitation of activities such as the establishment of new mosques or the implementation of Islamic educational programmes, which may be undertaken without the hindrance of Islamophobia and discrimination. The restricted familiarity and understanding of Muslims in Japan offers a substantial opportunity for Muslim communities in the country. In contrast to numerous Muslim diasporic communities elsewhere in the world, Japanese Muslims are not compelled to navigate the pervasive prejudices that exist within their communities. The representation of Islam and Muslims in Japanese media is predominantly negative, largely due to the fact that the majority of coverage originates from Western media outlets. It is therefore essential that further measures be taken to challenge the negative portrayals of Islam and religion in conjunction with violence or radicalism. It would be beneficial to implement programmes that reflect a more balanced representation of religion. It seems reasonable to posit that programmes which prioritise the cultural richness and depth of Islamic civilisation, as opposed to its theological and dogmatic aspects, will foster openness and sympathy among the Japanese public (Global Muslim Diaspora: Muslim Communities And Minorities In Non-Oic Member States, 2019, p. 43).

One rationale for the diminished trust in religious organisations within Japanese society can be attributed to historical occurrences and the impact of radical religious movements, most notably Aum Shinrikyō (オウム真理教). The 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyō caused widespread outrage in Japan. The attack resulted in the deaths of thirteen individuals and injuries to thousands more, leading to a profound sense of distrust in Japanese society towards religious movements and groups (Yamashita, 2022, p. 87).

It can be argued that the constraints faced by Japanese Muslims as a minority in the population have evolved beyond the initial challenges of food, language, and employment. Moreover, they must also navigate the pervasive negative portrayal of Islam in the media. A survey



of high school students in Japan conducted in 2006 revealed that 75% of students perceived Islam as an aggressive religion, and 92% identified Islam from television media. The execution of two Japanese citizens by ISIS in 2015 served to reinforce negative perceptions of Muslims. Some representatives of Japanese mosques have reportedly requested that the media refrain from using the term "Isuramu-koku," which literally means "Islamic state," to refer to ISIS. Such misunderstandings and hostilities have the potential to have adverse consequences for the Muslim population in Japan. Such circumstances have the potential to result in an increase in social distance between Japanese citizens and Muslims. Conversely, Japan is focusing on the representation of Islam and the country's efforts to counter the negative portrayal of Islam in the mass media on an international scale. In the context of the 2020 Olympic Games, the Japanese government and local organisations throughout the country have implemented initiatives with the objective of fostering a more welcoming social environment for foreigners, including those of the Muslim faith (Yulita & Ong, 2019, p. 24).

## 2. Issues on Islamophobia in Japan

Modern Japan is a secular society, defined by the absence of any state-sponsored religion. The majority of Japanese people tend to exhibit a degree of scepticism with regard to religion. Notwithstanding their scepticism about religion, Japanese people still engage in religious ceremonies. Such practices are frequently perceived as social rituals rather than a reflection of their beliefs. For instance, Japanese individuals regularly attend Shinto rituals during the summer festival season, get married in a Christian church, and attend a Buddhist funeral. Consequently, religion is not a fundamental aspect of their identity. Nevertheless, while there are Japanese who adhere to a specific religion, religion is largely excluded from the public sphere (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 170).

There is a paucity of official data on the religious affiliation of individuals in Japan. Opinion polls indicate that 62% of the population adhere to no religious beliefs, with this figure increasing (Toshiyuki, 2019, p. 53). The majority of individuals who identify as having religious beliefs adhere to Buddhism, while the proportion of those who identify as having Shinto beliefs is relatively insignificant. Additionally, a Christian minority comprising approximately 1% of the population exists. Since 1945, three Christian prime ministers have held office, with two preceding them. However, as religion is largely regarded as a personal matter in Japan, the fact that prime ministers adhere to Christian (or other) faiths has not been a significant issue in Japanese society and media (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 170).

It is estimated that there are approximately 200,000 Muslims in Japan today. This equates to approximately 0.17% of the population. Of this figure, it is estimated that approximately 90% are foreign nationals with ties to predominantly Muslim countries, primarily Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Turkey and Iran. Approximately 10% of the total population (20,000) are estimated to be Japanese converts to Islam (Tanada, n.d., pp. 1–22).

The Muslim population in Japan is experiencing growth, including the Japanese Muslim population. Consequently, the construction of new mosques is currently underway. As stated by Tanada, by the conclusion of 2018, there were 105 mosques in 36 of Japan's 47 prefectures (Mainichi Shimbun, 2019a). Some of these structures were originally designed with the intention of serving as places of worship for the Muslim community. In 2014, there were 80 mosques, representing a

significant increase from the 14 recorded in 1999. (Tanada, 2017, pp. 27, 36). In 2016, a mosque with a particular focus on Japanese Muslims was established. In contrast to other mosques, where the sermon and khutba are delivered in different languages (e.g. Urdu) according to the majority of the congregation, the sermons in this mosque are delivered in Japanese (Asahi Shimbun, 2016). The establishment of a mosque addressed in Japanese is significant as it indicates the presence of a significant group of Japanese Muslims (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 170).

Despite the considerable development and potential of Islam in Japan, it is argued that the religion's social impact remains ambiguous. The principal reason for this is that Islam is predominantly depicted in public discourse as an incomprehensible and foreign entity, a perception that is widely held by the general public. A significant majority of books and media articles on Muslims residing in Japan concentrate exclusively on foreign Muslims, with minimal attention given to Japanese Muslims (see Mori, 2018; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 171).

The phenomenon of Islamophobia in Japan can be elucidated through an examination of three principal domains. These encompass the religious and cultural background, the nexus between religion, ideology and terrorism, and the written and oral media. In our study, the issues pertaining to Islamophobia in Japan are evaluated within these domains.

## **2.1. Religious, Cultural Background**

It can be argued that the negative perception of Muslims in Japan originated with the sustained recruitment of foreign workers in the 1970s, continued through the 1980s and 1990s, and reached a point of Islamophobia following the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 and the kidnapping and murder of two Japanese nationals by ISIS in 2015. However, these events possess religious and social characteristics that serve to intensify their reflection in Japanese society. An explanation for these characteristics can be found in Japan's religious and cultural background. This background is analysed in detail in the following sections: 'Japaneseness, Foreignness and Multiculturalism' and 'The Relationship Between Religion, Ideology and Terrorism'.

### **2.1.1. Japanese-ness, Foreignness and Multiculturalism**

The term "nihon-teki" (Japanese) is employed to delineate the religious and cultural homogeneity of the Japanese people. This concept suggests that homogeneity represents the fundamental structure of a religion and/or culture. This perspective is also espoused by the Japanese with regard to other religions, cultures and their adherents. The concept of "gaijin," or "foreigner/other," is closely related to the concept of "nihonjinron," or "Japaneseness Theory." The concept of nihonjinron posits that the religious and cultural homogeneity of the Japanese people is based on the homogeneous race of the Japanese. Consequently, the emphasis on racial, religious and cultural homogeneity provides the foundation for an ideology in which those who do not conform to the Japanese identity are viewed with suspicion (Suzuki, 2005, pp. 74, 94, 163).

The Theory of Japaneseness examines the origins of the concept of the foreigner/other in Japan (Cornille, 1999, p. 239). This theory is defined by the concept of the Japanese as a historically continuous and homogeneous racial group, distinct from all other peoples. It asserts that their culture and traditions must be preserved and protected from external influences and corruption (Dale, 2012, pp. 1–2). In his analysis, Kosaku Yoshino characterises this phenomenon as ethnic nationalism. He posits that it represents a reaction to the process of internationalisation and the

concomitant loss of Japaneseness. Alternatively, it may be viewed as a compensatory phenomenon, emerging in response to the socio-economic identity that Japan acquired in the latter half of the 20th century (Yoshino, 1992, pp. 163–181).

It can therefore be posited that the negative perception of Islam and Muslims in Japan is more a consequence of the unidimensional conceptualisation of Japanese foreign relations than a reflection of Islamophobia. This also serves to reinforce an essentialist cultural approach, which suggests that Japanese people possess a homogeneous structure and, as a result, those who adopt other religions and cultures can be excluded. Conversely, members of other religions are defined by a single, overarching concept or profile. In Japan, this essentialist approach to culture posits the existence of discrete cultural groups with fixed cultural practices, and asserts the existence of a singular "Japanese culture" or "Islamic culture." Such an essentialist concept of culture frequently constrains cross-cultural understanding to the level of superficial multiculturalism (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 332).

The results of official surveys conducted in Japan indicate that the majority of Japanese people self-identify as *Mushūkyō*, which can be translated as "religiously indifferent". In other words, they are not religious, do not adhere to any particular religion, do not generally trust religious organisations, and are not officially affiliated with any religious group. This can be viewed as a form of apatheism, characterised by indifference towards religion. Nevertheless, this circumstance precludes the possibility of classifying them as atheists, given that they acknowledge the significance of spirituality and engage in religious and traditional rituals, despite professing a lack of interest in religion. It is important to note, however, that rituals are maintained as a distinct entity from religion in Japanese thought. For example, the New Year Shrine Visit (初詣, *Hatsumōde*) and the Bon Festival (お盆, *Obon*) are regarded as traditional practices that are distinct from religious beliefs (Ama, 2004, pp. 3–5). The former refers to visits to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, while the latter is a Japanese Buddhist ritual honouring ancestral spirits at the end of summer. Furthermore, Christmas and other Buddhist and Shinto rituals in which many Japanese people participate are also regarded as traditional, rather than religious. Consequently, the Japanese perspective on the beliefs of others is shaped more by a shared tradition and culture than by religion and tradition. It can be argued that elements that are incongruent with this and/or that may potentially lead to incompatibility are perceived through the lens of the foreigner.

This perspective on Japanese society necessitates a critical historical and phenomenological examination of the generalised notion of Japan as a non-religious and religiously tolerant country. Yoko Yamashita posits that Islamophobia in Japan manifests as an "unregistered passive acceptance," which is predicated on three factors: religious apathy, religious phobia, and ignorance about Islam. This phenomenon is further shaped by the pervasive belief that Islam is defined by fundamentalism and extremism, and Muslims by terrorists (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, pp. 2, 102). The term is defined by Motoko Katakura as "a prejudice that develops with indifference" and by Naoko Kawada as "an indifference that is a far cry from tolerance" (Katakura, 2004, p. 20; Kawada, 2004, p. 225).

It is not feasible to assess the prevalence and ramifications of Islamophobia in Japan in a manner analogous to that employed in Western nations. This is due to the fact that in Japan, the prejudice in question is developed through the definition of a distinct foreign culture. By way of

illustration, in contrast to the situation in Europe and the United States, Muslims in Japan are not typically subjected to overt discrimination on the grounds of their religion. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to describe Japanese attitudes towards Islam and Muslims as mere neutral indifference. It can be reasonably deduced that Islamophobic tendencies that develop on the basis of indifference towards religion (or Islam) and religious phobia may result in the evaluation of Islam and Muslims with fundamentalism and terrorism on the axis of shallow thoughts as well as ignorance. These evaluations, disseminated through periodicals and the media, engender a superficial perception of Islam and Muslims that fosters a sense of fear, which in turn gives rise to the formation of a phobia of Islam in Japanese society in general (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 9).

Yamashita posits that while Islam is perceived as a foreign culture in Japan within the context of *Tabunka Kyōsei* (multicultural coexistence) and superficial multiculturalism, this perspective is ultimately neutral. Islam is frequently tolerated by the Japanese, which can be seen as a means of overcoming religious indifference, religious phobia, and prejudice against Islam (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 2). The concept of multicultural coexistence and the related approach to multiculturalism, known as the "cosmetic approach", originated in 2005 with the establishment of the Japanese government's Research Group on Promoting Multicultural Coexistence. This group released a report in March 2006 (*Sōmu-shō*, 2006).

This report delineates the means of achieving multicultural coexistence, encompassing multicultural communication support, livelihood assistance, and social cohesion with recently arrived foreign nationals. It is achieved through collaboration with local communities and civil society organisations. Additionally, the term 'Tabunka Kyōsei' is defined as follows:

The term 'multiculturalism' is defined as the coexistence of people of different nationalities or ethnic origins, etc., as constituent members of the local community, with the establishment of equal relations and recognition of each other's cultural differences. (Roberts, 2013, p. 209)

The concept of *Tabunka Kyōsei*, or the acceptance and definition of cultural diversity, gives rise to a multitude of interpretations within Japanese society. This definition is based on the presence of foreign nationals in Japan who adhere to their own religious and cultural traditions. As Yamashita notes, people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are often perceived as conforming to Japanese cultural norms. In Japan, this conformity is seen as a sign of recognition of the foreigner's identity and the establishment of a relationship based on that identity (S. Yamashita, 2010, p. 331).

In Japan, Islam is frequently regarded as a monolithic cultural entity, and Muslims are often viewed as a monolithic community. This results in a number of issues when local governments implement social policies based on the *Tabunka Kyōsei* definition, rather than aligning with the Muslim community's desire to open mosques and provide halal food for tourists. For instance, Tanada observes that some local governments that have initiated communication with mosques have encountered challenges in implementing *Tabunka Kyōsei* measures to open mosques and events for Muslim residents. This is because they have discovered that mosques (and other Islamic organisations) represent a diverse population, comprising individuals with varying ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as differing interpretations of Islamic beliefs and practices. It is challenging for them to reach a consensus on specific religious rules (Tanada, 2019, p. 231). However, Yamashita also notes that some Muslims decline to attend events with mixed-gender

attendance or use mixed-gender prayer rooms. Some refuse to accept food prepared in kitchens where alcohol or pork is present as halal, while others accept as halal food that does not contain pork (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 10).

As evidenced by the preceding examples and determinations, the definition of Tabunka Kyōsei cannot be applied to disparate Islamic and Muslim communities from a homogeneous perspective. However, the homogeneous, culture-based approach to Tabunka Kyōsei, which is generally accepted and practised in Japan, is defined by Morris-Suzuki as "superficial multiculturalism". Moreover, he identifies contributing factors that perpetuate this superficial approach. He provides vivid examples of how this superficial approach manifests itself in practice. Such practices include defining cultures with a uniform understanding of aesthetics and art, thereby ignoring the diversity within them; highlighting a single musical genre in cultural events without including the various musical traditions within that culture; and emphasising the differences between Japanese Muslims and other Muslims, which serves to perpetuate a superficial multiculturalism. The Japanese reinforce the existing definitional approach to Tabunka Kyōsei, whereas the realisation of the antithetical issues serves to reinforce the notion of serious coexistence (Morris-Suzuki, 2013, pp. 183–185).

Furthermore, Yamashita posits that despite Islam being perceived as a foreign culture within the context of tabunka kyōsei (multicultural coexistence) and superficial multiculturalism, this perspective is, in fact, neutral. He asserts that Islam is, in fact, tolerated by the Japanese, and that this is a means of overcoming religious indifference, religious phobia and prejudice against Islam (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 2). This is evidenced by the significant number of publications in Japan that emphasise the need for coexistence and tolerant attitudes towards foreign and Japanese Muslims (see Mori, 2018).

Manga constitutes a significant element within this context. To illustrate, the award-winning series *Satoko to Nada* (Satoko and Nada), published on a popular web-based manga platform, recounts the experiences of a Japanese schoolgirl residing in the United States who arrives at her college apartment and discovers that her roommate is a veiled Saudi Muslim. Despite initial reservations, Satoko comes to recognise that she and Nada share common interests. As their relationship develops, Satoko gains insight into the positive aspects of Islam (see Yupicheka, 2018). It is evident that the manga does not present an entirely objective portrayal of the other. To illustrate, the manga series focuses on violations of women's rights in Muslim countries, while conveniently ignoring patriarchal structures in Japan and the rest of the world. In conclusion, the series promotes mutual understanding by conveying the message that Muslims are individuals with shared humanity (see Yupicheka, 2018). While the majority of these publications focus exclusively on foreign Muslims, the experiences of Japanese Muslims are also worthy of attention. This suggests a growing awareness of the Japanese community (see Sato, 2015). Furthermore, the lack of discrimination based on religious affiliation in Japanese society indicates that, regardless of one's religious beliefs, adherence to the norms of society is a prerequisite for acceptance (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 176).

For instance, in the wake of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in north-eastern Japan, Muslim organisations were involved in charitable activities, including the distribution of food. Such activities were disseminated through the media, thereby countering the propagation of hate

speech against Muslims and creating a positive image (see J-Cast, 2016). Furthermore, additional developments have occurred that have had a favourable impact on the image of Islam and Muslims. To illustrate, the prolonged economic downturn in Japan has compelled Japanese businesses to recognise foreign visitors as a vital source of revenue. In response, the government has implemented initiatives with the objective of revitalising the tourism sector, thereby facilitating an exit from the country's economic downturn. This has resulted in a notable surge in the number of Muslim tourists, a phenomenon frequently referred to as the 'halal boom'. Consequently, restaurants, large grocery chains and other outlets in major cities and tourist destinations in Japan have made efforts in recent years to promote their products as halal, and many of them display the halal certification of one of the various certification associations. A substantial body of literature exists on this topic. Some local governments even provide financial support to businesses seeking Halal certification (see Taito-ku, 2019). Although this growth can be attributed to financial considerations and policies rather than religious and cultural factors, it can also be argued that it has the potential to foster a deeper understanding and greater acceptance of Muslims in Japan. This is evidenced by the positive impact it has had on increasing awareness of Islamic practices (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 176).

### **2.1.2. The Relationship Between Religion, Ideology and Terrorism**

The notion of Japan as a nation devoid of religious affiliation and characterised by religious tolerance is a simplistic and inaccurate representation of the historical reality. Throughout its history, Japan has employed a multifaceted approach to the regulation of religious beliefs and practices. Such instances have included the suppression and persecution of religious minorities on the grounds of their beliefs and actions being deemed 'heretical' and a threat to the authority of the state, Japanese rule, and the dominant Shinto tradition. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the government implemented a policy of repression against religious minorities who espoused beliefs in a deity, a transcendent entity, or a reality that superseded the authority of the state. Moreover, these individuals repudiated the state's claim to absolute political authority. Christianity was prohibited for a period exceeding two and a half centuries, from 1614 to 1873. The Nichiren-shū Fujufuse-ha (a sect of Nichiren Buddhism) was subjected to severe suppression for a period exceeding two centuries, until 1876. During this period, as part of the Tokugawa Shogunate's attempt to suppress Christianity, the registration of temples became mandatory, and Buddhist rituals and activities other than funerals and memorial services became less and less a part of people's daily lives (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, pp. 5–6).

As a consequence of these developments, the Meiji government's endeavour to expunge Japanese Shinto of non-Japanese Buddhist influences and establish Shinto as a national religion in the 1870s was largely unsuccessful. This was due to a dearth of official religious doctrine and missionaries. Subsequently, the government merged Shrine Shinto with Imperial Dynasty Shinto, establishing Kokka Shinto (State Shinto), which designated Shinto as the state religion and the basis for public morality. Jun'ichi Isomae has observed that as part of the process of modernisation and westernisation in Japan, the administration of the time constructed a national identity centred on the institution of empire through State Shinto. Isomae characterises this as an "invented tradition" rather than a modernisation of old traditions (Isomae, 2014, p. xxii). Furthermore, the government granted official recognition to select Buddhist and Shinto sects under the designation of Kyōha Shinto (Shinto Sects), while simultaneously suppressing other religious minorities,

particularly those that posed a challenge to imperial authority and national governance. Religious movements, also known as "pseudo-religions" or "satanic cults" (e.g. Ōmoto), were subject to regulation not only in Japan but also in its overseas colonies and occupied territories by the 1939 'Religious Organisations Law' (Inagaki, 1996, pp. 178–179).

State Shinto may be regarded as an exemplar of state-sponsored religious comprehension within the public domain. Nevertheless, it is argued that religion, shaped by the Western/Christian concept of the separation of religion and state embraced by the Meiji administration, was perceived as a bureaucratic tradition that transcended the private sphere, occupying a position above and beyond religion (Isomae, 2014, p. xxii). This approach is particularly pertinent to the Meiji Constitution of 1889, which emphasised the possibility of practising religion "within limits that are not detrimental to peace and order and inconsistent with their duties as a people" (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 6). It is argued that the Japanese imperial government sought to legitimate Shinto shrine visits and emperor worship by emphasising the non-religious nature of State Shinto. This was done in order to circumvent accusations of violating the constitutional right of citizens to freedom of religion, and these practices continued until the end of the Second World War. In 1940, however, the then government established a body called the Shinto Rituals Board, which defined its mission as "to officially elevate the authority of State Shinto above all other religions." (Garon, 1986, p. 274).

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Shinto Directive, which was issued by the occupying authorities in 1945, resulted in the abolition of state Shinto. The current constitution, which came into force in 1946, established freedom of religion and the separation of church and state (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 7). Notwithstanding the constitutional prohibition on state financial support for religious institutions, conservative politicians have sought to re-establish a connection between Shinto and the state. This has led to the perception of Shinto as a tradition that transcends the religious domain and as a state ideology that serves militaristic and nationalistic objectives (Garon, 1997, p. 210).

To illustrate, between 1969 and 1974, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) proposed legislation to renationalise the Shinto Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japan's war dead. The bills were rejected due to opposition from political parties and religious movements. However, since 1976, prime ministers have visited the shrine. Those in favour of the reunification of Shinto and the state have advanced the argument that the shrine should not be regarded as a religious institution, but rather as a site for public rituals designed to foster a sense of belonging to the nation-state (Garon, 1997, p. 210).

The politicisation of religion and the concomitant reinforcement of the negative perception of religious movements occurred in 1995, coinciding with the increased visibility of religious structures and institutions. It can be argued that the 1995 sarin attack on the Tokyo subway by members of Aum Shinrikyō served to reinforce the Japanese public's pre-existing distrust of religious movements, while simultaneously enabling the administration to gain greater control over such organisations (Hardacre, 2007, p. 171). The paradoxical support for the idea that Japan is a non-religious and religiously tolerant country, despite post-war attempts to reunite Shinto and the state, can be attributed to the prevalence of religious apathy, phobia and prejudice against formal

affiliation to a particular religious group among the general Japanese population (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 7).

In the view of Helen Hardacre, the Japanese media's unrelenting focus on the Aum Shinrikyo incident and the subsequent police investigation had the effect of manipulating religious trends and *"painting all religions with the same brush, implying that all religions should be subjected to greater scrutiny in order to prevent them from following Aum's example"*. As Sheldon Garon notes, the Aum Shinrikyo incident *"brought to the surface the Japanese public's deep anxieties about new religions" and "greatly contributed to the relaxation of postwar Japanese society's reservations about the use of state power to regulate religious organisations"* (Garon, 1997, pp. 211–212). This resulted in the amendment of the Religious Institutions Act of 1951. Notwithstanding the opposition of numerous religious organisations, particularly religious movements, the revision was enacted with the support of the conservative LDP, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party, the Sōka Gakkai religious movement and its political party, Kōmeitō, which sought to diminish their political influence, and ultimately granted the government greater control and oversight over religious organisations (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 7).

The public discourse on religious groups in Japan is generally characterised by a notable absence of violent and overt racism, in stark contrast to the prevalence of such attitudes in many Western countries. However, Islamophobic narratives prevail in the discourse on national security issues. Consequently, terrorism, particularly international terrorism, is predominantly associated with Islamic groups in the official discourse in Japan. Documents published by the country's security forces frequently cite the potential for 'guerrilla/terrorist' activities by far-left groups (See Keisatsucho, 2018). However, it would appear that the term 'terrorist organisations' is employed solely in reference to 'radical Islamic groups'. A government document dated December 2017 serves to illustrate this point. The document is entitled "Counter-Terrorism Measures Ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games." However, the document's entirety is dedicated to the purported threat posed by "radical Islamic organizations." In consequence, the document enumerates known attacks in the United States and European countries and asserts that Daesh, in its capacity as an Islamic organization, constitutes a significant threat to Japan (see Keishicho, 2017). Similarly, other official statements concentrate on the security situation in West Asia and highlight the danger posed by "radical Islamic groups" (See Keisatsucho, 2015; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 171). This concept of a potential threat is a reflection of the Japanese perspective on matters. For example, in a case before a Japanese court, an individual alleged to be a member of the terrorist organisation al-Qa'ida was reported to have entered the country in 2004 by falsifying documents. The report on this individual also indicated that he was "a devout Muslim" and that he "never failed to pray five times a day and frequently visited mosques." These statements were subsequently disseminated in the print media (*Tokyo Chiho Saibansho*, 2014). One might posit that these expressions result in all Muslims being perceived as potential terrorists. This perspective tends to view sects and groups expressing Islamic character as a monolithic entity (*Tokyo Chiho Saibansho*, 2014; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 172).

## 2.2. Global-local Issues and the Impact of Policy

Additionally, the negative trends towards Islam in Japan can be examined in the context of the influence of global events on Japanese society and politics. These include the formation of a



negative image of Muslims as a consequence of global politics in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States and Japan's military alliance in the context of the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003. Furthermore, the dissemination of confidential official documents in 2014, the assassination of two Japanese nationals by ISIS members in 2015, the monitoring of Muslims by security forces in 2016, and recent occurrences have contributed to this unfavourable perception.

Scholars have identified the reappropriation and repurposing of the colonialist discourse of the nineteenth century, which characterised Islam as an inherently backward and violent religion that does not value women, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This phenomenon has been particularly evident in the context of the US government's efforts to justify its military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq on moral grounds. In Europe, a number of countries have implemented limitations on the display of the Islamic headscarf in both public and private domains. These constraints have witnessed a notable intensification in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, p. 1). In Japan, he stated, the number of Japanese Muslims attending mosques declined in the days following 9/11 due to concerns about being associated with non-Japanese Muslims and the association of Muslims with terrorism (Siddiqi, 2003, p. 165).

In Japan, Da'esh and al-Qa'ida affiliates have identified the country as a target due to its military alliance with the United States in the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Keishicho, 2017, p. 1). It has been argued that the Japanese government's politically and militarily active relations with Israel, as well as the United States, which continue to this day, have shaped Japanese politics in accordance with the view of Islam held by these countries. This is identified as one of the principal reasons for the social reaction against Islam that is currently observed. (See Nishi Nihon Shimbun, 2015; See BDS Japan, 2018; See Mainichi Shimbun, 2019b; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 174). It was emphasised that this created an atmosphere of a potential terrorist threat in the country. The government characterised terrorism by the existence and activities of "radical Islamic groups", thereby reinforcing the idea that Islam and individual Muslims are potential terrorist threats (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 172).

As a consequence of the aforementioned tendency towards such an image, it was revealed that in the period preceding the Hokkaido Tōyako G8 Summit in July 2008, the Japanese police force had engaged in the systematic monitoring of Muslims in Japan and the collection of personal information, including bank account and passport details, from 72,000 individuals identified as terror suspects. Furthermore, it has been documented that, in the course of monitoring the activities of Muslims, properties situated in proximity to mosques have been leased and police officers have been deployed to these locations on a 24-hour basis. Their objective has been to record and track individuals entering the mosque, and to collect data pertaining to their residential and occupational addresses, contacts, immigration history, and other relevant information (Keishicho, 2007, p. 1; Takahashi, 2021b, p. 171). These developments are predicated on the assumption that all Muslims are inherently susceptible to posing a security risk, irrespective of their individual beliefs. In consequence, the Japanese authorities have treated religious affiliation as an indicator of a high propensity to engage in terrorism. Among those who prayed five times a day was a Muslim who was said to have aroused suspicion because he 'started praying diligently after his daughter was born' (Keishicho, 2008, p. 1). Additionally, he expressed views on controversial political issues, such as criticising the participation of the US, Israel and Japan in the invasion of Iraq (Keishicho, 2005, p. 1).

For example, it has been reported that the Japanese police were made aware of a Pakistani national who expressed negative sentiments towards the United States and advocated for their withdrawal from Iraq (Aoki, 2011, p. 50). There are numerous additional examples that could be cited for consideration. For example, the entire staff of the Iranian embassy in Tokyo was reportedly placed under special surveillance (including personal bank accounts) for no other reason than "the US designation of Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism" (See Keishicho, 2005). Following appeals against these practices, the Tokyo High Court upheld the Tokyo District Court's January 2014 ruling that police information-gathering activities were "necessary and unavoidable measures for the prevention of international terrorism" and that police surveillance of Muslims in mosques and other Islamic facilities did not violate the constitutionally guaranteed rights to privacy, equality and freedom of religion (Takahashi, 2018b, pp. 204–206). As reported by The Japan Times, the court ruling provides the police with the authority to continue monitoring the activities of Muslims in Japan. As of 2016, police surveillance of Muslims was still ongoing, with their children identified as 'suspects' and treated as 'potential homegrown terrorists' (See Blakkarly, 2016). In May 2016, the Supreme Court of Japan upheld the decision of the Tokyo High Court, which had awarded a total of 90 million yen in damages to 17 plaintiffs belonging to the Muslim community. This was on the grounds of invasion of privacy. In October 2010, the Japanese security forces released over 100 documents, some of which had previously been referenced (The United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2016, p. 5).

It is an inevitable consequence that Japanese society will be affected by such news and developments. In an academic study of Japanese society, a series of surveys conducted between 2009 and 2012 in various regions where mosque construction was planned revealed a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims. The 2012 survey conducted in Fukuoka, Japan, revealed that 63% of respondents perceived Islam as an "extremist" religion, while 49% regarded it as "scary". Only 22% of respondents identified Islam as a "religion of peace" (Tanada & Okai, 2011, p. 9).

In February 2015, an ISIS-affiliated extremist group, the Islamic State (IS), perpetrated the killing of two Japanese citizens within Japan, inciting a significant public outcry. In the aftermath of this incident, the US State Department revealed that a number of Muslim organisations and mosques in Japan had been the target of a series of threatening telephone calls, prompting the police to implement enhanced security measures around Islamic institutions. (The United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2016, p. 1). In the aftermath of this terrorist incident, the tendency to view Muslims as a homogeneous group has been superseded by reactions and publications characterised by violent rhetoric. For example, Akari Iiyama, a best-selling author, has made a number of statements that are incendiary in nature. These include the assertion that "the Koran requires Muslims to kill all non-believers, including Japanese," as well as the claim that "peace in Islam means submission to Muslim rule." Additionally, he has stated that "Japanese who believe that Islam is a religion of peace are only reflecting their own feelings," and that "Islam is fundamentally incompatible with democracy." These claims have received considerable media attention. (Iiyama, 2018, 2019, p. 7; Ikeda, 2018; Takahashi, 2021c, pp. 5, 174).

### **2.3. Written and Visual Media**

The advent of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments in Japan has resulted in the propagation of information pertaining to these attitudes through a multitude of media outlets,

including print and oral communication. The initial significant turning point was the formation of a negative image in the wake of the September 11 attacks. It can be argued that the mainstream international and Japanese national media have played an important role in the popularisation of Islamophobia. As demonstrated by Keiko Sakai's 2010 research, there has been a discernible surge in the number of newspaper articles concerning Islam since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The majority of these articles demonstrate a tendency to associate Islam with terrorism. He observes that the dominant narrative surrounding Islam in the Japanese media is shaped by the Iranian Revolution, with the religion being portrayed as fanatical, violent, and backward. Moreover, he suggests that the media tends to uncritically reproduce Western perceptions of Islam, which are often shaped by Western media. The Muslim community is perceived as an 'other' that may precipitate a 'clash of civilisations' with the West, and this perspective aligns with the prevailing stance in the international media (Sakai, 2010, pp. 125, 135).

This negative representation of Islam in the media is indicative of a lack of depth of understanding rather than a reflection of objective knowledge about the religion. This viewpoint is closely aligned with the dominant attitudes towards Islam in the West. For example, the Charlie Hebdo attack in France in January 2015 and the subsequent publication of Charlie Hebdo's cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad by the Tokyo Shimbun prompted a backlash among Muslims in Japan. Muslim groups, predominantly Pakistani Muslims, organised demonstrations outside the Chunichi Shimbun building in Tokyo. In response, the newspaper issued an apology for having inadvertently offended Muslims. Subsequent to this incident, in February 2015, two Japanese citizens were kidnapped and murdered by a radical group of ISIS members, further reinforcing the negative public image of Islam (Y. Yamashita, 2022b, pp. 7–8).

Moreover, the aforementioned negative image has been reflected in the media in a similarly negative manner. In particular, media coverage of the alleged surveillance and monitoring of Muslims in Japan by security forces is significant in reflecting such an ethno-religious perspective (see Takahashi, 2018c). Consequently, the media have censured the dissemination of the surveillance data to the general public, rather than the infringement of the individual's personal space (Asahi Shimbun, 2010). It has been documented that the majority of media outlets in Japan characterised the incident, which subsequently became a legal case, as a "case of leaking counter-terrorism documents" (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 172).

A significant proportion of articles on Islam published in the Asahi Shimbun between 1 January and 31 October 2019 were found to be associated with terrorism, armed conflict or social fundamentalism. In numerous instances, Middle Eastern countries were referenced as case studies (see Asahi Shimbun, 2019). A survey conducted in Japan on the subject of "Muslims living in Japan" revealed that 27% of respondents held the view that Muslims should not be permitted to reside in the country, while 65% of respondents indicated that they were unsure. The majority of respondents (44%) expressed support for the admission of foreign nationals to Japan, while a minority (14%) opposed this position (Tanada & Okai, 2011, p. 8). Other studies have demonstrated that participants receive the majority of their information about Islam from written and visual media, which has a significant impact on shaping their views of Islam (Tanada et al., 2012; see Tanada & Okai, 2011). Notwithstanding the aforementioned negative portrayal, instances of violence perpetrated against Muslims are exceedingly uncommon. Moreover, the Japanese are not

a violent society in general (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 175). Consequently, Japanese society both emphasises coexistence and tends to have a negative image of Islam. This expresses a contradictory tendency within Japanese society. Once the Japanese become aware of this inconsistency and perceive the reflection of Islam in the Muslim Japanese, a significant positive awareness of Islam is created (Takahashi, 2021b, p. 177).

## Conclusion

This study examines Islamophobia in Japan within the framework of 'possibilities and debates', with the aim of elucidating the ways in which attitudes towards Islam and Muslims have been shaped in historical and social contexts. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the global Islamophobic discourse was reflected in the Japanese media, facilitating the spread of negative perceptions of Islam in Japan. In this context, it can be argued that the international mainstream media and the Japanese national media have played a crucial role in shaping a negative image of Islam. Notwithstanding the fact that Japanese society is generally tolerant and supportive of multiculturalism, as evidenced by the principle of "Tabunka Kyōsei" (Multicultural Coexistence), the persistence of a negative view of Islam is noteworthy. This has led to an inconsistent perception of Islam within society, as evidenced by the contradiction between the tolerant and supportive attitude of Japanese society as a whole and the negative view of Islam.

Moreover, the identification of Islam with foreign Muslims and the limited knowledge of Japanese Muslims create hesitation about the presence of Islam in the social sphere. The portrayal of Islam as a 'foreign' and 'incomprehensible' religion in the media and public discourse has led to this perception of Islam among a significant proportion of the Japanese public. However, there has been a noticeable shift in social behaviour as some Japanese individuals have developed a positive awareness of Islam through observing its impact on Japanese Muslims. Such awareness has the potential to challenge existing prejudices against Islam and promote understanding of multicultural coexistence.

In conclusion, the social impact of Islam in Japan remains uncertain. Nevertheless, there is potential for the development of a more impartial and accommodating attitude towards Islam within society, in line with the principle of Tabunka Kyōsei. To realise this potential, it is imperative that public discourse and media content refrain from portraying Islam as an alien phenomenon and instead prioritise the visibility of the experiences and contributions of Japanese Muslims. As such, it is expected that perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japan will continue to evolve in the context of social cohesion and cultural awareness.

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## Japonya'da İslamofobi: İmkân ve Tartışmalar

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Hatice ACAR\*\*

### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

Dünyada sosyo-siyasî gelişmelerin etkisiyle, erken modern dönemde başlayan yazılı ve görsel yayınların, dinlere ve kültürlere yönelik karşı-teolojik bakış açısının etkinliğinde bir artış gözlemlenmektedir. Tarihî ve dinî olarak ciddi bir etkileşimin bulunmadığı bölgelerde dahi belirli bir dine yönelik farklı dinî geleneklerin bakış açılarının etki ve izleri görülebilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Japonya'da İslâm'a yönelik teolojik veya dinî nitelikteki negatif yaklaşımlar, Batı'da modern dönemle birlikte ortaya çıkan ve kökleri Hristiyan dinî geleneklerine dayanan bir etki çerçevesinde değerlendirilebilir. Öte yandan İslâm'ın Japonya'daki dinî tarihi dikkate alındığında, ülkenin çok kültürlü ve dinî çoğulcu yapısı, herhangi bir dinin varlığının kolektif anlamda olumsuz bir imaja sahip olmasını mümkün kılmamaktadır. Bununla birlikte tarihi süreçte Batı tipi modernleşme, beraberinde Batı kültürünün diğer dinlere yönelik olumsuz-kültürel bakışını da beraberinde getirmiştir. Ancak İslâm, toplumsal dinî zeminde faaliyet alanı bulmuş ve Japon toplumu açısından farklı-olumlu dinî bir değer olarak görülmüştür. Bu anlamda günümüzde Japonya'da İslamofobi'nin imkânı ve etrafındaki tartışmaların zemininin bu bağlamda sürdüğü söylenebilmektedir.

Çalışmamızda Japonya'da İslamofobi'nin var olma imkânı ve tartışmaları dini-tarihi bağlam ve günümüz olayları üzerinden incelenmeye çalışılmıştır. Buna göre çalışmamızda ilk bölümde, tarihi süreçte dini eksende İslamofobi'nin imkânı üzerinde durmuş, Japonya'da İslâm'ın imajı irdelenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu bölümde konu, 1890-1947, 1947-2001 ve 2001-günümüz olarak üç tarihi döneme ayrılarak incelenmiştir. İkinci bölümde ise günümüzde İslamofobi, dinî-kültürel kökenleri, etkenleri, örnekleri üzerinden incelenmiştir. Bu bölümde dini-kültürel zemin, küresel ve yerel siyasi gelişmeler ve yazılı-görsel medya başlıklarında irdelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

### Japonya'da Müslüman-Japon İlişkileri

1850'lerden 1950'li yıllara kadar yapılan çeviri ve telif eserlerin etkisiyle, İslâm'ın 1890'lara kadar tarafsız bir perspektiften değerlendirildiği görülmüştür. Ancak, 1890-1950 yılları arasında İslâm, siyasi ve toplumsal açıdan konjonktürel ve yapay bir din olarak nitelendirilmiştir. Bu dönemde,

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İslam'a yönelik değerlendirmelerin tarafsızlıktan olumsuz doğru eğilim gösterdiği gözlemlenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, Japonya'da İslam'a dair islamofobik düşüncenin temellerinin bu dönemde atıldığı tespit edilmiştir. İslâm, Japon toplumu ve dini anlayışı açısından yabancı bir din olarak görülmeye devam etmiştir. Japonların batı-kültürü üzerinden Hristiyan perspektifli bir din olarak tanımladığı İslam, zamanla müstakil bir din olarak da kabul edilmeye başlanmıştır. Bir önceki dönemden nötrden olumsuz evrilen İslam imajı, bu dönemde Müslüman nüfusun artışıyla olumsuzdan kültürel nötr ve olumlu nötr'e bir ikili imaja doğru evrilmiştir. 2001'e kadar Japonya'da İslam, kültürel-yabancı bir din olarak görülmekle birlikte, ülke çapında dikkat çeken bir din olarak değerlendirilmemiştir. Nitekim İslâm'ın olumsuz imajı daha çok bilgi eksikliği ve kültürel farklılıklar nedeniyle ortaya çıktığı tespit edilmiştir. Günümüzde Japonya'da Müslümanlara yönelik imaja dair olumsuz eğilimin, 1970'lerden itibaren halen süren yabancı işçi alımlarıyla başladığı, 1980'li ve 1990'lı yıllarda da devam ettiği; 2001'te ABD'deki terör saldırısı ve 2015'te Japonya'da iki Japon'un İŞİD tarafından kaçırılıp öldürülmesi olaylarıyla da İslamofobi'ye dönüştüğü anlaşılmıştır. Bu olaylara dair haberler yazılı ve sözlü medyada yer almaya başlamıştır. Bunun ilk ciddi kırılma noktası 11 Eylül Saldırısı sonrası gelişen olumsuz imajdır. Buna göre ana akım uluslararası ve Japon ulusal medyası İslamofobi'nin yaygın hale getirilmesinde önemli bir role sahiptir.

### Japonya'da İslamofobi Üzerine Meseleler

Modern Japonya seküler-dindar bir toplumdur. Japonların çoğu dine şüpheyle yaklaşmaktadır. Dine kuşkuyla baksalar dahi dinî törenlere katılmaktadırlar. Onlar, bu uygulamaları inançlarının yansıması olmasının aksine genellikle toplumsal ritüeller olarak görmektedirler. Japonların düzenli olarak yaz festivali sezonunda Şinto ritüellerine katılmak, bir Hristiyan kilisesinde evlenmek ve Budist cenazesine katılmakla ilgili uygulamaları da bulunmaktadır. Bu nedenle Japonların çoğu için din kimliklerinin temel bir parçası değildir. Ancak belirli bir dine bağlı Japonlar olsa da din, büyük ölçüde kamusal alanın dışında tutulmaktadır. Japon toplumunun bu bakış açısı, Japonya'nın dindar olmayan ve dinî açıdan hoşgörülü bir ülke olduğuna dair genelleştirilmiş fikrin tarihî ve fenomenolojik açıdan eleştirel olarak dikkatle irdelenmesini gerektirmektedir. Japonya'da İslamofobi veya İslâm'a karşı önyargının, dinî ilgisizlik ve din fobisi ile İslâm'a dair bilgisizlik temelinde, İslâm'ın köktencilik/aşırılıkla ve Müslümanların ise teröristlerle tanımlandığı yüzeysel kanaatler olarak tezahür ettiğini görülmüştür.

Japonya'da İslam'a ve Müslümanlara olumsuz bakış açısının, İslamofobi'den ziyade Japon-Yabancı ilişkilerinin tek taraflı tanımlanmasından kaynaklandığı söylenebilmektedir. Bu aynı zamanda Japonların homojen bir yapıya sahip olduğunu, bu nedenle diğer din ve kültürleri benimseyenlerin dışlanabildiği anlamına gelmektedir. Diğer taraftan öteki din mensuplarının tek bir düşünce ve profil üzerinden tanımlanmalarına yol açan bir özcü kültür yaklaşımını da güçlendirmektedir. Japonya'da bu özcü kültür yaklaşımı, sabit kültürel pratiklere sahip farklı kültürel grupları varsaymakta ve tek bir 'Japon Kültürü' veya tek bir 'İslam kültürü' olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bu tür bir özcü kültür kavramı, kültürler arası anlayışı genellikle yüzeysel çok kültürlülükle sınırlandırmaktadır.

Japonya'da günümüzde siyasî açıdan işlevsel yönüyle değerlendirilen din ve dinî yapılar, 1995'e gelindiğinde bu görüşü güçlendirerek diğer din ve dinî hareketlere olumsuz bakışını arttırmıştır. Buna göre Aum Shinrikyō üyeleri tarafından 1995'teki Tokyo metrosu saldırısının Japon halkı arasında dinî hareketlere karşı savaş öncesi dönemdeki güvensizliği pekiştirdiği ve yönetimin

bu tür örgütler üzerinde daha fazla kontrol sahibi olmasını sağladığı söylenebilmektedir. Genel Japon nüfusu arasında dine ilgisizlik, din fobisi ve belirli bir dinî gruba resmî olarak bağlı kişilere karşı önyargı, savaş sonrası Şinto ve devleti yeniden birleştirme girişimlerine rağmen Japonya'nın dindar olmayan ve dinî açıdan hoşgörülü bir ülke olduğu fikrini güçlendirdiği tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca Japonya'da dinî gruplara yönelik kamusal söylem, genel olarak pek çok Batı ülkesinde olduğu gibi şiddetli ve açık ırkçılıktan uzaktır. Ancak ulusal güvenlikle ilgili konulardaki söylemlerde İslamofobik anlatılar yoğunluktadır.

## Sonuç

Japonya'da İslâm'a ve Müslümanlara dair olumsuz eğilimlerin ortaya çıkışıyla birlikte bu eğilime dair haberler yazılı ve sözlü medyada yer almaya başlamıştır. Bunun ilk ciddi kırılma noktası 11 Eylül Saldırısı sonrası gelişen olumsuz imajdır. Buna göre ana akım uluslararası ve Japon ulusal medyası İslamofobi'nin yaygın hale getirilmesinde önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu nedenle Japon toplumunda hem bir arada yaşama vurgulanmakta hem de İslâm'a yönelik olumsuz imaja eğilim bulunmaktadır. Bu ise Japon toplumunda tutarsız bir eğilimi ifade etmektedir. Bu tutarsızlığın farkına varan Japonlar ise İslâm'ın Müslüman Japonlardaki yansımaları gördüklerinden İslâm'a yönelik olumlu anlamda ciddi bir farkındalık da oluşmaktadır. Özellikle Tabunka Kyōsei "Çokkültürlü Bir Arada Yaşama" kavramı Japonların bakış açısının temelde nötr bir bakış olduğu, İslâm'ın Japonlar tarafından hoş görülme eğiliminde olduğu ve bunun İslâm'a karşı dinî ilgisizliği, din fobisini ve önyargıyı aşmak için bir araç olduğu ifade edilmektedir. Ayrıca gelişim süreci ve potansiyeli olmasına rağmen Japonya'da İslâm, toplumsal etkisi bakımından belirsizliğini koruduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bunun temel nedeninin kamusal söylemde İslâm ezici bir çoğunlukla anlaşılması ve yabancı olarak sunulması ve halkın büyük çoğunluğu tarafından da bu şekilde anlaşılması olduğu söylenebilmektedir. Japonya'da yaşayan Müslümanlarla ilgili kitap ve medya makalelerinin ciddi bir kısmı yalnızca yabancı Müslümanlara odaklandıklarından ve Japon Müslümanları dikkate almadıklarından söz edilmektedir.

### Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors

Yazarların çalışmadaki katkı oranları eşittir.  
Authors' contribution rates in the study are equal.

\*\*\*\*\*

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Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.  
*There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.*

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## Islamic Forms of New Age Belief in Syncretic Hyperreality

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### Abstract

Although the era of secularism, which promised that human beings could build the truth, was not over, the trend towards mystical and paranormal beliefs grew, as did the spread of new forms of religion and the dominance of postmodernity-specific confusion. Augury, magic, ancient secrets, the texts of Abrahamic Religions, and the mystical beliefs of the Far East have been blended and commodified, particularly transforming into commercial fields of interest for educated masses. In the study, examples of hyperreality presented as religion through syncretic forms were examined on YouTube, the most followed digital platform worldwide; 50 videos from five different YouTube channels were evaluated using thematic content analysis, and the findings were discussed within the framework of Baudrillard's Postmodern Media Theory. In the analyzed videos, promises of healing, weight loss, happiness, strengthening faith, etc., were made, and it was observed that Islamic content was added to Buddhist practices and indicators in an effort to engage a Muslim audience. The findings of the study exemplify post-truth practices in terms of the syncretization of different belief systems, providing detailed data especially for researchers working on New Age cults.

**Keywords:** New Age, Postmodernism, Hyperreality, Occultism, Islam

## Senkretik Hipergerçeklikte Yeni Çağ İnanışlarının İslami Formları

### Öz

Hakikati insanın inşa edebileceğini vaat eden sekülerizmin çağı sona erme nokta; mistik ve paranormal inançlara eğilimin arttığı, yeni dini formların yaygınlaştığı, postmoderniteye özgü muğlaklığın ve karmaşanın hakimiyeti olmuştur. Fal, büyü, kadim sırlar, semavi dinlerin metinleri ve Uzakdoğu'nun mistik inanç biçimleri harmanlanarak emtia haline getirilmiş, özellikle de eğitilmiş kitlelerin ilgi gösterdiği ticari alanlara dönüşmüştür. Çalışmada, senkretik formlara dönüştürülerek din olarak sunulan hipergerçekliğin örnekleri, dünya genelinde en çok takip edilen dijital mecra YouTube'da araştırılmış; incelenen beş ayrı YouTube kanalındaki 50 video tematik içerik analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiş ve bulgular Baudrillard'ın Postmodern Medya Kuramı çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır. Analiz edilen videolarda şifalandırma, kilo verme, mutluluk, imanın güçlendirilmesi vb. vaatlerde bulunulmuş, Budizm'e özgü uygulama ve göstergelere, İslami içerikler eklenerek Müslüman bir kitleden etkileşim alma çabası içerisinde olduğu gözlenmiştir. Çalışmanın bulguları, birbirinden farklı inanç sistemlerinin senkretik bir hale getirilmesi bakımından post-truth pratiklerine örnek teşkil etmekte, özellikle New Age kültürleri üzerine çalışan araştırmacılar için detaylı veriler sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** New Age, Postmodernizm, Hipergerçeklik, Okültizm, İslam

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## Introduction

Modernists believe that we know reality, while postmodernists argue that we are all confused with illusions and hyper-reality (Berger, 2018). Without claiming it to be an illusion, we can say that the expression “complexity” is in line with today's widespread belief. Therefore, the digital world represents a religion distinct from the traditional Abrahamic faiths. In particular, the digital world represents a system of beliefs that, regardless of the prevalent religion in the country, centers its teachings around the mystical beliefs and philosophies of other universal religions, particularly those from the Far East. This system ignores the limitations of religions and spreads through universally accepted teachings, asserting that the source of all beliefs lies in one place. It's often healing-centric; in other words, it claims to solve problems that modern medicine can't solve, far from claiming to be a different religion but bringing together certain rituals and belief systems. It aligns with postmodernism, as it is eclectic and complex, encompassing a variety of elements without conforming to a single concept.

According to Baudrillard (2016), postmodernism is actually a phrase that means nothing to people. It's not even a concept. We're going to use it as a term for defining a period in terms of being a period and a general term. However, Baudrillard's simulations and simulacra will again be the concepts we will use to understand occultist and new-age rituals. According to him, today's forms of abstraction have nothing to do with the concepts of mapping, shaping, etc. The concept of simulation has no relation to a piece of land on the map, a table, or a reference system. Models of a reality without any origin or reality derive simulation into a hyper-reality. The exact distinction between the map and the land, which makes extraction intriguing and attractive, no longer exists. From now on, it will not be possible to establish an imaginary correlation between reality and the real concept. Nowadays, we can replicate the truth in an infinite number of ways. In the postmodern era, religion is also at the forefront of the re-production of reality.

The motivation of the study is to trace the media transformation of the religious sphere, which has become syncretic in this era where everything is intertwined and a new truth is being attempted to be constructed from opposing elements. In summary, the aim of our study is to provide field data and perspectives to researchers working on the New Age and new religious forms. In this context, the aim is not to discuss the consistency of the content from the perspective of religious sciences or its place in Islamic sources. Analyses are limited to situation assessment. However, from a theological perspective, extraordinary data has been encountered. The data obtained in the study reflect a significant paradigm shift of today and include the necessary content that should be considered, especially for those working in the field of Islamic sciences.

In the literature section of the study, information is provided about "digitalization," occultism, and postmodern media theory in the religious and religious concepts we frequently encounter in the analyzed data. The research section examined videos from five YouTube channels that allegedly distribute healing and mystical content using the thematic content analysis method. The themes of the analysis were applied as Islamic, Other Abrahamic Religions, and Occult elements. Additionally, a detailed content analysis was conducted using semiotics under the headings of Video Title - Video Content - Video Visual Elements - Video Music for two videos from each channel. The findings, the analyzed videos, and the thematic content analysis used were discussed in the conclusion section within the context of postmodern media theory.

## 1. Digitized Religion and Religiosity

For the structure of the relationship between postmodernism and religion, a hybrid religion that feeds on both tradition but is compatible with both non-traditional and digital forms (virtual community religion, selfie religion, techno religion, etc.) can be mentioned (Çuhadar, 2021). In the digital age, religion and digital religion are distinct concepts. But this digital way of life, which affects almost all of people's daily life practices, has also transformed their beliefs and rituals. Understanding and studying digital religion in this complex environment of digital transformation will be crucial to understanding the landscape of belief and spirituality that evolves in the digital age. Therefore, this study will employ the term 'digital religiosity', a term that has gained widespread usage in literature.

Digital religiosity refers to the intersection of religious beliefs, practices, and expressions with the digital sphere and covers how individuals engage in listening through online platforms, technology, and virtual spaces. The concept has gained importance in recent years as developments in digital technology have changed the way people interact with their beliefs and religious communities. Research has shown that digital natives, especially the Y generation, prefer for interacting with both online and offline religious content (Aditoni & Rohmah, 2022). Religiosity has become active in the digital age, not limited to passive consumption but with increased participation by Internet users in digital content that includes religious beliefs (Ekonugraheni et al., 2023). The integration of religious practices into digital platforms reflects a wider tendency for individuals to take advantage of digital tools to express and deepen their religious beliefs (Yuliani & Khuwarazmi, 2022). This blurring of the boundaries between technology and spirituality has made the profound impact of digitalization on shaping contemporary religious experiences and perceptions a subject of sociological research (Sotiriou, 2021). Today's advances in information technology have also caused religious abuse to become more widespread than ever in history (Çuhadar, 2019). With digitalization, religion has become a virtual reality space in line with postmodernity. Postmodernity's adoption of a critical mindset fosters a cynicism that is more obscure and multidimensional than meaningful, accepting all shades of grey. In this context, digital religion is emerging as an alternative to restrictive theology in a liberating techno-media field (Alici, 2022).

Recent studies indicate that popular religion has grown, individuals shift from traditional/institutional religion to individual beliefs and mystical spiritual searches, and individuals use postmodern habits to define their beliefs based on their lifestyles (Baltacı, 2022). Naturally, these new religions have been influenced by complex digital media. In fact, postmodernism, called the New Age religion, is fed on occultist elements, remains within the framework of Abrahamic religions but is richly fed on Buddhism, Brahmanism, etc. religion (or philosophy) (which also has sharp differences in this regard), where yoga prevails instead of prayer, but Quranic verses are read. Thus, this section will discuss occultism and new age "belief"—often called spirituality rather than religion, faith "faith" in literature.

The environment in which digital religiosity develops is directly related to the concept of post-truth. In the post-truth era, the authority of objective truths is diminishing, leading to the prominence of personal beliefs and emotional resonances that can deeply affect religious discourse and practices (Saputra et al., 2024; Syofyan, 2019). This change has implications for how religious narratives are created and conveyed, especially in the context of social media where unverified

interpretations of religious texts and beliefs can rapidly proliferate (Ritonga et al., 2022; Susan & Singgih, 2023). The post-truth environment encourages the commodification of religious beliefs, viewing faith not as a source of deep meaning and community, but as a product to be marketed and consumed (Mavelli, 2019). This commodification can dilute the essence of religious teachings, reducing them to emotionally resonant but fundamentally theologically lacking slogans or sound bites. Wildt (2023) defines this situation as a "pop theology" that further complicates the relationship between belief and reality in contemporary society, prioritizing appeal over accuracy.

Additionally, the post-truth era is challenging traditional religious authorities and institutions due to individuals increasingly turning to alternative sources of information for spiritual guidance, such as social media influencers and online communities (Ritonga et al., 2022). This change can weaken established religious teachings and create an environment where subjective interpretations of faith can develop uncontrollably, leading to a crisis of intellectual accuracy in religious studies (Ambasciano, 2020; Ibrahim, 2018). The consequences of this crisis are profound, as it threatens the stability of the universal values embraced by many religions, which can lead to a moral relativism that undermines the foundation of faith (Bleazby, 2024; Saputra et al., 2024).

## 2. Occultism and New Age

"Occult" means "connected with magic powers and things that cannot be explained by reason or science" (Oxford Dictionary, n.d). Occultism, a term that encompasses beliefs and practices of interest throughout history, comes from areas such as mysticism, parapsychology, and esoteric practices, and offers alternatives to rational thinking.

Historically, occultism has challenged traditional beliefs and norms in reinterpreting mysticism, gender roles, and social classes, especially at a time of intellectual rationalization. Human curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge beyond the tangible underpin the discovery of occult phenomena, from parapsychology to astral projection. Humanity's persistent interest in the Occult stems from its desire to solve mysteries and explore realms beyond the ordinary (Gedicks, 1986; Wolfram, 2006). Modern society continues to incorporate occult rituals, not limited to ancient traditions or historical contexts. Despite significant advances in science and technology, it is known that there is a significant community of people interested in scholarly beliefs and practices (Nugroho, 2022). We cannot ignore the influence of mass media in shaping occult perceptions. TV shows and films have played an important role in portraying the themes of occultism, often either inducing fear, encouraging admiration, or nurturing misunderstandings about occult practices (Monacelli, 2023).

The pursuit of the hidden meaning behind the phenomenon began with Plato's concept of "idea" and continued to exist in the modernist and positivist planes of today. Occultist tendencies, which advocate that, instead of experiencing and rationally questioning the essence of the truth, certain spiritual abilities can be attained by unusual methods (by interacting with the realm of spirits, with the jinns), continue to exist in Islamic geography under different names. These trends can be studied under nine headings: 1. Augury 2. Prophecy 3. Meditation 4. Horoscope 5. Astrology and Signs 6. Magic 7. Yoga 8. Mystery 9. Reiki, Aura, and Chakra Practices and Healing (Yeşilyurt, 2020).

New Age spirituality is a multi-faceted movement that blends the divine with its individual interpretations, challenging traditional religious paradigms. Hanegraaff (1999) describes the New



Age movement as a historically innovative phenomenon based on personal symbolism. It is a manifestation of a particular symbolism directly embedded in secular culture, and the new form of belief is autonomous from traditional religions. Klippenstein (2005) distinguishes the New Age from the mainstream religion and describes it as a social or religious movement that challenges traditional categorization. This movement often reflects an approach to spirituality that integrates elements of Christianity (including Islam), native Shamanism, and personal spiritual beliefs (Gumucio, 2002). The New Age movement is not geographically limited but has a global presence that adapts to various cultural contexts and social changes (Bainbridge, 2004).

The New Age beliefs that have emerged in Western societies are becoming widespread and popular all over the world. New Age beliefs centre on sanctifying the individual and building secular sanctities that promise the individual unlimited freedom. At the same time, the New Age brings together many structures such as Shamanism, Buddhism, and Occultism for modern humans who are far from spirituality, creating a syncretic and hybrid model. Especially the ancient Indian religions and the Far East religion and mystical philosophies are presented to modern society in the form of modern practices (Arıcı, 2021).

The New Age movement is often associated with practices such as meditation, healing, and alternative medicine and reflects a holistic approach to spirituality. Jespers (2010) observes that paranormal activities, a popular manifestation of New Age spirituality, provide a platform to reenchant and sanctify experiences, emphasizing a return to spiritual values in a secularized world. This re-sanctification attracts academic interest in how New Age concepts, such as the “heavenly phenomenon” influence contemporary secular societies and shape discussions about spirituality and belief systems. The New Age beliefs gain meaning rather than ideological clarity by the integration of different elements, such as time, space, social practices, and texts, from hypocrisy to sophistication, from yoga to astrology, from Gaia theory to Atlantis civilisation, which are transformative embedded and inconsistent with each other (Karaosmanoğlu, 2009). The religious market created around neo-sufism, or other New-age currents and cults, is now referred to in literature as “spiritual markets” and in this way, the products produced in these markets and offered to the masses as popular culture are replacing a new religious culture, a new vocabulary, and new perceptions of religious identity in a way that rebuilds the general perception of society’s transitional religion through various symbols (Bölükbaşı, 2012).

A study conducted by Gürbüz and Aygül (2021), who participated in rituals that could be evaluated as part of the New Age belief, found that the practice of reiki, bioenergy, and access bars (energy bars conversion therapy) was more healing, relieving pain and pain, while yoga, meditation and hypnosis were preferred by individuals seeking mental and spiritual well-being, seeking psychological relief, and seeking a rescue way/method to cope with negative situations. At the point of belief, the participants showed a strong tendency to believe in a sacred existence and a lesser inclination to worship and perform rituals.

As a natural consequence of advanced capitalism, it is observed that New Age rituals have turned into an industry in themselves. It is observed that especially educated white-collar workers participate in rituals of these new forms of belief by paying high fees in the luxury districts of metropolises. In this regard, the findings of Doğan's (2020) research on energy therapists and participants in these therapies are noteworthy. According to the research, energy healing has become a lucrative sector. All energy healers justify their fees with the balance of giving and

receiving in the world. “You get as much as you give to the world. No more, no less.” With this rhetoric, healings are done for high sums of money. In addition, it is said that if the fee is not paid, the healing process will not take place, and the person will not be healed. New Age beliefs constitute a huge religious market worldwide, including in Turkey. Finding religious packages that will appeal to all segments here is attractive to modern individuals.

As the name suggests, the New Age movement is specific to the postmodern era. The field of consciousness is the media, and postmodern media theory can be used to fully understand it. In this sense, postmodern media theory will be discussed in this section, both to establish the theoretical framework of the study and to provide a better understanding of the definition of the contents.

### 3. Postmodern Media Theory

Arthur Asa Berger's definition of postmodernism (2018) also explains the contemporary background of his interest in the New Age rituals, which are actually the subject of the study. According to him, postmodernism, whatever it is, was often regarded as replacing modernism in the 1960s, when the values and beliefs that characterized, modernism were suddenly rejected. Postmodernism is fun in mass culture. Modernism involves a high degree of seriousness towards life, while postmodernism includes a playful and ironic attitude, as well as a sort of masquerade. People in postmodern societies play with their identities, and when they get bored with their former ones, they change them.

Baudrillard (2016), questions the existence of religion and God in the simulation universe. According to him, images have a lethal power, like Byzantine icons trying to destroy God's divine identity. The Western world, with all its good intentions, believes in the resurrection power of images or the ability of an indicator to substitute a meaning. Once even God has been simulated, an entire system will become a mass, a giant simulation that has been freed from the influence of gravity. Baudrillard, describes what is called the production and reproduction of truth as a fundamental disease inherent in our times. What society has been constantly trying to produce and revive for many years is the fact that it has missed. That is why material production itself has become hyperreal today. Today, material production has all the characteristics of traditional production but is nothing more than a reflection of it in much larger dimensions.

Baudrillard's discovery of hyperreality extends to criticism of technology, suggesting that certain forms of communication, especially those that drive individuals away from face-to-face interactions, end up in a hyperreal form of communication that lacks authenticity and depth (Korpijaakko, 2015). Moreover, Baudrillard's study of hyperreality enters the realm of cultural phenomena such as America's enchantment and disaster, suggesting that the hyperreal nature of American society allows utopia and dystopia to coexist, blurring the boundaries between reality and simulation (Smith, 2002). In general, Baudrillard's concept of hyper-reality challenges traditional concepts of reality by emphasizing the widespread influence of simulations and representations in shaping contemporary experiences and perceptions.

Jameson, a prominent postmodernist theorist, argues that a new form of postmodernism is just another name and a concept that is closely linked to consumer culture, explaining that this consistent view also provides an enabling environment for the commercialization of the New Age rituals that we described above (Berger, 2018) Baudrillard's postmodern media theory focusses on

postmodernism, a simulation era in which models, signs, and codes dominate, which defines the media as the main simulation machines that play an important role in everyday life and generate images, signals, and code, forming the autonomous hyper-real field. The media viewer absorbs images passively rather than passing through the active process or generating meaning. The audience responds not to the meaning of the media's message or its relationship with the outside world but to its striking internal code and self-reference structure (Alemdar & Erdoğan, 2005).

We find it appropriate to take advantage of Baudrillard's theory in our study, not to discuss the criticism of theoretical technological determinism, etc., especially because of the social environment that provides the basis for such 'mixed religion' (syncretic) content, and because it takes a quite holistic approach to the reactions of viewers.

#### 4. Research

##### 4.1. Research Questions and Methodology

The study's design is based on "examining the contents of New Age items on YouTube". In this context, the following questions will be answered:

RQ1: What is the New Age/occult elements in Islamic videos on YouTube?

RQ2: Are there rituals of non-Islamic religions in Islamic videos on YouTube?

RQ3: Did videos on the channels analyzed on YouTube use direct or covert persuasion strategies and investigation methods at the point of receipt of messages?

Thematic content analysis was utilized to give objective data and allow for interpretation as the study focusses on the academic issue and analyses new religious forms. Thematic content analysis is a qualitative research approach that finds, analyses, and interprets data themes (Lawong & Munchus, 2022). Through thematic content analysis, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the content and meaning of data, which enables the identification of patterns and themes that can be used as categories for analysis (Giesbrecht et al., 2010). Most importantly, thematic content analysis gives scholars a deep understanding of the substance of studies in a field (Torun & Pektaş, 2023). Thematic content analysis synthesizes research findings, allowing generalizable results from studies conducted in the same subject area (Kabar, 2023). Researchers can use this strategy to evaluate, integrate, and interpret data from several studies on a topic, offering a full perspective of the research environment (Yılmaz et al., 2018). In addition, thematic content analysis can yield practical results by identifying and reporting the main themes in the data, providing valuable insights for further research or practical applications (Saleem et al., 2012).

The analysis combines structural/sensitive thematic analysis with realistic approaches. Themes were created based on these questions, primarily epistemological questions, and themes for each data analysis were simply contained and synthesized. The two videos selected from each channel were theoretically interpreted based on Baudrillard's theory. The analysis of the other videos is summarized in the summary table of each channel analyzed. The New Age elements are the elements of new religious currents and are included in the theme of "other religious elements" under a single theme because the Far Eastern religions have elements in common with religions such as Hinduism. Like other religions, New Age elements are covered by the theme of "other religious elements." Paranoid beliefs from the past to the present are included in the theme of healing, coding, knowledge of the air, and other elements of beliefs and tendencies.

At the point of analysis of the channel reflections of the new form of religion, three themes have been identified: A) Islamic B) Other religion C) Occult. Within the framework of these three themes, the analysis was carried out in the context of the determined content elements for the video content. The specified content items are: Video title - Video content - Video visual elements - Video music.

#### 4.2. The Sample of the Research

The sample was used for research purposes. YouTube has also been selected as the media. There are two main reasons why YouTube has been chosen. The first is to be the world's most followed social media application (We Are Social, 2024), and the second is to provide more information than other councils, a more suitable area for research, especially for thematic content analysis.

YouTube channel "Lost Sciences" (2024a) has been chosen as a prime example of new syncretic religious forms. The channel has 116K subscribers as of July 2024. When scanning with key concepts, the first channel is seen as the result of scanning, and it has rich content where both new religious forms and rituals are excessively mixed, and when you look at the comments, they have a great deal of influence on individuals. In order to obtain sufficient data, the channels "Depths of the Intermediate Realm" (2024a), "Elfabex Ancient Wisdom and Spiritual Peace" (2024a), "Qur'an Therapy" (2024), and "The Universe Journey" (2024j) have been included to compare and validate the data. Thematic analysis of a total of 50 videos, including 10 videos from each channel, was carried out. Other analyses included in a detailed analysis of the randomly selected two videos from each channel under article limitations are presented in the summary table.

#### 4.3. Scope and Limitations

Among the YouTube app, which includes millions of contents, the study searched for channels with syncretic and Islamic content, using keywords such as Turkish, healing, purification, Esmā-ul Husna (names of Allah), dhikr, soul, etc., and examined the five channels with the most subscribers and regular content. The study is limited to the analysis and interpretation of the situation. The subject of the theological coherence of the content, the correctness according to Islamic sources, etc., was left to the scientists working in theology. Our aim here is to make a situational analysis of how New Age/Buddhist or occultist content leaks on Islamic topics.

### 5. Findings

#### 5.1. The Analyze of the Channel "Lost Sciences"

The channel (2024a) has 116K subscribers. While providing general information about what we're doing in the section, it's remarkable: "With Tefek Applications, you can buy your truth. "The phrase "purchase of truth" actually summarises what we're trying to draw attention to. Such channels do not hesitate to hide the commercial aspects of the work they do while promising their followers healing, cleansing, etc. It is claimed that the channel will change people's lives with meditations containing "Esmā-ul-Husna" (the names of Allah) codes and verses. Furthermore, the Sufi breathing exercises, the meditation practices, which he describes as Sufi meditation, and the study of sympathy and devotion are often part of a channel in which he incorporates these practices into his Sanskritic religious practices. The details of the 1st and 10th videos (randomly selected) on the channel are given below.

**Table 1.** The Analyze of 1st Video of the Channel of Lost Sciences (Lost Sciences, 2024i)

<b><u>Video Name</u></b>
Subconscious Transformation Affirmations Bringing Happiness with Esmas
<b><u>Video Content</u></b>
<p>As a video summary, the practices often used in meditation are performed using Islamic terms (particularly the names/rituals of Allah).</p> <p>In the opening of the video, YouTuber said (00:00:12-00:00:51):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Friends, I'm now going to give you a series of affirmations that you can listen to while you're sleeping at night or during the day. So your heart, which will be better and more beautiful because of the subconscious rhythm, will rejoice as a 'mutmain' (be happy and internalization the faith). Just listen and let the words fill your mind. Without any effort, you'll see your transformation, and over time, you'll experience the positive effects in your life. If you're ready, let's start.</p> <p>In the sequel to the YouTuber video (00:00:53-00:01:38),</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">With the mystery of the Creator's "Vedud", I give my permission to love without limits, to be loved and to allow loving people to come into my life, to appreciate and to be liked, and to create people who are generously expressing "love" with "positive energy" to enter my life. As he loves the creature he has created, and at the same time gives his servants mercy and consent, I allow him to get rid of all the negative things that have accumulated in my subconscious mind through the expression of love and conversation.</p> <p>For example, another striking realization is (00:07:34-00:07:42): "I cancel all mental programs that have disturbed me and deprived me of my presence in the secret of suicide."</p>
<b><u>Visual Content</u></b>
<p>First, it was termed "Purification and Affirmation of the Subconscious by the Names of God." Instead of "meditation" in the title, the video uses "Rabida" (connection with mursidh / guru), a visual sufism phrase. A religious scientist comes in the video and departs from the globe of light while reading a heavy book on his waist, symbolizing the lost conduit of information. The channel's name and graphic insignia evoke mystery and Islam. The video shows nature and seascapes. Views of the water and environment help viewers absorb the material. The sea represents "eternal peace and happiness" with natural scenery, "growth and life," and hot air balloons with "freedom, relief from burdens, relieving from past sufferings." "The hot air balloon" means "it must give up some loads in order to fly higher."</p>
<b><u>Music</u></b>
<p>Meditation music composed of Far Eastern spirits and instruments was used. When the music was studied, it was found to be called "Buddha Zen Spa-Deep Relaxation Massage Music" on the Fizzy Chakra Radio. Music reflects Buddhist and mystical elements in New Age music.</p>

From the introductory sentences, it is clear that listening to the video of the transformation with these phrases to reach the truth and God and become, 'mutmain' has been presented as a formula, a recipe for salvation.

**Table 2.** The Analyze of 10<sup>th</sup> Video of the Channel of Lost Sciences (Lost Sciences, 2024j)

<b>Video Name</b>
Subconscious Weight Loss Meditation with the Names of Allah (“ <i>Esmā’ul Husna</i> ”) Without Dieting
<b>Video Content</b>
<p>The video's title carries a syncretic character consisting of "subconscious cleansing, studies," and "meditation," which are interested in the New Age, and "<i>Esmā’ul husna</i>" and "<i>Rabita</i>" which are Islamic content. He also promises to lose weight without dieting, without exercising, that is, without making any effort, just by prayer and prayers. So, the practice of praying and "<i>Esmā’ul Husna</i>" is a magical task.</p> <p>Before to start meditation, YouTuber says (00:15.00-00.2.44),</p> <p>Despite the very strict diets, sometimes the hours spent in the gym, the results aren't as desired because we don't have control over our minds. The subconscious encodings of the mind power that we are now beginning to recognize, which have been discovered a little more every day, are now reaching out to us. In short, this practice is designed to help you reach your ideal weight and maintain that ideal weight by using the power of your mind through the influence of lamentation, supplication, and prayer. Basically, focusing on four main points will ensure that you get it. The first point is motivation. The second is the release of stress. The third point is prayer. Prayer is the greatest power a man can produce. With prayer, it is possible to change both your mind and your will. So, prayer is the first step to action. The fourth point is the power of pushing. It's generating positive thinking by creating an energy field. By focusing on these four main points, you'll change and transform the energy you load into the food. You can reach your ideal weight with your new eating habits. It is expected that you will fall asleep during the period. Even if you're asleep, there's no doubt that you'll see the expected effect of the ransom in its entirety. I would ask those who have practiced this practice for 30 days to write down what they've experienced in the comments at the bottom of this video. It will be the most ideal and healthy feedback for those who decide to apply this method. Are you ready? Then let's start.</p> <p>YouTuber doing relaxation and breathing exercises first. He then intends and tells the audience that they should repeat what they say (00: 3.41-00: 4.05):</p> <p>“<i>Bismillahirrahmanirrahim La Ilaha'e illAllah</i>”, O Lord Healer, there is no healing but the healing you give. Give me a cure so that my extra pounds leave me and I reach my ideal weight.</p> <p>“<i>Subhane Rabiye'l A'lel Vehhab</i>”. Praise be to you, my Lord, the Exalted, the Merciful.”</p> <p>And then he's doing affirmations with “<i>Esmā’ul Husna</i>”. “<i>Esmā’ul Husna</i>” used in the video are: “Rahman, Nafi, Salam Mucib, Vedud, Muktedir, Batin, Nur” (an example of the sentences of <i>Esmā’ul Husna</i>) and “O Nafi, God who created good and beneficial things for the human body, let the excess fat in my body burn.” After the video, he brings the salavat to the end of the video and works with his imagination (00:10.26-00:12.12):</p> <p>“<i>Estağfurullah el-azim. Allahumme Salli Ala Seyiddine Muhammeddin ve Ala Seyidina Muhammed</i>”. Imagine your body as a tree in your mind.</p> <p>“<i>Ya Evvelu Allah</i>”, you created my soul in the realm of souls before you created it in this present realm, which is ruled by the core of my tree of flesh. My body is my soul's home. Thank you for bringing me the ideal weight so that I can stay in this house where my soul lives as a guest. Oh, Ahiri, thank you for bringing this body, which is governed by both the body and the fruit of the tree, to the ideal weight to meet the needs of both my body and my soul as food. Oh, Zahiri, thank you for shaping my soul as well as my body in the shape and shape of every tree you put on. Whether it's the West, the factory that works with a very sensitive temperament for the continuation of the life of that tree in every tree, for the perfect and intimate work of my body and all my desires.</p>
<b>Visual Content</b>
First, there is a crowned religious scholar who reads religious books on the rail, which is a symbol of the Lost Sciences Channel. Then the blue mist clouds slide up and form shapes throughout the video.
<b>Music</b>
A relaxing frequency of music was used to facilitate the reception of messages in the video.

The sentence "Allah, let the excess fat in my body burn" in the video actually summarizes the problematic that our study addresses. Meditation has eradicated activities such as human will, sports, diet, and others that rely solely on mental power. The obligation in Islam to make the necessary effort for a prayer to come true has not been considered. The heading does not align with the Islamic concept of "Rabita". The content primarily focuses on meditation. The title already incorporates a combination of meditation and rejuvenation techniques. The viewer is presented with a magical healing package that incorporates captivating visuals, soothing music, and a language that suggests the subconscious will be magically influenced by salt waves and prayers, leading to a weak physical appearance. What the YouTuber said before he started his meditation study; for thirty days, the practitioners have been using persuasive communication that increases their faith in the study by asking them to write comments at the bottom of the video. Watching the same video for 30 days will increase viewing time, and commenting will increase the video's interaction, enabling it to reach more users with the YouTube algorithm. This will undoubtedly boost the channel owner's profits.

**Table 3.** Thematic Analysis Of All Videos On The Channel Lost Sciences

Video No./ Source	Video Title	Islamic Elements	Other Religious Elements	Occult Elements
1. (Lost Sciences, 2024i)	Subconscious transformation affirmations bringing happiness with Esma'ul husna/meditation	"Esma'ul Husna", "Rabita"	Meditation, Healing, Buddha Zen Music	Havas (Secret Spiritual Wisdom)
2. (Lost Sciences, 2024k)	Mystic astrology your zodiac sign, ruling planet and Esma'ul husna	Muhiddin Ibn 'Arabi, Essences, Throne, Kurs	Zodiac	Astrology, Zodiac
3. (Lost Sciences, 2024f)	Which Esma'ul husna should we read? What is the esma'ul husna of our zodiac sign?	Esma'ul husna, Zikr	Bioenergy, Chakra, Healing, Subconscious Cleansing Healing Work	Deer, Chakra
4. (Lost Sciences, 2024g)	The code of essences: what is the cosmic energy of essences? How to discover the hidden treasure in essences?	Esma'ul Husna, Arabic Letters, Tulip	Energy healing applications	Cipher, number, energy, Esma'ul Husna ,Havas
5. (Lost Sciences, 2024e)	Chakra opening and aura cleansing meditation with celcultiye\huruf-u mukataa	Celcultiye Ode, Huruf-u Mukataa Letters	Chakra Opening Healing, Aura Raising Healing Practices	Chakra, Aura, energy healing, Huruf-u Mukataa, Magical Prays
6. (Lost Sciences, 2024h)	Jalcelutiye prayer meditation\ let your request be accepted immediately	Jalcelutiye Ode, Contemplation	Meditation	Talismanic Meditation, Healing
7. (Lost Sciences, 2024c)	Crown chakra and hill chakra opening, cleansing and balancing contemplation	Contemplation	The crown and crown chakras,	Chakra Opening, Healing, mystical images
8. (Lost Sciences, 2024b)	Aura strengthening and balancing all chakras meditation	Dhikr, Esma'ul Husna, Prayers, Recitation sounds	Chakra Opening Healing, Aura Strengthening Healing Practices	Mystical visuals, Chakra
9. (Lost Sciences, 2024d)	Clearing ancestral burdens meditation	Esma'ul Husna and Dhikr, Recitation sounds	Buddhist, Far Eastern blend New Age Music	Cleansing from ancestral burdens
10. (Lost Sciences, 2024j)	Subconscious diet-free weight loss relation with Esma'ul Husna\meditation	Esma'ul Husna, Rabita,	Meditation, Subconscious Cleansing Healing Work	Esma'ul Husna and Magical Prays

All ten videos contain Islamic items, other religious items and occult items.

**5.2. The Analyze of the Channel “Depths of the Intermediate Realm (Berzah)”**

The channel (Berzah’s Depth, 2024a) has 92K subscribers. The channel's analysis revealed the presence of a few other religious elements. It's a channel that contains more occult elements. We conducted a detailed analysis of the randomly selected 3rd and 5th videos and summarized the other videos in the summary table.

**Table 4.** Analyze of 3<sup>rd</sup> Video of Channel (Berzah’s Depth, 2024j)

<b>Video Name</b>
Change Your Life By Applying the Chakra Opening Method of Muhyiddin İbn’ul-Arabi
<b>Video Content</b>
The video contains the scriptures of ibn 'Arabis applied to seven chakra regions. The YouTuber ranks the notes in sequence from the lowest chakra.
<b>Visual Content</b>
Holy books, surrealistic pictures, mystical figures from the hands of light, human figures meditating on the seven-coloured chakra with a combined spiral.
<b>Music</b>
No music, sound or frequency is heard. There's only talk.

A miracle package is presented in the title. It is also used in conjunction with the "chakra" of the title, the New Age element, and the Islamic content (a “well-known Muslim religion, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabic). Islam does not include the concept of the chakra, but the spiritual centres in the “*sufism*” are the "*letaifs*." But the chakras mentioned in the video have nothing to do with them.

**Table 5.** Analysis of the 5th Video of the Depths of Channel (Berzah’s Depth, 2024c)

<b>Video Title</b>
21 Days of Cleansing from Ancestral Burdens
<b>Content of the Video</b>
At the video's beginning, YouTuber promises to teach the technique for ancestral baggage emancipation in 21 days. He says DNA encodes information for generations. He stresses that this information is also called “ <i>Levh-i Mahfuz</i> ”. He calls “ <i>Levh-i Mahfuz</i> ” (described in the Qur'an) the mirror of divine knowledge, the ledger of destiny, the universe's program, where everything that has happened, will happen; all time and space beings are inscribed. The family sequence states that we all face problems, deadlocks, and obstructions to overcome ancestral barriers. Our negative views and forefathers' baggage can trigger this, he says. He argues we don't have to carry our predecessors' crimes, and the key for liberation is (00:06.12-00:06.53):
I, hereby release all my vows of poverty and sickness, all my sexual, physical, and material formations, all my vows of poverty and sickness, which all of my ancestors have knowingly or unknowingly manifested during their lifetimes, which have been transmitted to me through their genes and made common to me, and which I have unknowingly taken during my own lifetimes.
For 21 days, he states that this practice should be done like taking medicine morning and evening and that this is the definitive prescription for salvation. He ends the video with greetings and prayers.



### Video Visuals

The video cover shows Hindu goddess Parvita. Parvita usually has four or eight arms and bears swords, bows, and arrows in one hand. Her grace and beauty are shown. When discussing ancestors and generations, the film shows two colorful birds and eggs. Magical seven-chakra human bodies arise occasionally. In other words, the video mixes Buddhist and Hindu aspects with others. In the video, "*Levh-i Mahfuz*" from the Qur'an is described.

### Music

A mixture of relaxing Turkish and Arabic melodies was used.

The issue of rejecting spiritual inheritance from ancestors, which has no equivalent in Islam or without any evidence in this regard, is directly associated with the "*Levh-i Mahfuz*" which is mentioned in the Qur'an as the place where fate is written, but the video is served with images of Hindu goddesses. This video can be shown as an example of the content in which the syncretism we emphasized in our study is presented most clearly.

**Table 6.** Thematic Analysis of Channel Videos

Video No.	Video Title	Islamic Elements	Other Religious Elements	Occult Elements
(Berzah's Depth, 2024b)	Those Who Recite the "Ettehiyatu" Prayer in the Kitchen of Your Home Become Rich	Surah from Qur'an, Image of People Praying	-	Encrypted recitation of the prayer for a certain number of days and a certain number of day
2. (Berzah's Depth, 2024d)	Communicate with your Guardian Angel through Meditation	Ablution, Surah "Yasin"	Meditation	Communicating with Angels
3. (Berzah's Depth, 2024k)	Change Your Life by Applying Muhyiddin Ibn'ul Arabi's Chakra Opening Management	Muhyiddin Ibn'ul Arabi,	Chakra, Cross-legged Meditating Human Figures with Seven Colored Chakras, Bible image	Mystical Figures with Light Emerging from Their Hands
4. (Berzah's Depth, 2024e)	Lucid Dream Techniques to Solve Your Problems	Prayer	-	Recitation of a Certain Number of Prayers Not Included in Havas Science, Mystical Nature Scenes
5. (Berzah's Depth, 2024c)	21 Days of Cleansing from Ancestral Burdens	Prayer	Hinduism Goddess, Human Bodies with Seven	Ritual of Purification from Ancestral Sins
6. (Berzah's Depth, 2024l)	Put This Kernel in Your Wallet and Experience Abundance and Wealth	Surah from Quran, Kaaba Images, Images of People Praying, Images of People with Rosary in Their Hands, Images of the Quran	-	Ciphers, Formulas, Astrology, Mystical Images in which the person praying on the prayer rug shines like light
7. (Berzah's Depth, 2024f)	Read this secret prayer before you go to sleep and experience its miracle	Surah from Quran Images of People Praying, People with Rosary in Their Hands, Images of the Quran	-	Secret Prayer-Havas Science, Number Cipher of Verses (Reading in a Certain Number)
8. (Berzah's Depth, 2024h)	Vibration Codes of Essences	Esma'ul Husna, Images of People Praying, Images of People with Rosary in Their Hands, Images of the Quran	-	Vibration Cipher, Reading Esma'ul Hüsna in Certain Numbers Depending on the Cipher
9. (Berzah's Depth, 2024g)	Surahs to be read according to the zodiac signs	Surahs, Images of People with Rosary in their hands, Images of the Quran	Zodiac Signs	Horoscopes, Reading Certain Prayers in Certain Zodiac Signs (Codes)
10. (Berzah's Depth, 2024i)	The magnificent life-changing zikr formula	Zikr, Salavat, Besmele, Images of People with Rosary in Their	-	Zikr Formula, Recitation of Besmele, Salavat and Surahs in a Certain Number, Mystical Images

Other religious elements were found in four of the ten videos. In all the videos, both Islamic and occult elements are seen.

**5.3. The Analyze of The Channel “Elfabex Ancient Wisdom and Spiritual Peace Point”**

With 12K subscribers, the channel covers Spiritual Therapy Lessons, Religion and Sufism, Quran and Hadith, Islamic Prophet Ethics, History and Sociology, Literature, Family and Society, Astrology, Science and Technology, Meditation, and Music (Elfabex, 2024a). In meditation studies, Islam and other religions are mixed and made syncretic, verses and prayers become incomprehensible, subconscious suggestion practices with solfeggio frequencies, New Age practices, and other religious and occult elements are added. The 5th and 7th channel videos were specifically analysed, while the others were conceptually analyzed.

**Table 7.** Analysis of 5<sup>th</sup> Video of Elfabex Channel (Elfabex, 2024b)

<b>Video Title</b>
Stress, Sleep, Relaxation Therapy \ Rain Celcelutiye Secine Content \ Meditation Music
<b>Content of the Video</b>
The video begins with a line under Stress-Sleep-Relaxation. It reads Rain “Celcelutiye”, “Sekine” Subliminal Message Meditation Music. After the rain and calming music, Celcelutiye Ode and Sekine Prayer appear in the video. The 52 minutes and 11 seconds video convey prayers subliminally. Celcelutiye and Sekine” are Islamic, "meditation" New Age. Music obscures the prayers.
<b>Video Visuals</b>
Various relaxing nature scenes and rainfall are seen throughout the video.
<b>Music</b>
Relaxing music and frequencies are used with the sound of rain.

What is striking in this video is that the prayers are placed in the background of the music, just like Catholic or Buddhist liturgy. In Islam, there are religious poems called "hymns," but in prayers, only the makams consisting of human voices are used; no music is used. Syncretic presentation is also encountered here.

**Table 8.** Analysis of 7<sup>th</sup> Video of Elfabex Channel (Elfabex, 2024c)

<b>Video Title</b>
The Virtue of Reciting the Names of the Companions of Badr / Allah's Lions on Earth
<b>Content of the Video</b>
YouTuber first explains what the “Ashâb of Badr” is (soldiers of the first battle that Muhammad fought against his followers and won). Then he conveys the virtues of reading the names of the “Ashâb of Badr”. He states that reading the names of “Ashâb of Badr” will be a source of absolute healing. He also states that if the names of the “Ashâb of Badr” are read before praying, the prayer will be accepted quickly.
<b>Video Visuals</b>
The video starts with the emblem of the channel. Then it is written “Ashâb of Badr” in a circle of fire. In the rest of the video, images from Arab society and images from the market are presented in an enchanted, mystical atmosphere with small balls of light emitting light. There are also images from the Battle of Badr and pictures representing the “Lions of Bedr.”
<b>Music</b>
In the video, when “Ashâb of Badr” is written in the circle of fire and the fires are moving around it, a rapid heartbeat sound is heard. It is aimed to attracting attention by adding an element of excitement in accordance with the theme. In the continuation of the video, the voice of a YouTuber making explanations is heard.

The claim that memorizing the names of those who participated in the battle of Badr, the first battle of the Muslims against the Meccan polytheists, which resulted in the victory of the Muslims, would be a healing factor has no equivalent in the generally accepted Islamic sources. Here again, a "promise of healing" is made by associating occult practices with Islamic history.

**Table 9.** Thematic Analysis of "Elfabex Ancient Wisdom and Spiritual Peace Point Videos

Video No.	Video Title	Islamic Elements	Other Religious Elements	Occult Elements
1.(Elfabex, 2024j)	Opening of the gates of the third eye\ mikikr of the sages 9 and 10 babs	"Celcelutiye" ode, "hayy and kayyum" Esma'ul Husna	Chakras	Celcelutiye prayer talisman, sacred geometry
2. (Elfabex, 2024d)	Success, motivation, relaxation, Quran therapy music, secret suggestion	Ode of "Celcelutiye", verses of the holy Quran, jawshen, image of the Quran	Subliminal suggestion studies (new age religion element)	Images of occult nature, sacred geometry
3. (Elfabex, 2024e)	Healing, health, relaxation and subconscious cleansing, quran therapy spiritual meditation music	Quran	Meditation, healing practices, subconscious cleansing	Healing
4. (Elfabex, 2024g)	The best attracting operator is prayer\di voice prayer frequency and healing energy	Prayer	Bioenergy, prayer frequency subliminal studies	Healing
5. (Elfabex, 2024b)	Stress, sleep, relaxation therapy\rain "Celcelutiye" "Sekine" content\meditation music	"Celcelutiye" ode, "Sekine" prayer	Meditation	"Celcelutiye" prayer talisman
6. (Elfabex, 2024f)	Return to your original nature with the sound of kun\just listen	Sound of kun, ism-i azam, "Ayat al-kursi", surah "Fatiha", allah writing	Hill chakra, flower of life	Reading surahs with numbers- mystical visions, sacred geometry
7. (Elfabex, 2024c)	The virtue of reciting the names of the "Ashâb of Badr" \Allah's lions on earth	Names of "Ashâb of Badr"	-	Healing talisman with the names of "Ashâb of Badr", mystical images
8. (Elfabex, 2024i)	Aura and chakra cleansing\peaceful sleep pattern\therapy music with verse messages	Verses	Aura\chakra cleansing, subconscious subliminal work	-
9. (Elfabex, 2024h)	Ney sound frequency\according to chakra makams\body and soul therapy	Ney	Chakras	-
10. (Elfabex, 2024k)	Soul and Body Health\Subconscious Cleansing\Subliminal Music ("Sekine" Prayer and Verse Content)	Sekine Prayer and Verse	Subconscious Cleansing, Solfege Frequencies Work, Meditation	Sacred Geometry

#### 5.4. Analyzing the “Qur’an Therapy” Channel

The Channel (Qur’an Therapy, 2024a) has 5K subscribers. No explanation is given on the channel, although its logo is Kubilay Aktaş's Quran Therapy book. Solfej frequencies, especially 432 Hz, subliminal verses, suras, prayers, and essences, and 25. square visual therapy meditation videos have religious content. The channel appears to mix other religious elements, especially New Age and occult elements, with Islamic elements. Analyses of the channel's first and 10th videos are given, and the summary table covers the rest.

**Table 10.** Analysis of Video 1 of Qur'an Therapy Channel (Qur’an Therapy, 2024b)

<b><u>Video Title</u></b>
For the salvation and survival of our nation and the preservation of our unity and solidarity 5000 Ayat al Kursi
<b><u>Content of the Video</u></b>
Video titles feature Islamic motifs. "Mysticism" includes the occult number 5000. The 34' 26" video features calming music and hypnotizing visuals. The frequency is 432 Hz. A compelling wording was employed in the video description.
<b><u>Video Visuals</u></b>
In the space image, it is as if moving balls of light and stars are visible. In the video, the same image is presented as if hypnotizing.
<b><u>Music</u></b>
Relaxing music was played. The 432 hz frequency was stressed. “Ayat-el Kursi” pray is subliminally presented beneath 432 hz music. Instead of being understood, the prayer was rendered incomprehensible and used simply to achieve the aim.

The video directly refers to nationalist and pan-Islamist sentiments, but occult elements are also used here. The fact that the surahs or verses, which we encountered in the previous video, remain behind the music is also observed here.

**Table 11.** Analyzing the 10th Video of the Qur'an Therapy Channel (Qur’an Therapy, 2024c)

<b><u>Video Title</u></b>
25 <sup>th</sup> Square Subconscious Therapy for Psoriasis and All Skin Diseases
<b><u>Content of the Video</u></b>
The video's "25th Square subconscious therapy" treats New Age skin diseases. The current title contains New Age and occult implications. The explanation underneath the video proposes placing the 14th verse of Surah “ <i>al-Mu'minun</i> ” in the substructure 7 times using the 25th frame approach and watching it once for at least seven days.
<b><u>Video Visuals</u></b>
The space image appears to show moving light balls and stars. The video shows the same visual hypnotizing. The movie shows coiled spiral patterns on the ground and light-like smoke emanating from a giant light sphere sitting on them, where geometric shapes are generated.
<b><u>Music</u></b>
Relaxing music was played. The 432 Hz frequency was stressed. “Ayat-el Kursi” pray is subliminally conveyed beneath 432 Hz music.

**Table 12.** Thematic Analysis of Qur'an Therapy Channel Videos

Video No.	Video Title	Islamic Elements	Other Religious Elements	Occult Elements
1. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024d)	5000 Ayat-el Kursi for the salvation, survival, unity and solidarity of our nation	"Ayat-el Kursi"	Solfège Frequencies, Subliminal Suggestion Work (New Age Religions Applications)	5000 numbers "Ayat-el Kursi" (Havas Lore)
2. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024e)	Surah "al-Ma'ida" for Increasing the Rizq and Protection from All Kinds of Harm Surat "al-Ma'ida"-40 Pieces-432 Hz.	Surah "al-Ma'ida"	Solfège Frequencies, Subliminal Subconscious Suggestion Work	40 Reading Surah by Number (Havas Science)
3. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024f)	25th Square Technique for Beautiful, Intelligible Speech, Communication Skills and Success in Examinations	Surah "Ta-Ha"	Subliminal Subconscious Visual Therapy Study	-
4. (Qur'an Therapy, n.d.)	Frame 25 visual Qur'an suggestion	Quran	Subliminal subconscious visual therapy study	Sacred geometry
5.(Qur'an Therapy, 2024g)	Surah Rad Therapy Ney and Rain Sound	Surah "Rad", Ney	Subliminal Subconscious Visual Therapy Study	40 Days of Listening to Prayer (Prayer Password (Havas)
6. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024i)	Surah Alak-7 Pieces-432 Hz.	Surah "Alak"	Solfège Frequencies, Subliminal Subconscious Suggestion Work	Surah Reading Formula with Numbers, Cipher
7.(Qur'an Therapy, 2024j)	Surah Inshirah and Duha subliminal suggestion for relief from inner distress and refreshment	Surah "Inshirah" and "Duha"	Subliminal Subconscious Suggestion Study	Formula for Reading Surah by Numbers and on a Certain Number of Days, Cipher
8. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024h)	1001 Salavat-1001 "Fatiha" Surah (432 Hz.)	"Salavat-i Fatiha", Surah "Fatiha"	Solfège Frequencies, Subliminal Subconscious Suggestion Work	Surah by Numbers, Salavat Reading Formula, Cipher (Havas Wisdom), Sacred Geometry
9. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024k)	"Esmā-i Idrisiye"(21 repetitions-432 Hz.)	"Esmā-i Idrisiye", Ney (Instrumental Sufi Music)	Solfège Frequencies, Subliminal Subconscious Suggestion Work	"Esmā'ul Husna" Reading Formula with Numbers, Cipher (Havas Wisdom)
10. (Qur'an Therapy, 2024l)	25th Square subconscious therapy for psoriasis and all kinds of skin diseases	Surah Believer, White Rose	Subliminal Subconscious Visual Therapy Study	Reading Surah by Numbers and Certain Number of Days Formula,

Islamic and other religious elements were found in all videos. Nine videos contain occult elements.

### 5.5. Analysis of the “Universal Journey” Channel

The channel (Universal Journey, 2024j) has 16.5 thousand subscribers, and there is no information in the about section. It has the appearance of a syncretic channel where other religious and occult elements are blended with Islam. "Prayer Meditations" and "Dual Soul Studies" are presented as two separate lists in the playlists. Videos 6 and 7 on the channel were analyzed, and all videos were evaluated in Table 15.

**Table 13.** Analysis of the 6<sup>th</sup> Video of the Universal Journey Channel (Universal Journey, 2024a)

<b>Video Title</b>
Meditation for Diving Deeper into the Soul with “Ya Allah” Zikr
<b>Content of the Video</b>
The title's "Ya Allah" chanting is Islamic, but "meditation" is Buddhist New Age and other faiths. YouTuber begins meditation by suggesting that all stress and anxieties are released and breathing techniques soothe the body. Yotuber explained his study's purpose: "This meditation is to be free from our mind and thoughts and to be able to dive completely into the depth within ourselves and to meet with the Almighty Creator, Allah in that depth."
<b>Video Visuals</b>
Throughout the video, fractal patterns and models, i.e. sacred geometry, are used. As already mentioned, crystal and sacred geometry belong to the occult.
<b>Music</b>
The chanting of "Ya Allah" is accompanied by a Tibetan bell. It is especially emphasized by YouTuber that this sound is a Tibetan bell.

The ways of connecting with God in Islam such as contemplation, “*Rabıta*” and dhikr, or worships, have lost their meaning by being presented with hypnotizing visuals accompanied by Tibetan bells, and a brand-new Islamic form is presented in hyperreality.

**Table 14.** Analysis of the 7<sup>th</sup> Video of the Universal Journey Channel (Universal Journey, 2024b)

<b>Video Title</b>
Prayer Meditation for Regaip Kandil. Prayer with 99 names of Allah
<b>Content of the Video</b>
The video title comprises “ <i>Laylat al-Raghaib</i> ” (Sunni holy night) and "Prayer with 99 names of Allah". Again, Islamic content is mingled with other ideologies. The YouTuber starts by stating the Prophet Mary weeps on a mountaintop overlooking the sky as her love for Jesus grows. He says Jesus' spirit rose like the sun over Mary and the mosque. He claims Mary and Jesus have twin spirits or flames. He starts meditation by saying, now imagine that you are a light and enter the first level of your heart' since dual spirits only sense divine love, their nature, destiny, and mission. The YouTuber prays 'entrust yourself to the lovely spirit of “ <i>Laylat al-Raghaib</i> ” with 99 Allah names in the study. Study methods included New Age breathing, imagination, and meditation.
<b>Video Visuals</b>
A light and crescent moon are in front of it. Refers to “ <i>Laylat al-Raghaib</i> ”. A topic ideal for enlightening the heart, dual spirits being a light to the surroundings, and imagination work was employed in the film. Islamic visuals are employed. The "Crescent" also symbolizes Islam in Islamic culture and art.
<b>Music</b>
Relaxing wordless music is used throughout the video.

Jesus Christ and Mary are mentioned in the video for Islamic and Christian reasons. Dual-spirit belongs into Yeşilyurt's (2020) "Mysticism" group of esoteric aspects. “*Laylat al-Raghaib*” is not mentioned in the video, which contains rumors. A new religious form generated in simulation influences spectators.

**Table 15.** Thematic Analysis of Universal Journey Channel Videos

Video No.	Video Title	Islamic Elements	Other Religious Elements	Occult Elements
1. (Universal Journey, 2024c)	Stages of the Heart - Breaking the Walls of the Heart - Surah "Inshirah" and "Ya Shafi" Zikr	Surah "Inshirah", Ya Shafi Zikr, Shams, Ney	Meditation, New Age Music	mystical images
2. (Universal Journey, 2024k)	Purification and Repentance Meditation	Repentance, Prayer	Repentance and Purification Practices	-
3. (Universal Journey, 2024d)	The Way of Lovers Meditation-Rise of the Soul-3 Veysel Karani	Veysel Karani, Camel	Meditation	-
4. (Universal Journey, 2024e)	Our Ramadan Study - Stages of the Heart - 4th Floor Sealing Study with "Ya Baki Ya Entel Baki" Zikr	Zikr, Ayata'l Kursi, Hymn	Meditation	reading prayers by number (prayer-zikr cipher, science of havas), sealing the 4th floor of the heart
5. (Universal Journey, 2024f)	Special Meditation for "Miraj Kandil"	Surah "Sebe", Holy Quran Image	Meditation, Christian Hymns Background Music	-
6. (Universal Journey, 2024a)	Meditation for Diving Deeper into the Soul with Ya Allah Zikr	Ya Allah Dhikr	Meditation, Tibetan Bell	sacred geometry
7. (Universal Journey, 2024b)	Prayer Meditation for Regaib Kandil. Prayer with 99 Names of Allah	Regaib Kandil, Prayer with 99 Names of Allah, Mary, Jesus Christ	Meditation	dual soul
8. (Universal Journey, 2024g)	Surah Lokman and Bismillah 20 Prayers- For Happiness and Opening of Good Doors	Surah "al-Lokman", Ney Sound	-	Bismillah 20 prayers not included in sahih sources except havas science
9. (Universal Journey, 2024h)	Meditation for Recognizing the True Twin-Soul with the Zikr	"Ya Hayyu Ya Kayyum" Dhikr	Meditation	dualruh, sacred geometry
10. (Universal Journey, 2024i)	Twin/Dual-Soul Astral/Lucid Connection Chanting and Prayer Meditation	Surah "Araf", Dhikr, Prayers, Quran Images, Hymns	Meditation	astral/lucid connection with dualruh

The video opens with a brilliant crystal ball of light and the channel's crystal heart. Sacred geometry incorporates the light sphere and crystal heart. Islamic aspects are in all videos. Nine videos included other religious aspects and seven had occult components. Unlike other networks, Christian material is prioritized.



### 5.6. General Evaluation

The common point of all the analyzed videos is that they are constructed to get interaction from a Muslim audience by adding Islamic content to the New Age content and practices discovered by the publishers for which they are in demand. In other words, in each video, there are any of the Islamic contents, such as Kandil, Surah, Zikr, and Names of Allah, but without giving any information about their content, virtues, or place in Islam, they are combined with Buddhism or more generally occult practices and promise healing, purification, and happiness. Even videos promising weight loss and getting rid of diseases have been encountered. Therefore, it can be said that these videos have nothing to do with Islam. For example, it is possible to come across similar content in a society where Catholic Christians are widespread. In a video with images, hymns, prayers, etc. belonging to Catholicism, elements such as meditation, Tibetan bell, Indian goddess, etc., or simply meditation, yoga, etc. practices can be used. Here, there may be a differentiation only in terms of what the common belief is in the society where the audience to which the video is addressed is located, but it is possible to come across similar content.

The answer to research question 1 is detailed in the analysis tables of Islamic channels under the themes of "other religious elements" and "occult elements." Accordingly, it is seen that Buddhist and New Age practices such as "meditation, subconscious cleaning, chakra opening, and aura raising" are frequently used. Energy, chakra, and healing practices are also included in occult elements. Considering the classification of Yeşilyurt (2020), horoscopes and astrology are related to other religions, but also to occultism.

To answer the second question, meditation, chakra opening, aura boosting, and bioenergy treatments are Far Eastern and New Age techniques distinct from Islam. The Lost Sciences channel uses syncretic phrases like "meditation contemplation" and "meditation rabbi" in video names, descriptions, and content. Other channels use merely "meditation." Christianity, among other religions, is represented on the "Universal Journey" channel by communicating with the dual spirit, recounting the tale of Jesus Christ and Mary, and emphasizing their duality. The ancient ritual of cleansing from ancestral baggage has endured to the present and relates to religion, yet it has no religious equivalent. Buddhists believe in ancestry, karma, and rebirth. New Age methods include "subconscious washing" and "subliminal suggestions and affirmations." Subliminal message and suggestion practices using the 25th Square visual method and solfege frequencies are New Age components, so the analysis tables include them as "other religious elements."

To answer the third study question, persuasive communication tactics are used explicitly and subliminally upon message reception. In the analysis table of the Lost Sciences channel's video number 7, "Crown Chakra and Hill Chakra Opening, Cleansing, and Balancing Contemplation," a YouTuber said, "Don't be afraid; there will be those who will overturn your intellectual system by saying that what I have done to you is a Buddhist belief from the East. Allah owns the East and West. All creation belongs to Allah. On the road of Tawhid, consider what Allah made. Allow objections. The Qur'an commands reasonable thought; thus, those who miss it are dissatisfied. Existence is one. The truth exists. Please start if you're ready." This statement proves the account manager intentionally constructed a syncretic religion. He promotes this by direct persuasion. The Holy Quran appears to be his cause. Baudrillard's ideas shape his truth reconstruction.

In general, soothing frequencies and music, hypnotizing, and relaxing images used in all channels increase the viewing of videos on the channel. It also ensures that the messages are more easily received. Therefore, hidden persuasion strategies were used in this direction in the channels.

### Conclusion

Today it is even clearer that the freedom promised by modernism does not bring happiness. The modern, educated masses, insatiable, unhappy, and falling into a great emptiness by consuming everything with advanced capitalism, seek the remedy in energy healers by paying money. This change cannot be perceived as religion recapturing the public space that it had abandoned to secularism, but it can also be defined as an endeavor to unite all celestial religions with other forms of belief to form a single religion whose basis is not very clear. The influence of mass media and globalization on this change is indisputable.

The universe of simulation that Baudrillard foresees in his theory of postmodern media appears exactly here. Religion has been detached from its context, and what has emerged has turned into a syncretic form as an artificial reality created by man rather than reality. As Baudrillard frequently emphasizes in his book *The Society of Consumption* (2008), the concept of shopping has also changed in the postmodern period, and now a toilet paper, a sandwich, a television, and a boat are sold in the same place. The observation we made in our study confirms that religion has also become like this. Everything, regardless of whether it is Muslim or Christian, has been melted into the pot of the new popular, and the hunt for interaction has begun. Regardless of whether its basic ground is occultism or New Age, the main reason why it originates from Buddhism can be considered as the fact that it does not have sharp boundaries that can cover everything. In other words, Buddhist elements are a commodity with many buyers. It is a rising value in terms of popular culture. The limiting issues of the Abrahamic religions, such as the obligation to adhere to a certain book and doctrine, do not exist here. However, to break the prejudices against Buddhism, using Islamic content (such as the night of the holy month, “*Esma’ul husna*” dhikr, etc.) is also very favourable for convincing the audience. The followers who oppose the product are also told that “they all have the same source”, and the product is sold.

As mentioned in the literature section, the spread of unverified personal interpretations of religion, especially on social media, the change in religious discourse and practices, and the commodification of religious beliefs in the post-truth era have also emerged here. The data obtained in the research have confirmed the theses in the literature section on the post-truth-religion relationship, similar to Baudrillard's postmodern media theory.

Looking at the follower counts, it is known that high-paid camps for high-income groups, which are not common on YouTube, have become widespread. Since our study is centered on YouTube, we recommend that researchers working on a similar topic analyze such events or the Instagram channel where many 'life coaches' make suggestions. In these areas, data can be found in abundance and at different scales.

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# MEDİAD

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## Senkretik Hipergerçeklikte Yeni Çağ İnanışlarının İslami Formları

Nil GÜREL\*

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### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

Postmodernizm hakkında uzlaşma varılmış belki de tek kelime olan “karmaşıklık” olgusunun inanç biçimleri ve ritüellerde karşılık bulduğunu söyleyebiliriz. Öyle ki, dijital alana yansıyan semavi dinlerin türevleri geleneksel din yapılarından oldukça farklı. Özellikle, bulunduğu ülkede hangi din yaygınsa onun öğretilerini merkeze alan ancak diğer semavi dinlerden ve bilhassa uzak doğunun mistik inanç ve felsefelerinden beslenen, dinlerin sınırlandırmalarını görmezden gelen, tüm inanışların kaynağının tek bir yer olduğu iddiasıyla hemen herkesin kabul edileceği öğretiler üzerinden yayılan bir inanç sistemi olduğu ve bunun gitgide yaygınlaştığı söylenebilir. Genellikle şifa merkezli, bir başka deyimle, modern tıbbın çözemediği sorunları çözme iddiasıyla yola çıkan, çoğunlukla başka bir din olma iddiasından uzak ancak belirli ritüelleri ve inanç sistemlerini bir araya getiren, postmodernizme uygun, eklektik, karmaşık, her şeyden bir parça taşıyan ama tek bir kavrama da sığmayan, bir parçaya da benzemeyen, yeni, karmaşık ve elbette ticari değeri yüksek bir akım olarak betimlenebilir. Baurdillard’ın postmodern medya teorisinde ön gördüğü simülasyon evreni tam olarak burada karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Din olarak ortaya çıkan şey, gerçeklikten öte insan tarafından oluşturulan suni bir gerçeklik olarak, senkretik bir forma dönüşmüştür.

Çalışmada, kitlelere şifalandırma, ruhsal arınma, imanı güçlendirme hatta zayıflama vb. vaatlerde bulunan kişilerin, internet ortamında İslami söylemlerle oluşturdukları içeriklerde diğer dinlere ve okült inanç biçimlerinin, New Age olarak da tanımlanan bir perspektif içerisinde nasıl sundukları, hangi yöntemlerle izleyicilere neler telkin ettikleri sorgulanmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı, New Age ve yeni dini formlar üzerinde çalışan araştırmacılar için sahadan veri ve yöntem sağlamaktır. Çalışmamızın, içeriklerin din bilimleri açısından tutarlılığı veya İslami kaynaklardaki yerini tartışmak gibi bir amacı yoktur. Dolayısıyla analizler durum tespitiyle sınırlıdır. Ancak teolojik açıdan, günümüzdeki önemli bir paradigma değişimini yansıttığı için verilerin ilgi çekici olduğunu ve özellikle semavi dinler veya New Age alanında çalışanlar için dikkate alınması gerekli içerikler barındırdığını düşünüyoruz.

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Çalışmanın literatür bölümünde, analiz ettiğimiz verilerde sıklıkla karşımıza çıkacak olan, din ve dindarlık kavramlarında “dijitalleşme”, okültizm ve postmodern medya kuramına ilişkin bilgiler verilmiştir. Araştırma bölümünde ise okült içeriklerle şifa dağıtma iddiasında olduğu tespit edilen beş ayrı YouTube kanalından toplamda 50 video incelenmiştir. Her kanaldan ikişer video özellikle kullandıkları söylem, görsel ve müzik temalarıyla derinlemesine analiz edilmiştir. Analiz edilen videolara ilişkin ve kullanılan tematik içerik analizine ilişkin bilgi verilerek, elde edilen bulgular Baudrillard’ın postmodern medya kuramı bağlamında tartışılmıştır.

## Metodoloji

Araştırmanın tasarımı, “YouTube’daki New Age öğelerinin içeriklerini inceleme” üzerine temellendirilmiştir. Bu bağlamda aşağıdaki sorulara yanıt aranmıştır:

AS<sub>1</sub>: YouTube’daki İslami içerikli videolarda hangi New Age / okült öğeler yer almaktadır?

AS<sub>2</sub>: YouTube’daki İslami içerikli videolarda İslamiyet’in dışındaki dinlere ait ritüeller var mıdır?

AS<sub>3</sub>: YouTube’da analiz edilen kanallarda yer alan videolarda mesajların alımlanması noktasında doğrudan veya gizli ikna stratejileri ve telkin metotları kullanılmış mıdır?

Çalışmada okült temaya odaklanma ve yeni dini formlar çerçevesinde bir analiz yapılması planladığından, verilerin en nesnel bir biçimde elde edilip yorumlama imkânı sunması bakımından tematik içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Senkretik yeni dini formun kanala yansımalarının analizi noktasında üç tema belirlenmiştir: A) İslami B) Diğer dini C) Okült. Bu üç tema çerçevesinde, video içeriğine ilişkin belirlenmiş olan içerik öğeleri bağlamında analiz yapılmıştır. Belirlenen içerik öğeleri ise şöyledir: Videonun başlığı -Videonun içeriği -Videonun görsel öğeleri -Videonun müziği.

Araştırmada amaçlı örneklem kullanılmıştır. Mecra olarak da YouTube seçilmiştir. YouTube’un tercih edilmesinin temel iki sebebi bulunmaktadır. Birincisi dünyada en çok takip edilen sosyal medya mecrasının olması (We Are Social 2024), ikincisi diğer mecralara göre daha fazla enformasyon sunarak, özellikle tematik içerik analizi için daha uygun bir araştırma sahası olmasıdır.

İncelenen YouTube kanallarının isimleri ise şunlardır; Kayıp İlimler – Berzahın Derinlikleri-Elfabex Kadim Bilgelik ve Manevi Huzur, Kuran Terapisi, Evrensel Yolculuk. Makale sınırlılıkları çerçevesinde, Temmuz 2024 itibarıyla yayında olan, her kanaldan onar adet toplamda 50 video analiz edilmiştir. Sunulan içeriklerin teolojik açıdan tutarlılığı sorgulanmamış, anlatıdaki dil ve söyleme odaklanılmıştır. Hesap yöneticilerinin kendilerine yönelik eleştirilere verdikleri bazı yanıtlara, yapılan eylemin hedefi ve yöntemi hakkında fikir vermesi açısından yer verilmiştir.

## Bulgular

Analiz edilen videoların tamamının ortak noktası; New Age içerik ve uygulamalarına İslami içerikler ekleyerek Müslüman bir kitleden etkileşim alma çabasına yönelik olarak kurgulanmasıdır. Yani, her videoda; Kandil, Sure, Zikir, Allah’ın İsimleri gibi İslami içeriklerden herhangi biri vardır ancak bunların içeriği, faziletleri, İslam dinindeki yeri hakkında bir bilgi verilmeksizin, Budizm’e veya daha genel bir deyimle okült uygulamalarla birleştirilerek şifa, arınma, mutluluk vaatlerinde bulunmasıdır. Hatta kilo verme, hastalıklardan kurtulma gibi vaatlerde bulunan videolara da rastlanmıştır.

Birinci araştırma sorusunun yanıtı, İslami içeriklere başka dinlerden öğeler eklenmesi gibi bir durumdan çok, aslında Budizme ve diğer okült anlatılara İslami içeriklerin eklenmesi söz konusudur. Yani buradaki anlatı İslami temelli değildir. Bahsi geçen sure, kandil gecesi, dua vb. konularda çok

az bilgi verilip bunlar kullanılarak meditasyonun nasıl yapılacağı anlatılmaktadır. İkinci araştırma sorusunun cevabı ise İslamiyet dışında meditasyon, çakra açma, aura yükseltme, biyoenerji uygulamaları gibi ritüellerin Uzakdoğu inanışlarına ait aynı zamanda New Age inanışlarıyla bağlantılı olduğu görülmüştür. Hatta atalardan gelecek olumsuzlukları reddetme vb. pagan ritüelleri de İslami söylemlerle sundukları gözlenmiştir. Üçüncü araştırma sorusunun cevabı olarak gerek doğrudan gerek subliminal telkinlerle mesajların alımlaması noktasında ikna edici iletişim stratejilerinin uygulandığı görülmüştür. Yapılan eleştirilere, tüm dinlerin kaynağının tek olduğu vurgulanarak yanıt verilmiştir. Bu da günümüzde evrensel tek din söylemlerinin bu mecralarda empoze edildiğini göstermektedir.

### Sonuç

Baudrillard'ın postmodern medya teorisinde ön gördüğü simülasyon evreni tam olarak burada karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Din, bağlamından koparılmış, ortaya çıkan şey, gerçeklikten öte insan tarafından oluşturulan suni bir gerçeklik olarak, senkretik bir forma dönüşmüştür. Baudrillard'ın Tüketim Toplumu kitabında da sıklıkla vurguladığı gibi, postmodern dönemde alışveriş mefhumu da değişmiş, artık bir tuvalet kâğıdı, bir sandviç, bir televizyon ve bir tekne aynı yerde satılmaktadır. Çalışmamızda yaptığımız gözlem dinin de bu hale geldiğini doğrulamaktadır. Müslümanlık, Hristiyanlık ögesi fark etmeksizin her şey, yeni popüler olanın potasında eritilerek etkileşim avına çıkmıştır. Semavi dinlerin sınırlayıcı, belirli bir kitaba ve doktrinlere bağlı kalma zorunluluğu gibi hususlar yok sayılarak yeni inanç biçimleri kitlelere pazarlanmaktadır. Kitle için "yeni" tanımlanabilecek Budizm vd. ait içeriklere karşı ön yargıların kırılması için de İslami içerikler (kandil gecesi, Esmâ zikri vb.) kullanmak izleyiciyi ikna etmek için de oldukça elverişlidir. Karşı çıkan takipçilere de "hepsinin kaynağı aynı" telkininde bulunulmakta ve ürün satılmaktadır. Takipçi sayılarına bakıldığında da alıcısının çok olduğu, özellikle YouTube'da pek olmayan ancak yüksek gelirli kesimler için yüksek ücretlerle katılım sağlanan kampların yaygınlaştığı bilinmektedir.

Literatür bölümünde de değinildiği gibi post-truth dönemde dinin doğrulanmamış kişisel yorumlamalarının özellikle sosyal medyada yayılması, dini söylem ve uygulamaların değişmesi, dini inançların metalaşması durumu burada da karşımıza çıkmış, araştırmada elde ettiğimiz veriler Baudrillard'ın postmodern medya teorisinde olduğu gibi, post-truth din ilişkisi üzerine literatür bölümünde verilmiş çalışmalardaki tezleri de doğrulamıştır. Çalışma YouTube merkezlidir. Benzer konuda çalışacak araştırmacılar için bu tür etkinlikler veya çok sayıda "yaşam koçunun" telkinde bulunduğu Instagram mecrasının da incelenmesini tavsiye etmekteyiz. Bu alanlarda bol miktarda ve farklı ölçeklerde verilere rastlanabilir.

**Arařtırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Yazarların alıřmadaki katkı oranları eřittir.  
Authors' contribution rates in the study are equal.

\*\*\*\*\*

**ıkar atıřması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

alıřma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kiři ile ıkar atıřması bulunmamaktadır.  
*There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.*

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## The Effects of Digital Culture and New Media on Religious Identity in The Postmodern Age: The Case of Türkiye

Tuba IŞIK\*

### Abstract

Postmodernism emerged as a reaction to the intellectual thought and values of the new modern era, particularly as modernist orientations reached an impasse. Critiquing various aspects of modernism, the concept of postmodernism has gained even greater significance in the contemporary era under the influence of digitalization. It embraces online existence, globalization, objective reality, hyperrealist movements, and, broadly, digital culture. With the impact of digital culture, religious life, teachings, tendencies, and practices have increasingly shifted to virtual platforms, and beliefs are progressively integrated into cyberspace. This study aims to discuss the influence of digital culture and new media on the processes of religious identity formation among individuals in Turkey during the postmodern era. Employing a literature review, the research highlights the digitalization of society, culture, and religion and their significant effects on individuals' religious experiences and identities. Consequently, it seeks to expand discussions within the postmodernism-Islam-digitalization triangle. The analysis underscores how the blurring boundaries between the virtual and the real have led to virtual reality encompassing all aspects of life, fostering the integration of religious identities into digital culture.

**Keywords:** Digital Culture, Digital Religion, New Media, Religious Identity, Postmodernism

## Postmodern Çağda Dijital Kültür ve Yeni Medyanın Dini Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkileri: Türkiye Örneği

### Öz

Postmodernizm, modernist yönelimlerin çıkmaza girmesine istinaden yeni modern dönemin entelektüel düşünce ve değerlerine karşı bir tepki olarak ortaya çıkmıştır ve modernizmi çeşitli yönleriyle eleştirmektedir. Postmodernizm kavramı, dijitalleşme sürecinin etkisiyle günümüzde daha da önem kazanmıştır. Çevrim içi olmayı, küreselleşmeyi, nesnel gerçekliği, hiperrealist akımları kısacası dijital kültürü desteklemektedir. Dijital kültürün etkisiyle birlikte de günümüzde dini yaşam, öğretiler, eğilimler ve pratikler sanal ortama taşınmakta, inançlar artan oranda siber uzama entegre olmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, postmodern çağda dijital kültür ve yeni medyanın Türkiye’de bireylerin dini kimlik oluşturma süreçleri üzerindeki etkilerini tartışmaktır. Literatür taramasının uygulandığı araştırmada toplumun, kültürün ve dinin dijitalleşmesi, kişilerin dini deneyimleri ve dini kimlikleri üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmaya başlaması ve buna bağlı olarak da postmodernizm, İslam ve dijitalleşme üçgeninde mevcut duruma yönelik tartışmaların genişletilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Yürütülen tartışma, sanal ile gerçeklik arasındaki sınırların giderek bulanıklaşması ve bunun sonucu olarak sanal gerçekliğin yaşamın tüm yönlerini kuşatmasıyla beraber dini kimliklerin artan oranda dijital kültüre entegre olduğuna dair çıkarımlara zemmin hazırlamıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dijital Din, Dijital Kültür, Dini Kimlik, Postmodernizm, Yeni Medya

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## Introduction

In the digital age, the digitalization of societies, cultures, and religions significantly affects believers' religious identities, practices, and how they experience religion. Therefore, topics within the scope of postmodernism, Islam, and digitalization have become one of the areas on which academicians and intellectual circles in Türkiye and abroad have conducted numerous researches in recent years. Besides, virtual spaces have become an area where everyday life is being constructed today, and especially in the last twenty years, new media have made a significant contribution to this transformation process. From this point of view, it is possible to state that in the postmodern age, individuals have entered a new socialization process through new media (Yeniyoğlu & Karakaya, 2022). Briefly, media is one of the most efficacious and functional tools of the digital age, and the decisiveness and functionality of the media have reached such a high level that the phenomenon of media is in use now as mass media. Beliefs, directly or indirectly influence a significant part of human actions. Therefore, faith-based actions determine the overall structure of societies and everyday life in most cultures. According to Arslan (2015b), there is a return to the sacred in the postmodern period. In this context, religion has begun to show itself everywhere in the public sphere rather than being stuck in a narrow area, as in the modern period. However, according to Marxist assertion, religion is the domination of one part of society over another (Plantinga, 2023). Based on these debates, the objective of this study is to explore the role of religious beliefs and identity in the digital media age, defined as postmodern and a relatively new era, and the impact of these on today's spiritual world. In the upcoming sections of the study, it will first discuss the concepts of modernism and postmodernism. In the research in which literature review was applied, the abundance of research in field studies directly related to terms such as identity, religious identity, belief and new media of modern or postmodern phenomenon draws attention. However, the digitalization of society, culture and religion has begun to have a significant impact on people's religious experiences and religious identities, and accordingly, explaining the situation in the triangle of postmodernism, Islam and digitalization is important for our understanding of today's understanding of religion.

Then, it will delve into the topics of virtual spaces, digital religion, and digital culture. It will next explore the impact of new media on Islamic identity. Lastly, it will emphasize how digital media is affecting Muslims in Türkiye in the postmodern age.

## The Concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism

The "modernism" is derived by adding the "-ism" suffix to the "modern" and the word was used in 1737 to mean "deviation from the ancient and traditional approach" and from 1830 to 1924 to mean "modern ways and contemporary style." It has been used as the means of "being away from classical, prototypical or conventional styles" since 1924 (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2024). On the other part, the "postmodernism" is a word that was coined in the mid-20th century in the United States by adding the prefix "post" to the modern. Since its emergence, many different definitions of the term postmodernism have been made. Therefore, the lack of a clear definition of postmodernism causes individuals to interpret postmodernism according to their thoughts (Yıldız, 2015). When the definitions of postmodernism in various dictionaries are examined, for instance, in the Oxford English Dictionary, postmodernism is defined as a movement that involves deliberately

combining varied styles in art (Waite & Hawker, 2009). Apart from this, in the Turkish Language Association Online Turkish Dictionary (2024), it is defined as the name of various modes and trends that emerged after the mid-20th century, after the modernist search lost its liveliness.

To properly understand the postmodernism phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the concept of modernism in detail. The term modernism refers to the changes that occurred in the scope of art, culture, and science in the mid-19th century. The technological advancements and economic growth experienced in Europe in the 17th century drove societies into a course of institutional and cultural alteration termed modernism. In consideration of the foregoing, the progressions in the Age of Enlightenment form the basis of the thought of modernity, which emerged in the 18th century (Bayhan, 2006). Also, according to Giddens (2015), modernity is a concept that refers to the styles of social life and organization that emerged in Europe in the 17th century and subsequently had effects worldwide. On the other hand, according to centered on humanity and the mind, and as a result, religion began to lose its value while the human mind started to be sanctified. Postmodernism means beyond or after modernism, which shows that postmodernism is defined by looking at modernism, and there is continuity rather than a difference between modernism and postmodernism (Tekin, 2000). For this reason, postmodernism is not an epistemological or radical break from modernism. French philosopher and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard is one of the pioneering writers of the contemporary period who popularized the concept of life is the new perception of identity. In the postmodern phase, identities appear as a structure that transforms as a part of a timeless and spaceless space with a fluidity that transcends borders and displays multiple characteristics (Güven, 2015). In particular, it teaches us to express our values and commitments and adapt them to life by reshaping postmodernism and postmodern philosophy. According to Lyotard's (2005) hypothesis, the circumstance of knowledge has changed as cultures enter the postmodern age and societies enter the postindustrial age. In simple terms, the period we live in now represents a media and information age. Therefore, scholars use the concept of information society to name the post-industrial society.

In this respect, digital media and information are the distinguishing characteristics of postmodern society (Arslan, 2015a). Giddens (2015) states that today's societies have come up against situations that exceed modernity, and Vattimo (1988) defines this situation as postmodern and states that the media is the leading actor in the postmodernization process. In this regard, Arslan (2015) also supports Vattimo and confirms that the forming power of the postmodern society is the media. To summarize the above, media in general and digital media in particular is a phenomenon with dynamics that create new meanings, habits, symbols, lifestyles, and cultures. Consequently, developments that create a new social situation, culture, or form of knowledge are called postmodern.

One of the important benefits of postmodern them, by drawing attention to how we are affected by the axity of cultural, social and political differences in life (Stone-Mediatores, 2002). It is obvious that identity experiences differences depending on the events that occur in every period of history and finds new ways for itself with new meaning paradigms according to these differences. Identity in traditional life; While it is mentioned with concepts such as family and lineage, with the transition to modern life, the individual has become the center of social life, and the phenomenon of identity has now taken on a multiple and mobile structure (Möngü, 2013). However, it is not possible to find traces of the sense of belonging in the understanding of identity



in the structure of modernity in postmodernity. Postmodern identities built on a fragmented self find themselves with differences. During the modernization process, the individual's perception of identity has changed with the addition of 'worldly' elements to the individual's search for meaning and definition in symbolic systems, which has caused ruptures in the perception of the world of existence (Erkan, 2013). With the development of these processes, it is seen that questions about modernism have increased and the perception of identity has undergone a rapid change and taken on a dynamic and pluralistic understanding. Postmodernism also takes individualism to a new level, unlike modernism. According to this postmodern understanding, it offers individuals seemingly endless options to differentiate themselves from others, instead of relying solely on protecting borders as in modernity. In this direction, individuals can constantly acquire new identities forever. It can create new universes of reality to satisfy an insatiable search for meaning, belonging, and identity (Yin, 2018). In addition, in the postmodern process, all of the thought and value quotations of the modern period have been questioned, instead of terms such as difference, diversity and pluralism, the rejection of the other manifested with the postmodern understanding, that is, by going beyond the rational boundaries of modernity.

The way has been paved for it to be shaped in a heterogeneous and diverse manner (Möngü, 2013). In the postmodern understanding, identity has a very mobile and dynamic structure compared to the modern understanding. A fixed or static understanding of identity cannot find a place in a postmodern process. Therefore, the postmodern identity structure goes through a rapid evolutionary process and continues its life in a cycle of consuming itself and re-existing.

It is stated that one of the frequently stated criteria of postmodern life is 'return to religion and traditional understanding'. With postmodern thought, the process is supported by traditional-community and spiritual revival, instead of the collapse of the positivist, rationalist tradition (Arslan, 2015). This situation has paved the way for the emergence of new paradigms in religious identity with postmodern life. The concept of 'religion', which has a direct impact on individuals and societies in current thoughts as well as in historical narrative, has found a place for itself in 'identity'. This understanding shows that one of the important parameters of the identity element is 'religious identity' (Pısdıl, 2022).

However, modernism, which embraces worldly social life, attaches importance to the idea of purifying society from religion and magic, and expresses that socialization takes place by getting rid of the domination of religion (Erkan, 2013). Important sociologists of the period, such as Marx, Durkheim, Engels and Weber, also argued that the influence of religion on social life would completely disappear with modernism (Delibaş, 2008). Therefore, it is predicted that modernism, which wages war on the dogmatism of religion, will dissolve religious identities and render them ineffective. Because of this thought, which worries a certain segment of the society, the understanding of postmodernism, which attaches importance to freedom and individualism, has positioned itself as a solution for the salvation of religious identity for individuals. Postmodernity comes into play from this point.

Postmodernism is seen as a manifestation of the postmodern structure as the address of the effort to return to religion and see religious identity as an important factor of social life, with the understanding of returning the world to its old mystery and "making it magical again" (Bauman,

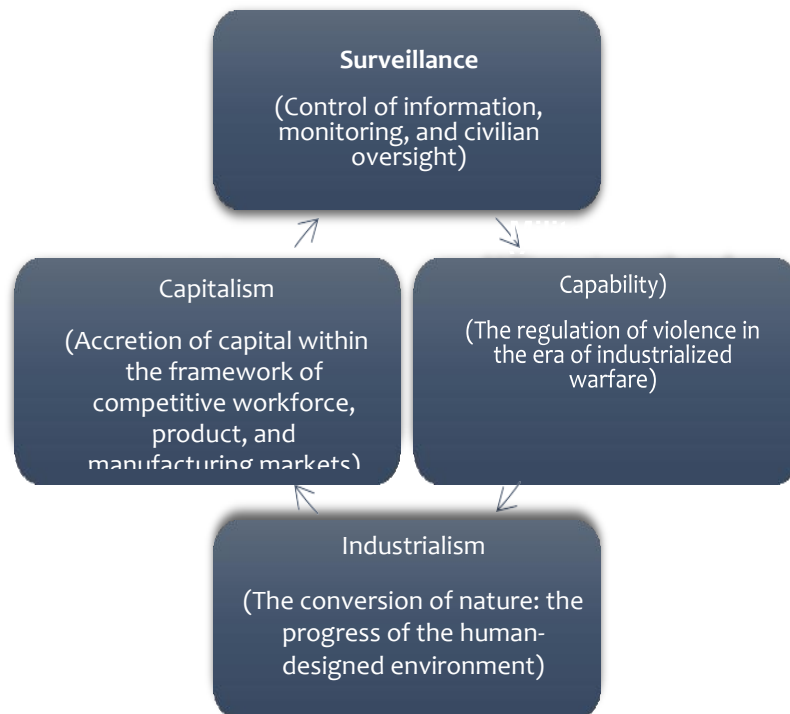
1998). However, postmodernity does not have a libertarian attitude towards religion. Postmodernity includes religions into its system at the expense of distorting their own nature (Tekin, 2015). Because in postmodernity, religion is seen as the representation of the call for justice in the lap of barbarism (Perşembe, 2003). Therefore, it does not seem possible that the future of religions will be solid in the understanding of postmodernity, which anathematizes any overdeterministic identity, term and system, in other words, the "meta narrative" (the idea that claims that everything can be explained) and is based on relativity (Erkan, 2013).

The fact that the postmodern understanding puts the traditional understanding of community at the forefront is not the re-establishment of religious belief, nor is it a policy of reviving any ritual. Because the postmodern understanding reduces God to one dimension, like grand narratives (Perşembe, 2003). As a result, the chaos that started with modernism in societies as a result of the capitalist system continues, reaching more extreme levels with postmodernism. While postmodernism objects to the rational mind of the modernist enlightenment and the authority it imposes on the universal attitude towards truth within its own framework;

Postmodernism has a syncretic character where religion and religious identity are redefined by rejecting universal truth and abandoning the idea of integrity through its own process (Tekin, 2015).

According to Giddens (2015), the four key systemic factors of modernity can be listed as in Figure 1.

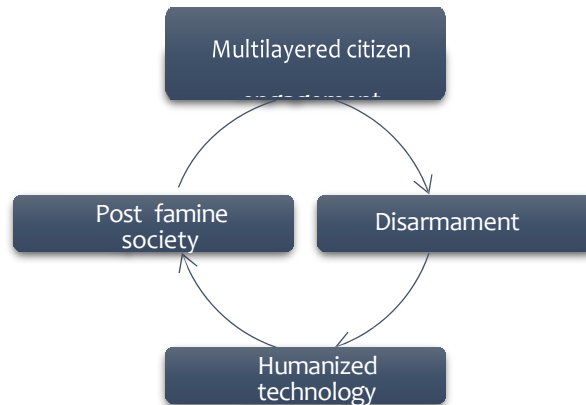
**Figure 1.** The Systemic Factors of Modernity



Technological innovations, cultural changes, increases in information, globalization, digitalization, digital culture, and numerous other factors and circumstances have paved the way for the formation of postmodern society. In other words, as the structure, social fabric, and

institutions of modern industrial society become old-fashioned and weaken, new social conditions have begun to emerge, and postmodernism is, in a sense, an extension of new social conditions. Against this background, according to Giddens (2015), the main lines of the postmodern world order can be listed as seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Outlines of the Postmodern World Order



To summarize the above information, some fundamental differences between the concepts of modernism and postmodernism can be briefly listed as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Main Differences between Modernism and Postmodernism

Modernism	Postmodernism
It represents the mindset that accompanies the social change initiated by the Industrial Revolution.	It criticizes modernism and interrogates modernist ideologies.
It separates the contemporary from the traditional.	According to postmodernism, reality is relative so there is no such thing as a universal reality.
It is a process that includes individual-religion-state and society relations	Postmodernism is pluralistic and it supports all kind of ideas, freedom, equality, and similar tendencies in society.
It is the expression of a process that includes individual-religion-state and society relations.	It is a prominent feature of contemporary society, which is prone to digitalization and globalization.
Capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, democracy, rationality, scientific knowledge, secularism, and the national state are the fulcrums of modernism.	It is not a fully understood phenomenon and therefore there is no clear definition of it.

In conclusion, introductory level explanations of the concepts of modernism and postmodernism can be briefly given as above, and since there is no clear definition of postmodernism, it will be beneficial for researchers to first consider modernism in detail.

However, postmodernism is based on consumption and the masses who have lives that are seen as valuable as they consume (Mazıcı and Can, 2021), where individual wishes and desires are prioritized, therefore religious identity progresses in a fluid structure from collective processes to

individual lives, and is reinvented in the form of an individualized life rather than a shared social lifestyle. We can explain postmodernism as a structure based on the fundamental role played by culture in the centralized global network of today's multinational capitalism, where culture is rapidly spreading all over the world by transforming everything in our lives into 'cultural' (Featherstone, 2013).

### **Digital Religion and the Impacts of Digital Culture on Religious Identity**

While a new understanding of consumption emerges with the personalized interactive structure of new communication tools, unlike traditional communication tools (Mazıcı and Can, 2021), the applications of new digital media tools provide significant support to this feeling of fragmentation of postmodernism, which also deals a blow to the integrity structure of modernism. Thus, individual religious identities that are fragmented but feel free within themselves have opened the door to the concept of 'digital religion' due to the digital contents that provide seamless connection by transcending the concept of time and space. The concept of 'digital religion' began to be expressed as a result of the studies of various conferences, symposiums and research centers held after the 2010s. Especially with Campbell's editorial work called "Digital Religion", this concept has been used permanently. Campbell states that the most important difference of the concept of digital religion compared to the uses of cyber religion and virtual religion is that it allows thinking of online religious practices as a bridge connecting offline religious practices, online space and the offline world (Dereli, 2019).

Moreover according to Campbell (2013), to better understand the concept of digital religion, the term digital religion should first considered from a terminological perspective, and then the nomenclature used in the past to describe the relationship between religion and the Internet should be examined. The term cyber religion was used in the 1990s to describe the importation of religion into the new boundary of cyberspace or the insufficiently realistic world generated by virtual reality technologies. In the beginning, figurative framing invoked images of allegorical surreal and anti-utopian religion, where religious worship could be reimagined beyond the screen and freed from conventional limitations and traditional religious patterns (Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, over the past few decades, numerous academics, subject matter experts, and researchers during the course of naming the term cyber religion as digital religion have proposed different definitions of the term cyber and digital religion. For instance, some definitions concerning the cyber religion and phenomenon of digital religion can be outlined as follows: Bauwens (1996) associated cyber religion with new religious practices and communities and proposed that a new affiliation between information and communication technologies and religion was appearing as individuals attempted to move their spiritual lives into cyberspace. On the other hand, Helland (2000) approached the phenomenon of cyber religion from a different standpoint and drew attention to the distinction between the speculative framing of online religion and religion online. In that respect, religion-online, a methodical endeavor to harness conventional embodiments of communication to present religion rests on a vertical idea of control, authority, and status. In contrast, online religion depicts a new development in religious practices, mirroring the nature of the Internet environment itself (Helland, 2000).

In other words, the fundamental difference between online religion and religion online is that online religion is associated with a non-hierarchical and non-configured communication protocol. Additionally, according to Højsgaard's (2005) assessments, cyber religion as a theoretical notion is

a term that mirrors the characteristics of postmodern cyberculture. Ultimately, digital religion; It can be listed on a continuum ranging from media designed with specific logic and for religious purposes and containing only religious content, to general digital media (e.g. social media) that are not only for religious purposes but can also contain religious content and can be used by members of religious communities (Müller and Friemel, 2024).

In the modern period, the dominance of positivist thought by going to extremes in rational understanding has led to a move away from spirituality and this has led to a 'loss of meaning'. In addition, due to the factors of 'religious pluralism' that emerged with the weakening of the institutional structure of religions by prioritizing the phenomenon of individualization, the increase in the desire to return to the sacred is in a decisive position in the construction of new religious identities in the field of religion (Arslan, 2015). The postmodern approach, which designs a new world free from the turmoil that occurs in the field of religious identity, as in many areas with modern life, has built new areas that center on individuals (Yeniyol and Karakaya, 2022). The price of accessing these constructed areas is to adopt the new consumption approach, which is a necessity of postmodern life (Mazıcı and Can, 2021). While technological developments that emerged with the modern understanding transformed all life practices, we can state that these practices were reconstructed by moving to digital environments with postmodern life (Yeniyol and Karakaya, 2022). Thus, in addition to life practices such as socialization, marketing, communication and interaction, the concept of 'digital religion' with faith-based religious practices has also taken its place in digital media.

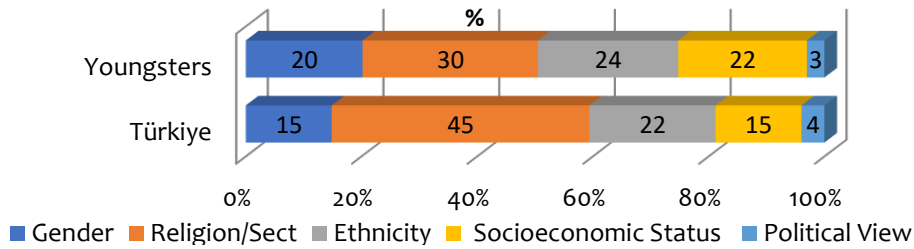
Digital religion does not only refer to religion with the practice of practicing online, but also functions as religious meaning-making and religious social connection (Müller and Friemel, 2024) by providing signs of how digital media and spaces shape religious practice and are shaped by religious practices (Dereli, 2019). offers the opportunity to fulfill According to Campbell, four different layers of authority emerge on the internet. Religious hierarchy, religious structure, ideology and text. With the layer of religious ideology, Campbell states that religious groups and communities take part in the internet world to confirm their religious identities, while Wagner argues that fragmented online religious identities will be formed in the digital world as a result of the multi-window environments of cyberspace (Dereli, 2019). In addition, by allowing individuals to experience instant changes in their own identity in digital processes, it supports the claims made by the postmodern structure that identity is not singular but multiple, not holistic but fragmented, not centered but decentered, not fixed but dynamic (Yin, 2018). As a result, it can be seen that digital religion is actively involved in every platform, from the decentralized, fluid and uncertain MUD environments of the early periods of the internet to today's social media networks. At the point where these two components meet, digital religious identity determines its position as an important concept that corresponds to the religious sensitivities of individuals in cyberspace. The important point here is that whether we consider online religious identity as a subcomponent of identity or as an extension of digital religion, it is remembered that it is a remarkable and important element in both understandings (Dereli, 2019).

In today's postmodern world, new identities represented in popular culture are emerging. In other words, unlike the modern world, media causes the formation of new identities in the postmodern world (Arslan, 2015a). In a survey conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy

Company (2024) in March 2024, 3147 respondents from 78 provinces in Türkiye were asked, "Which identity is more important to you?" Most respondents answered that their religious identity was more important to them.

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Figure 3. Prominent Identities of Individuals in Türkiye

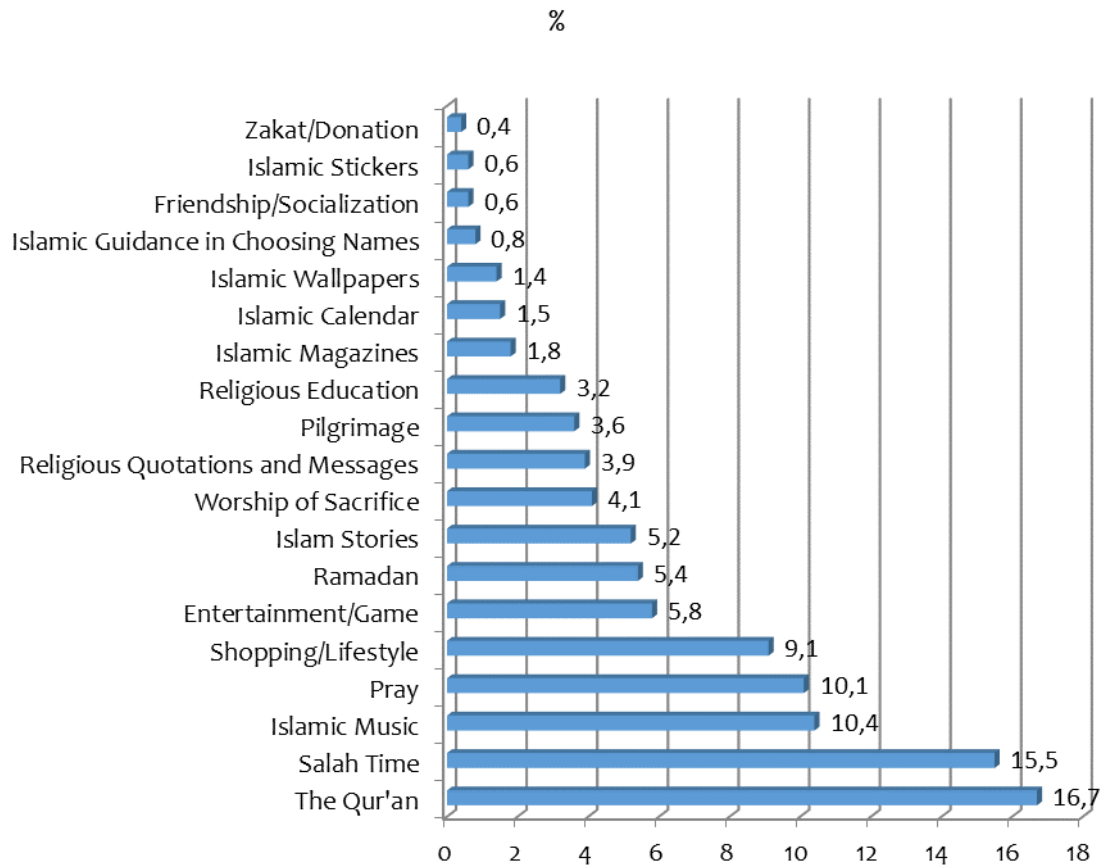


As seen in the Figure 3 (KONDA, 2024), the rates of young people who consider their gender, ethnic origin, and financial status as the significant source of their identity are higher than those in Türkiye as a whole is too much. Nevertheless, while 45 percent of the overall Turkish population considers religious or sectarian identity significant, this percentage drops to 30 percent among the youth. Despite this decrease, it is still evident that religious identity remains the most embraced element of identity among young people.

Digital media has banalized the phenomenon of culture by making cultural and artistic activities an ordinary part of daily life. Consequently, people today have had the opportunity to access activities such as going to a concert, cinema, or theater from home, work, or anywhere. In this context, digital culture has created a new social ecosystem that influences how people communicate and interact with each other and machines. From this perspective, digital culture has blurred the boundaries between real and virtual and human and robot. In addition to that, in the postmodern era, data of all types and for all purposes - public services, social services, the insurance system, the banking system, credit arrangements, real estate, travel, entertainment, education, health, law, employment, and personal data - is now primarily in digital form. Therefore, most of the tools used by individuals, governments, and organizations are based on digital technology, and even physical currency is nothing more than digitized data transformed into matter (Gere, 2008). On the other hand, the concept of digital religion has led to traditional religious interpretations, understandings, and hypotheses being explored in different ways through digital media platforms and has led people to question sacred practices in certain aspects. The widespread use of smart devices and the popularity of customizable smartphone applications have led to the digitalization of religion to a certain extent. In other words, the number of Islamic mobile applications on well-known electronic media distribution/sales platforms such as the Google Play Store and Apple Store, where applications developed for smart devices are stored, is increasing (Aygül et al., 2022).

Consequently, the reach of mobile applications is expanding daily, fostering the rapid spread of digital culture among faith-based living people.

**Figure 4.** Distribution of Islamic Mobile Applications Developed in Türkiye in Google Play Store



As seen in Figure 4 (Aygül et al., 2022), there is an interest in the development of mobile Islamic smartphone applications in Türkiye. Digital applications such as prayer time reminders, Qibla finding compass, mosque/masjid finders, halal food locators (restaurant, cafe, market, etc.), Islamic banking and finance tools, and translation apps are in many ways facilitating the lives of Muslims and bringing about changes in their religious lifestyle. At the end of the story, in the postmodern era, digital culture has the potential to directly influence religious rituals and lifestyles, both positively and negatively.

#### **Religion in the Digital Space in Postmodern Society**

In the 21st century, people spend a significant part of their lives in digital spaces close to reality. In other words, digital environments are digital spaces where people socialize, exchange information, follow the agenda, and organize their business and private lives. In this sense, digital spaces are environments where real-time interactions occur online, and therefore these spaces constitute cyber societies. In addition, digitality is one of the basic concepts adopted by the postmodern paradigm due to the features it implies (Rotaru et al., 2010). In current conditions, new media, digital spaces, digital reality and artificial intelligence technologies shape the postmodern

paradigm. More clearly, media technologies create multi-layered communication, paving the way for significant changes in the socio- cultural and religious structure of society.

In addition, according to the narrative in question, which is built on the discourse that new media supports religious identities due to the phenomenon of digitalization, it is seen as an important field for the revival of religious identities and assigning a position or role or roles to religion (Dereli, 2019).

**Figure 5.** A Cartoon Drawing Highlighting the Impact of Virtual Spaces on Digital Natives



Figure 5 (Hudson, 2011) presents the interaction of digital natives with technology in a metaphorical perspective. Even though human beings live in a physical world, the latest point reached by the Internet and technology has caused people to need digital experiences alongside their physical needs because people have acquired a digital identity in addition to their real identities in the digital worlds they have created. In other words, digital worlds contain material and spiritual values because in these digital worlds, which gain visibility beyond the real world, a digital life created by real people is created, similar to life in the physical world (Yiğitoğlu, 2022). In summary, people have transferred their numerous practices, traditions, and acts from the physical world to the digital world owing to time, space, and other difficulties and constraints. In this regard, when the subject is religion, the permissibility of religious worship in the digital world has begun to be discussed. The Internet, social media, and digital realms have expanded the scope of people's religious practices. The simplest example is that a person who is a part of any religious community or sect in the world can establish websites, blogs, forums, and video-sharing accounts to engage with others in digital networks, either as individuals or representing their religious organizations.

### **The Influence of New Media on Islamic Identity and Muslim Community**

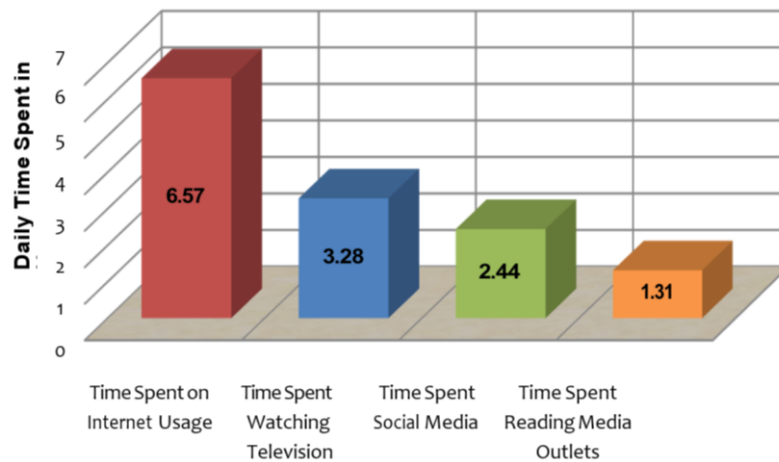
People identify and situate themselves in society through their identities. Therefore, identity is about what people internalize, and people will continue to search for identity as long as they exist. In this respect, religion is one of the crucial issues in human beings' search for identity because religion is one of the leading actors in individuals' efforts to make sense of what is happening around them and in the universe. In short, although the place and position of religion in people's lives have weakened from time to time, in the postmodern world, religion is still an



element that significantly affects people's search for meaning and propiarte striving. In the postmodern age, most Muslims learn religious information through new media channels, and this is like searching for meaning in a digital sea. From this perspective, it is true to say that new media, and especially social media, has a depth of cultural, sociological, psychological, and philosophical importance for Muslims in their search for Islamic identity.

Reports on social media usage, published regularly by various institutions annually, demonstrate that a growing number of people across the globe use social media tools. In direct proportion to this, users' time spent on social media tends to increase gradually. For example, according to the most up-to-date data in the Digital 2024 April Global Statshot Report published in partnership with We Are Social and Meltwater, 69.7% (5.65 billion) of the world's population (8.10 billion) uses mobile phones, and 67.1% (5.44 billion) uses Internet, and 62.6% (5.07 billion) uses social media (Thompson, 2024). Moreover, according to the report mentioned above, as of April 2024, people in Türkiye spent an average of 6 hours and 57 minutes on the Internet. The figure below (Thompson, 2024) illustrates the average daily media consumption for main media elements on a global scale.

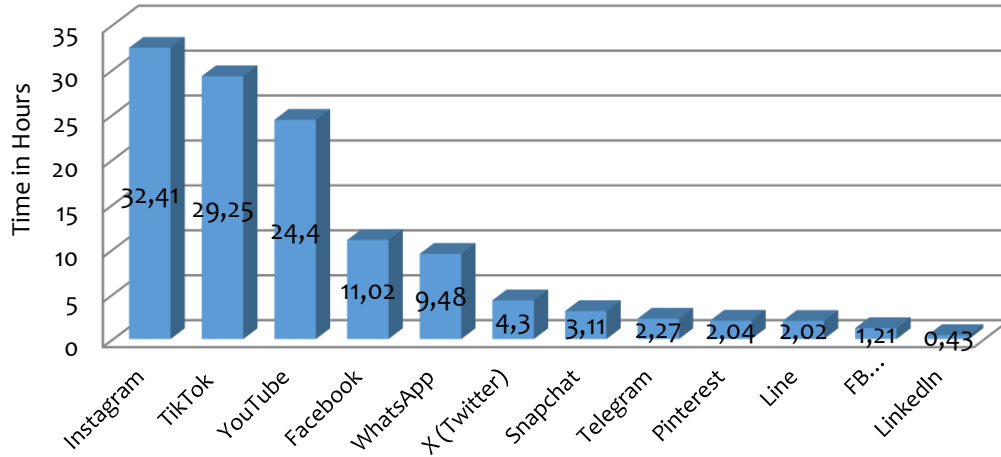
Figure 6. Daily Media Engagement Time in Türkiye - April 2024



According to a report by We Are Social and Meltwater (Thompson, 2024), people also spend 1.34 hours a day listening to music streaming services, 59 minutes on a game console, 42 minutes listening to broadcast radio, and 43 minutes listening to podcasts. Based on the We Are Social and Meltwater analysis of the data, a straightforward calculation demonstrates that the average daily time individuals allocate to media consumption amounts to 16.38 hours. In other words, these findings point out that individuals allocate approximately two-thirds of their daily time to digital media consumption. Given this significant portion, it is evident that new media channels play a perceptible role in shaping religious identities. On the other hand, based on the findings of the Household Information Technologies (IT) Usage Survey Report carried out by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), as of 2023, the percentage of individuals using the Internet in Türkiye has climbed to 87.1%, and the proportion of households with Internet access has risen to 95.5% (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2023). Current TUIK statistics indicate that the Internet usage rates in Türkiye are pretty

high on both a household and individual basis, and it is expected that these rates will increase further in the coming years.

**Figure 7.** Average Monthly Time Spent Using Social Media Applications in Türkiye by Platform



The figure above (Thompson, 2024), shows the average amount of time spent on the popular Android apps in Türkiye between June and July 2023. In this context, it is evident that the amount of time people spend on social media in Türkiye is significantly high. Also, according to the Statista data portal, as of 2024, the number of social network users in Türkiye is 71.43 million, and this rate is projected to reach 77.42 million by 2029 (Dierks, 2024). According to data from multiple sources, it is forecasted that a typical internet user today will engage with an average of 6.7 to 9.2 social media platforms monthly (Dean, 2023). In summary, Türkiye is one of the countries with the highest use of social media worldwide. As social media use and addiction increase in Muslim societies, the postmodern digital consumer culture and acculturation will reshape Islamic identity.

New media environments have had a profound impact on the way services and worship are performed. For instance, some social media applications and television channels allow religious worship to be broadcast in real-time. Thus, people can attend the worship service remotely, even physically absent. In other words, digital networks have now become an essential source of information for many believers. Nowadays, YouTube has become a prominent religious education platform used by large audiences both in the world and in Türkiye, and the number of people actively using the YouTube platform to share religious content is increasing daily. In this regard, Kutlu (2024) refers to Muslim religious influencers who share religious content on YouTube as "social media preachers" and states that the importance and popularity of Muslim social media preachers on YouTube has increased against Islamophobic posts on Western social media.

On the other hand, a study conducted in the US found that three in ten US adults use digital channels to learn about religion. In other words, digital networks have become an essential source of information for many believers. For example, a study conducted by Faverio et al. (2022) in the US found that three-tenths of US adults use digital channels to obtain information about religion.

**Figure 8.** Percentage of US Adults Seeking Religious Information Online

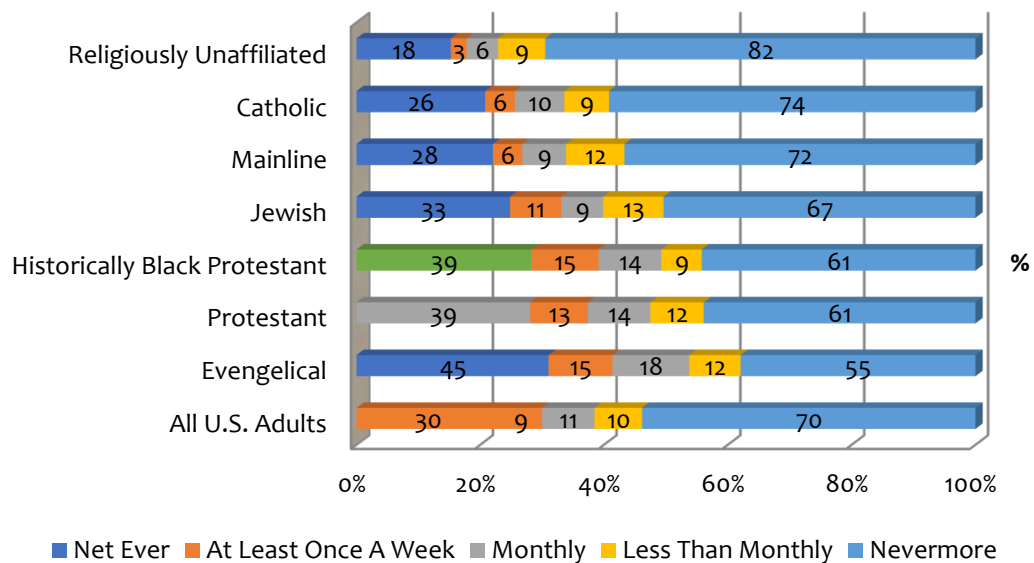
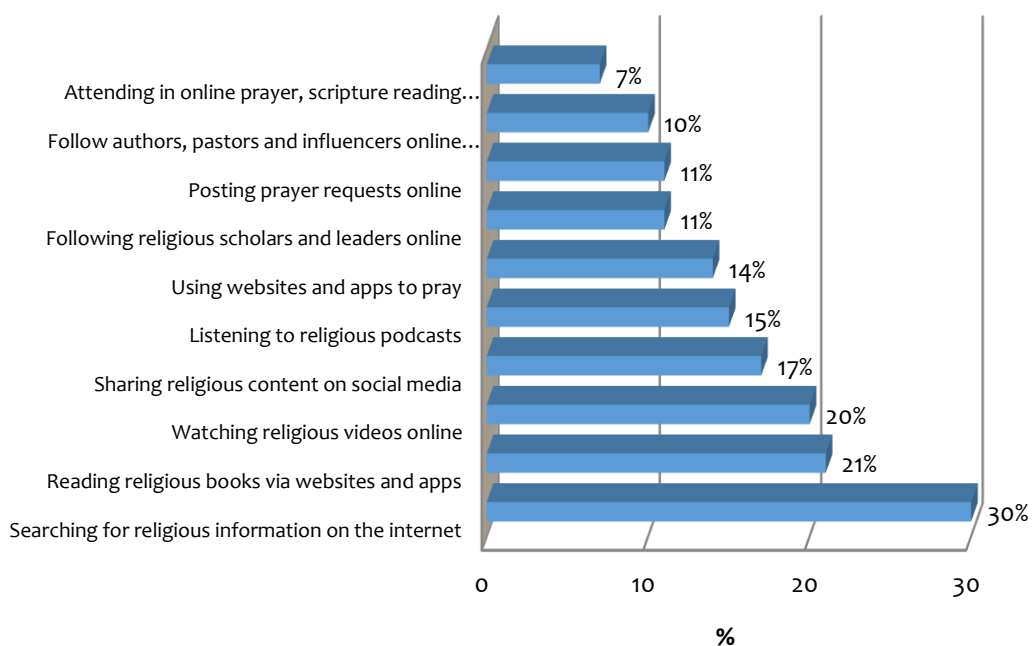


Figure 8 (Faverio et al., 2022) shows that a significant percentage of US adults of different religious beliefs reported using online resources to access religious information, even if only once a week. With the development and widespread use of the Internet and social media technologies, people have found the opportunity to access religious services through various smartphone applications and web pages.

**Figure 9.** Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Engage with Religion Using Any of the Following New Media (Faverio et al., 2022, p.46)



According to Figure 9 (Faverio et al., 2022), a notable proportion of US adults engage with religion through new media channels and considering the 21st-century global circumstances, it is possible to say that religion is at least as effectual and functional as the media. Against this background, the relationship between media and religion is quite complex, interdisciplinary, and multidimensional. From Derrida's (2001) perspective, media is strengthening religion, and this development is the revival of religion. However, it is critical to consider how media transforms religion at this point. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the Islamic identity within the triangle of religious identity, digital media, and postmodernism.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that Muslims around the world who use the Internet are substantially more likely than other Muslims to have an optimistic view of Western movies, music, and television. Similarly, Muslims who use the Internet are also more probably to see similarities between Islam and Christianity than Muslims who do not use the Internet (Liu, 2013). In other words, the abovementioned Pew Research Center study reveals that Muslim Internet users are much more welcoming to Western popular culture and are more likely to think that Western entertainment culture does not harm the morality of Muslims. Besides, İsmail Çağlar (2019), the Media and Society Research Director for the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), believes that while it is natural for foreign media organizations to operate in Türkiye, however, the excessive interest of foreign media organizations in the country should be questioned. That's because, according to Çağlar (2019), foreign media organizations broadcasting in Türkiye follow a monophonic broadcasting policy in Türkiye, and this situation is in no way compatible with the media standards they set for their own countries. In summary, what Çağlar wants to express here is that foreign media organizations can manipulate the Muslim community in Türkiye in line with their interests through the media, and this may have negative consequences.

In consequence, the most modern communication tool of the postmodern age is social media, and accordingly, social media has many benefits for the Muslim community but also some adverse effects. For example, learning/teaching the Quran, spreading the Quran, hadith, and Islamic references, and spreading the message of Islam are some of the positive effects of social media on the Muslim community. On the other hand, the spread of disinformation about Islamic issues on social media, the spread of Islamophobia, inappropriate content that is incompatible with Islamic values that disrupts the family structure of Muslims, recruitment of militants by some harmful organizations that identify themselves as Muslims, and social media addiction are some of the adverse impacts of social media on the Muslim community (Islam, 2019). In light of this information, Muslims need to improve their digital literacy and use social media more consciously in terms of Islamic identity and Islamic society to benefit from new media better.

### **Being a Muslim in a Postmodern World: The Case of Türkiye**

In the transition from a modernist culture of calculation to a postmodernist simulation culture (Dereli, 2019), interpreting religious and spiritual revival together by calling for a return to religion and traditions from the structure of modernity, which proposes and implements distance from religion that centers the individual, and (Arslan, 2015) re-religious We are in a process that continues towards the postmodern structure, which predicts that the phenomenon will take its place in social life. It is seen that with modernism, religious life was interrupted and lived among neighborhoods, and societies that wanted to get rid of this shallow period clung to the rope of the

postmodern structure in order to reveal the meaning in their belief systems. Postmodernism's criticism of modernity and its discourses on religion and freedom found a significant response among Muslims (Tekin, 2015). However, it is understood that world religions have no future in the postmodernist structure, which rejects the meta-narrative, that is, the idea that claims that everything can be explained, and centers on relativity. Because postmodernism sees religions as a symbolic part of the whole in a fragmented culture where everything is seen as permissible (Erkan, 2013).

In parallel with the development of technology and postmodernism, we witness that a significant part of social life flows through digital media tools that have no boundaries of space and space. 'Media' plays a leading role in the presentation of identity or religious identity phenomena of the postmodern structure. However, as Dereli states, he argues that the media, identity and religion triangle has a direct impact on each other (Pisdil, 2022). Moreover, trying to explain the structure of digital religion in terms of real and virtual leads to a reductive or one-sided stance that symbolizes offline life as inherently authentic, whereas digital encounters are inherently false or unreal (Campbell & Connelly, 2020).

The difference between online and offline spaces that emerged with the internet that emerged in the postmodern period has also directly affected the issues of religion and religious identity. We witness that both structures mutually transform each other in a cultural sense, in return for religion gaining a place for itself in cyberspace through people. Dereli uses the expression 'fluidization' for this transformation. Fluidization resembles the tides during which the phenomenon of mutual transformation continues. In other words, it is seen as the manifestation of the structure that emerges as a result of the close relationship between online and offline spaces (Pisdil, 2022). This negotiation between offline and online space expands our understanding of what religious practices mean in the current century (Campbell & Connelly, 2020).

In today's digital age, simulation has started to replace reality, so in postmodern society, simulation is now considered more real than reality (Ata, 2023). Within this culture of consumption, religion has become a part of the digital culture industry and commoditized (Özbolet, 2017). In this process, postmodernity has hurt large religious systems. However, at the same time, it has led to the emergence of new individual and communal religious forms (Solmaz, 2006). From this point forth, Atay (2004) discusses religion in three stages according to social periods:

- In a traditional agrarian society, religion is at the center of life.
- In modern society, religion is objectified and is no longer at the center of life.
- In postmodern society, religion came to the fore again in the culture of consumption and became the chief determinant of daily life.

A postmodern standpoint paved the way for the diversification of mainstream religious views in Türkiye, a framework consisting of new political movements, habits, attitudes, and cultural developments, and thus, new social designs began to emerge.

The Internet provides online resources that create new forms of religious identity, which can be seen as problematic for religious communities as personalized religious identities are promoted over traditional or institutional religious identities. (Campbell & Connelly, 2020). In general, the

ultimate emphasis on individual autonomy and individual-social duality in both the modern and postmodern construction of western philosophy has made it impossible to conceptualize a self-concept that is sensitive to social solidarity, social good, equality and justice (Yin, 2018). In this way, one of the most remarkable and contentious societal models emerging from postmodernism is the one based on Islam, as the relationship between Islam and civil society prompts cultural inquiry. In addition, postmodernism has affected various Islamic principles based on faith and moral values in Türkiye, causing the breaking of some taboos, and consequently, some differences have begun to be observed in the functioning of the social order. In this context, the changes that came with postmodernism led to a religious awakening process in Türkiye, and Islamic social movements began to become more on the agenda. From Zeybek's (2017) perspective, postmodernism offers people a new way of life that is disconnected from the past and does not care about the future, and insists that this form of life is the most compatible with the digital age we live in. In simpler terms, the postmodern view looks at life from a new perspective outside of tradition and argues that the postmodern lifestyle is the most suited lifestyle for the age of digitalization and globalization.

Religion assumes a prominent function in human life, and the postmodern perspective further complicates many contentious religious issues. For example, there are similarities and differences among sects regarding the requirements of the pilgrimage/hajj, a significant sacred practice in Islam and one of the five pillars of the faith. However, apart from all these discussions, virtual and augmented reality technologies developed in recent years have brought new dimensions to the understanding of worship. For instance, in 2021, Saudi Arabia launched a new initiative called the "Virtual Black Stone Initiative" so that people can experience touching the Hajr Aswad stone in virtual reality, a black and shiny stone located on the wall of the Kaaba and considered sacred by Muslims. This initiative, led by the Exhibitions and Museum Affairs Agency and Umm Al-Qura University, to showcase historical and religious artifacts in Saudi Arabia, emerged as part of an exhibition to utilize virtual reality and digital experiences and has created several discussions among Muslims worldwide (Kızılaslan, 2022). An example that can be given in these discussions is the worship performed in the metaverse virtual worlds because questions such as whether it is permissible to perform a virtual pilgrimage in the metaverse are among the religious questions whose answers are sought in Türkiye. Türkiye's Directorate of Religious Affairs states that the Kaaba visit can be carried out virtually, but the virtual pilgrimage will never be accepted as a real pilgrimage (Erbaş, 2022). In other words, real pilgrimage is a form of worship that only Muslims can perform by physically going to the holy city of Mecca.

According to Kömeçoğlu (2012), the postmodern understanding is trying to update itself. In this context, the efforts of religious actors to transform public spaces and change their usage habits are part of the updating process. This period, in which complex motifs and new forms of expression emerged between the traditional and the modern, is controversial in many respects. For example, according to Biçer (2011), the understanding of mosque architecture and Islamic identity in Türkiye are interrelated, and based on her perspective, two main trends in mosque architecture design are popular in Türkiye today. The first of these is the classical Ottoman style mosque design that continues the tradition, and the second one is mosques with diverse structures, being built in a modern style that combines mosque designs from different periods or cultures in an eclectic manner. The first of these is the classical Ottoman style mosque design that continues the tradition, and the second one is mosques with diverse structures, being built in a modern style that combines mosque designs from different periods or cultures in an eclectic manner. Üsküdar Şakirin Mosque,

which was planned in a modern style at the beginning of the project but was seen as a postmodern mosque by some segments of the society when the construction process was completed, can be shown as an example of the postmodern mosque understanding in Türkiye (Biçer 2011). Şakirin Mosque has caused various controversies due to its architectural structure. In an interview with Hüsrev Tayla, who designed the architectural project of the mosque but later withdrew from the project, Hüsrev stated that mosques are not ordinary buildings, and he expressed concern that Şakirin Mosque lacks the traditional values that a mosque should embody. Along with these arguments, Tayla asserts that mosques should not be designed with exaggerated decorations and irrelevant concepts, such as wedding halls, casinos or public houses (Tayla, 2009a). In addition, according to Biçer (2011), Şakirin Mosque is a mosque that does not have a cultural identity and richness that reflects the past. In this respect, Şakirin Mosque typifies the deterioration in Turkish social identity, Islamic identity, and Islamic tradition. To summarize the above information, the postmodern interpretation of mosques in Türkiye is strongly associated with the erosion of Turkish Islamic identity and customs by some architects, politicians, academics, and citizens who may or may not be competent in their field. The idea that the construction process of mosques built in a postmodern style is handled with a museum approach rather than a place of worship forms the basis of the criticisms mentioned above. In other words, according to Tayla (2009b), an architect who specialized in mosque design, Şakirin Mosque emerged as a result of an eclectic manner, and certain postmodern places of worship built in an eclectically do not adequately reflect the traditional and cultural values of Turkish-Islamic identity<sup>1</sup>.

Figure 10. Şakirin Mosque – İstanbul

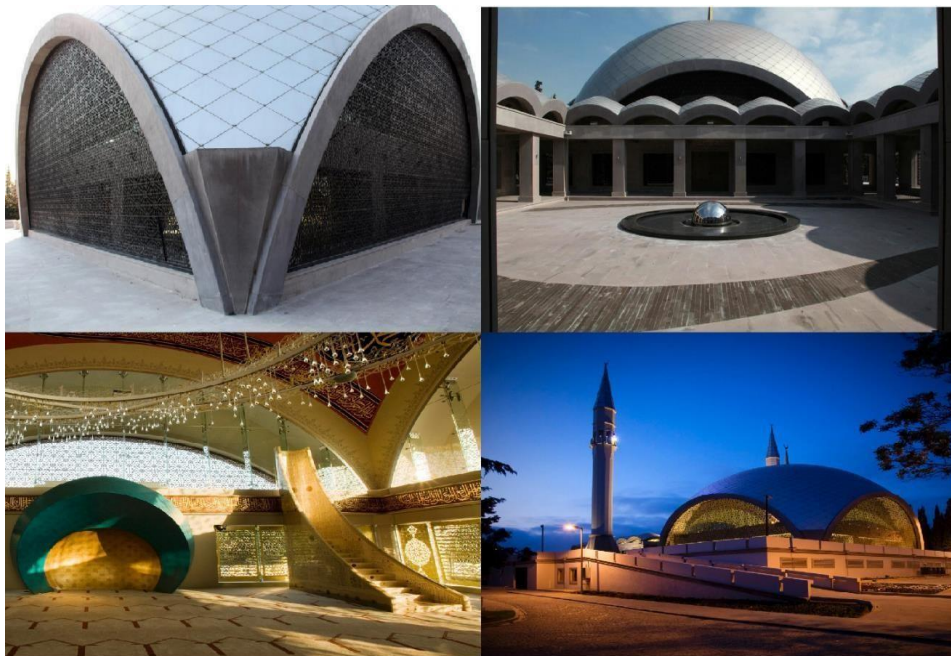


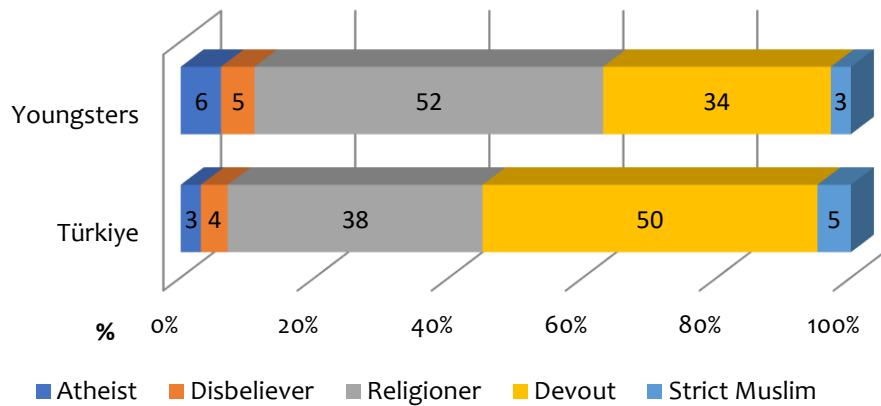
Figure 10 (Archnet, 2024) shows some images of the Şakirin Mosque and the Şakirin Mosque is an example of postmodern orientation. This orientation rearranges Islamic patterns by combining phenomena such as Islam and consumption, fashion and conservatism, show and

privacy, headscarf, and career on an axis. These combinations were not traditionally thought to come together for Muslims in Türkiye (Özbolet, 2017). For example, in Islam, wearing a hijab is a religious obligation, and there are formal guidelines on how to wear it. However, in social media, social environments, and other media outlets, hijab clothing is often promoted as a fashion trend. As a result, the modest attire, when integrated with fashion, becomes a symbol of modern Islamic identity. In addition, Meşe (2015) argues that expensive and flashy hijab dressing styles and hijab clothing fashion shows commodify hijab, and Meşe briefly summarizes this situation with the words "urban, modern but true to its essence." While the process of commodification of hijab is perceived as Islamization by some Islamic pressure groups, it is perceived as capitalization and postmodernization by others. In short, the postmodern tendencies of Islamic circles create some paradoxes, and some devout within the Muslim society in Türkiye perceive this situation as Western imitation and the degradation of spiritual identity.

In the postmodern era, Muslim societies are influenced by other societies on many issues as it is easier for Muslim societies to come into contact with different beliefs and cultures. If this situation is considered from a Türkiye-centered perspective, new religious movements affect Turkish society, the majority of which is Muslim, in many positive or negative ways. For example, alcoholic beverages are forbidden for Muslims, and in this respect, the world and meaning frames represented by wine and grape juice are different from each other. In this context, for a Muslim to consume alcohol is inconsistent with his/her religion. However, in some television series, movies, and reality shows produced both in Türkiye and other Muslim countries, media producers who bring together Muslims, alcohol, and adultery paint an image that there is no inconsistency between them.

Therefore, one of the prominent characteristics of postmodernism in Muslim societies is the normalization of behaviors that are inconsistent with Islam through the media. In sum, based on Foucault's concept of heterotopia, postmodernism opens the door to the spread of theistic agnosticism or agnostic Islam in Türkiye (Tekin, 2011). According to the survey conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy (2024) company with the participation of 3147 respondents, the percentage of atheists and non-believers among young people is higher than in Türkiye overall.

**Figure 11.** Distribution of Religiosity





As can be seen in the figure above (KONDA, 2024), the level of religiosity of the youth among the participants is lower than the level of religiosity in Türkiye in general. While 50% of the participants in Türkiye overall, characterize themselves as religious, this rate decreases to 34% among the youth. In conclusion, although the postmodern understanding has increased interest in religion to a certain extent in Türkiye, there seems to be a tendency towards secularization, especially among young people. In addition, the commodification of religion by postmodern tendencies is changing the characteristics of Islamic society in Türkiye in many other areas like Islamic attire, architecture, art, education, music, and worship practices.

### Conclusion

It is seen that with modernism, religious life was interrupted and lived among neighborhoods, and societies that wanted to get rid of this shallow period clung to the postmodern structure in order to reveal the meaning in their belief systems. 'Media' plays a dominant role in the presentation of identity or religious identity phenomena of the postmodern structure. In parallel with the development of technology along with postmodernism, we witness that a significant part of social life flows through digital media tools that have no boundaries of space and space. In particular, internet and digital reality technologies have increased the recognition and visibility of religious believers and faith-based communities in society in the postmodern era. However, due to the difficult nature of controlling and monitoring these tools and venues (the internet and social networks), they turn into a tool of disinformation and propaganda.

Digital spaces promise a second life to their users, and whether the metaverse can truly offer an alternative life is seriously debated in many societies. In this context, it seems likely that discussions about the manifestation of digital religion will increase radically, for reasons such as hyperverses such as the metaverse offer people the opportunity to acquire a new religious identity. Relatedly, the way Muslims in Turkey interact with reality is gaining new dimensions with the developing technological landscape and the reflections of religious beliefs in a computer-simulated metaverse lead to the emergence of new concepts such as digital pilgrimage. In other words, interest and curiosity in digital versions of spiritual life are increasing in Turkey and around the world.

Religious identities, which tried to survive with an introverted behavior in the modernist structure, were transformed with the influence of digitalization along with the postmodern understanding and acquired new identities that enjoyed their partial freedom. Postmodern philosophy has allowed religious ideas to survive through certain stages. As a result of these stages, ways have been constructed for the individual to live in harmony with postmodern life by taking on the identity he desires among the fragmented multiple truths presented to his life. Therefore, religious identities continue their lives as part of an adventure that includes many options and is constantly changing and transforming.

The majority of Muslims in Turkey have successfully adapted to the digital age. This digitalization process has also brought significant changes to the religious identities, understandings, and practices of the Muslim community. In essence, could we speak of an "Internetization" or "Digitalization" of Islam in the postmodern era? This phenomenon has led to several transformations:

It has changed the spiritual life and certain religious practices of Muslims.

It has influenced the ways Islam is expressed in both private and public spheres.

It has reshaped Islamic religious teaching methods and practices.

It has accelerated interactions between groups with similar or different religious beliefs.

It has created new opportunities for religious organization and collective worship.

It has led to changes in traditional architectural forms of places of worship, including mosque architecture.

Finally, postmodernism's synthesis of concepts that were unlikely to come together in the past has been criticized by some social groups for causing paradoxes. In the postmodern age, the internet and new media form the backbone of societies. In addition, the increasing use of social media every year causes the amount of time people spend in virtual digital spaces to significantly increase, thus blurring the boundaries between virtual and reality. Such situations cause simulation to be perceived as more real than reality and, in parallel, cause people's religious identities to change.

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## Postmodern Çağda Dijital Kültür ve Yeni Medyanın Dini Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkileri: Türkiye Örneği

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### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### Giriş

Dünyanın bugün geldiği noktada dijitalleşme, globalleşme, plüralizm ve sekülerleşme ile birlikte kültürler, dinler ve kimlikler önemli bir değişime uğramaktadır. Bu bağlamda postmodernizm, İslam, dijitalleşme ve küreselleştirmeyi aynı ekseninde kesiştiren konular da akademisyenlerin ve entelektüel çevrelerin ilgi gösterdikleri ve bilimsel çalışma ürettikleri popüler bir araştırma alanı haline gelmiştir. Ayrıca postmodern dönemin en etkin ve işlevsel araçlarından biri olan yeni medya da bu süreçte ayrı bir statü kazanmıştır, çünkü dijital medya postmodern dönemde dini inanç ve kimliği şekillendiren en temel unsurlardan biridir. Literatür taramasının uygulandığı çalışmada alan çalışmalarında modern veya postmodern olgunun kimlik, dini kimlik, inanç ve yeni medya gibi terimlerle doğrudan bağlantılı araştırmaların çokluğu dikkat çekmektedir. Ancak toplumun, kültürün ve dinin dijitalleşmesi, kişilerin dini deneyimleri ve dini kimlikleri üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmaya başlaması ve buna bağlı olarak da postmodernizm, İslam ve dijitalleşme üçgeninde durumun izah edilmesi günümüz din anlayışını anlamamız açısından önem arz etmektedir. Bu minval üzere de bu çalışmada ilk olarak modernizm ve postmodernizm kavramları ele alınmış ve bunun ardından sanal alanlar, dijital din ve dijital kültür konularına değinilmiştir. Bunun akabinde ise yeni medyanın İslami kimlik üzerindeki etkisi incelenmeye çalışılmış ve son olarak da postmodern çağda dijital medyanın Türkiye'deki Müslümanları nasıl etkilediği üzerinde durulmuştur.

#### Modernizm ve Postmodernizm Kavramları

Postmodernizm, 20. yüzyılın ortalarında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde ortaya çıkmış bir kavramdır ve ortaya çıkışından bu yana birçok farklı tanımı yapılmıştır. Dolayısıyla postmodernizmin herkesin üzerinde uzlaştığı net bir tanımı bulunmamaktadır. Ancak genel itibarıyla, 20. yüzyılın sonlarına doğru hareketliliğini yitiren modernist arayışların yerini almaya başlayan muhtelif yeni üslup ve yönelişlerin ortak adı olarak ifade edilmektedir. Bu bağlamda postmodernizm olgusunun tam olarak anlaşılabilmesi için öncelikle modernizm kavramının ayrıntılı biçimde ele alınmasında fayda vardır, çünkü modernizm 17.yüzyılda Avrupa'da temelleri atılmaya başlanan Sanayi Devrimi'nin 19. yüzyıldaki bilim, kültür ve sanat alanlarında meydana getirdiği değişimleri ifade etmektedir. Diğer taraftan modernizmin din merkezli bir dünya görüşü yerine insan ve akıl merkezli

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bir yaklaşım sunması modernizm kavramını dini açıdan önemli kılmaktadır, çünkü bu dönemde Tanrı ve din yerine insan akli kutsallaştırılmaya başlanmıştır.

Postmodern yaşamın önemli getirilerinden biri de yeni kimlik algısıdır. Postmodern evrede kimlikler, sınırları aşan bir akışkanlıkla zamansız ve mekânsız bir uzamın parçası olarak dönüşüme uğrayan ve çoklu özellikler gösteren bir yapı olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır (Güven, 2015). Özellikle, yaşantı içerisindeki kültürel, sosyal ve politik farklılığın eksenliğinden nasıl etkilendiğimize dikkat çekerek, değerlerimizi ve bağlılıklarımızı ifade etmeyi ve onları yeniden şekillendirerek hayata adapte etmeyi öğretir (Stone-Mediatore, 2002).

### **Postmodern Toplumda Dijital Uzamda Din**

Geleneksel iletişim araçlarındaki pasifliğin aksine teknolojinin getirisi dijital medya araçlarıyla aktif bir üne kavuşan toplumlar, yeni iletişim araçlarının etkileşimli yapısı ve bireyselleşme özellikleriyle yeni bir kültürel ortamın oluşmasını sağlamıştır (Mazıcı and Can, 2021). Bu yeni alanda bir araya getirme/bütünleştirme özellikleriyle ön plana çıkan din, bireyselleşen dijital mecralarda kendini yeniden inşa etme çabasına girmiştir. Diğer bir ifadeyle postmodern dünyada din, kolektif alandan bireysel yaşamlara doğru yeni biçimlenişlerin veçhini aramaya koyulmuştur (Yeniyol ve Handan, 2022).

21. yüzyıl dünyasında küresel çapta insanların önemli bir bölümü özellikle gençler zamanlarının büyük bir bölümünü gerçeğe yakın sanal dünyalarda geçirme eğilimindedirler, çünkü sanal uzamlar artık sadece bir eğlence ortamı olmaktan çıkarak kişilerin sosyalleştikleri, gündemi takip ettikleri, kamuoyu oluşturdukları, bilgi alışverişinde buldukları, iş ve özel hayatlarını organize edebildikleri çok katmanlı bir yapıya bir yapıya evrilmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda da siber toplumlar ortaya çıkmaya başlamış ve dolayısıyla sanal uzamlar postmodern paradigmanın temel unsurlarından biri haline gelmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, sanal ve arttırılmış gerçeklik teknolojileri, hiperevrenler, yeni medya ve yapay zekâ postmodern paradigmayı şekillendiren başat faktörler haline almıştır. Bu durumun doğal bir sonucu olarak da toplumların sosyokültürel ve dini dokularında birtakım değişimler gözlemlenmeye başlamıştır.

### **Dijital Din ve Dijital Kültürün Dini Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkisi**

Geleneksel iletişim araçlarındaki pasifliğin aksine teknolojinin getirisi dijital medya araçlarıyla aktif bir üne kavuşan toplumlar, yeni iletişim araçlarının etkileşimli yapısı ve bireyselleşme özellikleriyle yeni bir kültürel ortamın oluşmasını sağlamıştır (Mazıcı and Can, 2021). Bu yeni alanda bir araya getirme/bütünleştirme özellikleriyle ön plana çıkan din, bireyselleşen dijital mecralarda kendini yeniden inşa etme çabasına girmiştir. Diğer bir ifadeyle postmodern dünyada din, kolektif alandan bireysel yaşamlara doğru yeni biçimlenişlerin veçhini aramaya koyulmuştur (Yeniyol ve Handan, 2022).

Postmodern dönemde dijital teknolojilerin geldiği son nokta göz önüne alındığında sanal ağların ya da başka bir ifadeyle dijital kültürün insanlara alışılmışın dışında dini ve kültürel deneyimler yaşatmasının yanında bireyler artık sanal bir üst kimliğe de sahip olmuşlardır. Buna bağlı olarak da Metaverse gibi gerçeküstü evrenlerin pek çok açıdan önemi artmış ve özellikle farklı dini inançlara, mezheplere mensup toplulukların birbirleriyle etkileşime girmeleri oldukça kolaylaşmıştır. Diğer taraftan kişilerin veya dini organizasyonların bireysel ve kurumsal bazda dini içerikler

paylaşabildikleri web siteleri, bloglar, forumlar, görüntü ve video paylaşımı yapabildikleri sosyal medya hesapları oluşturmaları ve kişiselleştirilebilir akıllı cihaz uygulamaları geliştirmeleriyle birlikte de sosyal ağlarda her türlü dini bilginin ve dezenformasyonun dolaşımı hızlanmıştır. Bu durumun doğal bir sonucu olarak da dijital kültür ve dijital din gibi kavramlar popülerlik kazanmaya başlamış ve böylece dijital kültür kişilerin dini yaşam ve kimlikleri üzerinde hem olumlu hem de olumsuz birtakım yenilikleri de beraberinde getirmiştir.

### **Yeni Medyanın İslami Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkisi**

İnsanın kimlik arayışı sonu olmayan bir süreçtir ve bu arayış insan var olduğu sürece devam edecektir. Kimlik, insanın içselleştirdiği şeylerle ilgilidir ve dolayısıyla insanlar kendilerini toplumda kimlikleri aracılığıyla bir yerlere konumlandırmaktadırlar. Din de insanların hayatı anlamlandırma yolundaki başat faktörlerden biri olduğundan insanın anlam ve kimlik arayışında dinin oynadığı rol elzemdir. İçinde yaşadığımız postmodern çağda da çoğu Müslüman anlam, kimlik arayışı, dini bilgilere erişme ve bu bilgileri çevresindekilerle paylaşma noktasında internet ve yeni medya teknolojilerinden faydalanmaktadır. Dijital ağların birçok Müslüman açısından vazgeçilmez bir bilgi kaynağı haline gelmesi yeni medyanın insan hayatındaki önemini arttırmaktadır ancak medya ve din arasındaki çok boyutlu ilişkiler oldukça karmaşıktır ve bu bağlamda yeni medyanın dini ve kimliği nasıl dönüştürdüğünün araştırılması kritiktir. Son yıllarda yapılan geniş çaplı bazı araştırmalar internet kullanıcısı Müslümanların Batı kültürüne iyimser yaklaşma, Batı kültürünü benimseme ve İslam ile Hıristiyanlık arasında daha fazla benzerlik olduğunu düşünme olasılıklarının internet kullanmayan Müslümanlara kıyasla daha yüksek olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak postmodern çağın en modern iletişim aracı olarak görülen sosyal medya ve diğer dijital iletişim kanalları İslam'ın mesajının yayılması ve Müslüman toplumların dini öğrenmesi/öğretmesini kolaylaştırabileceği gibi dezenformasyon ve İslamofobi'nin yaygınlaştırılması amacıyla da kullanılabilirler.

### **Postmodern Dünyada Müslüman Olmak: Türkiye Örneği**

Postmodernliğin modernliği eleştirmesi ve postmodernliğin din ve özgürlüğe dair söylemleri, Müslümanlar arasında önemli bir karşılık bulmuştu (Tekin, 2015). Ancak meta- anlatıyı yani her şeyin açıklanabileceği iddiasında olan düşünceyi reddeden ve göreceliği merkeze alan postmodernist yapıda dünya dinlerinin geleceğinin olmadığı anlaşılmaktadır. Çünkü postmodernizm, dinleri her şeyin mübah görüldüğü parçalanmış bir kültürde bütünü sembolik bir parçası olarak görmektedir (Erkan, 2013).

Postmodern çağda sanal olan artık gerçekten daha gerçek olarak algılanabilir hale gelmiştir ve bu durum İslamiyet de dâhil olmak üzere diğer büyük dini sistemlere zarar vermeye başlamıştır. Ayrıca sanal ile gerçek arasındaki sınırlar muğlaklaştıkça da yeni bireysel ve toplumsal dini formlar ortaya çıkmaya başlamıştır. Örneğin, sanal gerçeklik teknolojileri tarafından tetiklenen Türkiye'deki ve dünyadaki postmodern yönelimler sonucu İslam'ın şartlarından biri olan hac ibadetinin Metaverse ortamında yapılıp yapılamayacağı bir tartışma konusu haline gelmiş ve dijital hacılık gibi bazı yeni kavramlar doğmaya başlamıştır. Ayrıca İslam'daki postmodern yönelimler Türkiye'deki cami mimarisi ve İslami giyim kuşama da yansımıştır ve bu bağlamda geleneği sürdüren Osmanlı dönemi cami mimarisi yanında postmodern cami mimarisi anlayışı da ciddi oranda popülerlik kazanmıştır. Ancak Türkiye'deki bazı kesimlere göre postmodern cami mimarisi anlayışı geleneksel İslami değerlerden yoksundur ve postmodern tarzdaki camiler dini ve kültürel açıdan Türkiye'nin



toplumsal ve dini kimliğini yansıtmamaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, postmodern anlayış sonucunda gelişen yeni cami mimarisi üslubu, bireylerin değişen yaşam/giyim tarzı ve Türkiye'deki kamusal alanların dönüşümü bazı İslami topluluklar tarafından Türkiye'de İslami kimliğin tahribata uğraması olarak görülmekte ve eleştirilmektedir. Ancak Türkiye'deki bazı gruplara göre ise postmodern eğilimlerin etkisiyle mimari üslup, ibadet usulleri, giyim, sanat, eğitim ve müzik anlayışında meydana gelen değişimler İslami kimliği zedelemekten ziyade İslam'ın daha da tanınması ve yayılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır.

### **Sonuç**

Postmodern dönemde İslam'ın internetleşmesi Müslümanların dini hayatını, ritüellerini, İslam öğretisini değiştirmiş, farklı dinlere mensup topluluklar arasındaki etkileşimi hızlandırmış, İslami görüş bakımından geçmişte bir araya gelmesi pek mümkün olmayan kavramları sentezlemiş, yeni imkanlar oluşturmuş, İslami toplulukların toplum içindeki görünürlüklerini arttırmıştır yani kısacası İslam'ın ifade biçimlerini değiştirmiştir. Bu değişim bazı Müslümanlar tarafından dini kimliğin bozulması olarak algılandığından eleştirilmekte iken başka bir kesim tarafından ise postmodern bir imkân olarak değerlendirilip İslam'ın mesajının yayılmasına katkı sunduğu gerekçesiyle desteklenmektedir. Postmodern çağda internet ve yeni medya toplumların omurgasını oluşturmaktadır, çünkü hem sanal ağlar üzerinden yapılan iletişim günümüzün en modern iletişim yöntemi olarak ön plana çıkmakta hem de internet ve yeni medya teknolojileri yediden yetmişe herkes tarafından gündelik hayatın vazgeçilmez bir parçası olarak sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, yürütülen tartışma, sanal ile gerçeklik arasındaki sınırların giderek bulanıklaşması ve bunun sonucu olarak sanal gerçekliğin yaşamın tüm yönlerini kuşatmasıyla beraber dini kimliklerin artan oranda dijital kültüre entegre olduğuna dair çıkarımlara zemmin hazırlamıştır.

#### **Araştırmacıların Katkı Oranı Beyanı/ Contribution of Authors**

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

*The research was conducted by a single author.*

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest**

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

*There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.*

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> For further reading, it is possible to access the construction contract of Şakirin Mosque, its project design, and many other similar documents and books from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) Atatürk Library and other IMM Libraries

