



## The emergence of Islamophobia in social networks

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### Abstract

**Aim:** There are now countless ways for people all over the world to connect and share information, thanks to the Internet's expansion. Blogs and other forms of online social networking have made it possible for people from all walks of life to connect and have their voices heard without fear of retribution. Verifying the connection between social networks and the phenomenon of Islamophobia is crucial in light of the recent rise of Islamophobia in the West following several attacks committed by fanatical terrorists who have been attributed to Muslims.

**Methodology:** To get to the bottom of things, we used a questionnaire to collect data and then analyzed it with content analysis.

**Findings:** The study's results corroborated the significance of social media in the emergence of Islamophobia.

**Implications/Novel Contribution:** The efforts that were made to present a synthesis of works on Islamophobia, particularly those related to social networks, constituted an important step in this study and made it possible to highlight a certain number of studies that have dealt with the relationship between our two variables. This was an important step in the study because it highlighted a certain number of studies that dealt with the relationship between our two variables.

*Keywords:* Social networks, Islamophobia, internet, racism, Islam.

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### INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of online and information-sharing platforms directly results from the Internet's evolution. However, it has also been a double-edged sword (Back et al., 2010) because it has provided a venue for racists to reach a broader audience covertly, allowing them to effect racism changes and evade oversight (Citron, 2014). The Internet, however, has evolved into a network that provides novel opportunities for cyberbullying and cyberhate (Jaishankar, 2008).

In several European countries, officials have enforced laws criminalizing the dissemination of hate speech based on race, religion, or sexual orientation.

While messages spread quickly on the Internet, users can communicate anonymously due to the lack of a centralized authority. Therefore, certain ideologies will use the Internet as a propaganda tool to influence many people. There is evidence that this form of communication can have a negative effect on community integration and harmony (see, for example, (Jam et al., 2014; T. I. Khan, Jam, Anwar, Sheikh, & Kaur, 2012; McNamee, Peterson, & Peña, 2010)).

This study area piques my curiosity because of the widespread discussion of Islamophobia in the media and among public and private institutions. Ink has been spilled, and this topic is still being dissected from every angle. Furthermore, media communication plays a fundamental role as a potent means, conveying ideologies in all directions and influencing social information flows and even entire societies, thanks to its enormous potential, which makes it capable of influencing people's cultures and perceptions.

Importantly, this study highlighted a select number of works that have dealt with the relationship between our two variables because of the efforts made to present a synthesis of works on Islamophobia, especially those related to social networks. To achieve the goals of this study, we have conducted theoretical research that has allowed us to draw attention to the importance and depth of prior works on Islamophobia. These include, but are

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not limited to, those written by Thomas Deltombe, Joceline Cezari, Stven Sheehy, and Edwy Plenel (Allen, 2010; Hajjat & Mohammad, 2013)

In this piece, we'll make an effort to investigate how Islamophobia manifests itself online. To begin, we will examine the various theoretical frameworks for this topic in a literature review; then, we will conduct an empirical investigation using an interview guide.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamophobia is a made-up term that first appeared in European literature at the turn of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, anti-Muslim sentiments like these have been pervasive in Europe for decades. "Islamophobia is undeniably rooted in the historical legacy of a conflictual relationship that developed over many centuries involving the overlap of religion, politics, and war," writes Weller, Feldman, Purdam, and Andrews (2001). Islamophobia has been a topic of discussion in European public discourse for several years, but no consensus has emerged on how to define the term (Weller et al., 2001). Europe's public discourse includes Islamophobia, which remains a contentious topic.

According to Robin Richardson, "the word was not translated as Islamophobia but rather as feelings hostile to Islam" in the English translation of the book. According to (Ezzerhouni, 2010), the term "Islamophobia" was used in French in other contexts between 1910 and 1918. Aside from that, Bravo (2011) confirms that the author used the term as a criticism of Belgian orientalist Henri Lammens for being too hostile toward Islam. Returning to the origin of the term, he writes, "For some, the Muslim is the natural and irreconcilable enemy of the Christian and the European; Islam is the negation of civilization, and barbarism, bad faith, and cruelty are the best that can be expected of Muslims." This was written in the doctoral thesis of French colonial official Alain Quellien. Furthermore, he mentions that the French military service between 1902 and 1906 (Bravo, 2011) inspired his research on Quellien.

Indeed, a group of French ethnologist administrators who specialized in West African Islam used the term at the intersection of a scientific claim, and a political project (Hajjat & Mohammad, 2013) to describe the exclusion of Muslims from the French colonial system of administration. Prejudices against Muslims and misinformation about Islam were spread, in part, by those in positions of authority, as described by delafosse (Delafosse, 1910; Jam, Singh, Ng, & Aziz, 2018).

However, the Oxford English Dictionary notes that the first English use of the term was in 1923 in the Journal of Theological Studies. The Runnymede Trust's report "Islamophobia. A Challenge for Us All" popularized the term in 1997. The research presented here was compiled by an organization devoted to racial equality issues (Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2006). A while later, in a lecture titled "Confronting Islamophobia" in 2004, Kofi Annan noted that Islamophobia is used to reflect growing bigotry. The report's publication had a widespread impact, lending the term Islamophobia real credibility (Allen, 2010). After that, scholars delved into the phenomenon, and the sociological concept of Islamophobia (Asal, 2014; McNamee et al., 2010).

In this case, the term was first used in 1985 by Said (1985), the author of a book with the same name, *Orientalism*, in which he analyzed in depth the connection between the East and the West and this gaze of otherness fixed especially around Arabs and Muslims (Said, 1985).

Islam + phobia, from Phobos, the Greek god of fear; hence, "Islamophobia." The French word for fear, "phobie," has its roots in the esoteric, or psychic, realm and can mean, on the one hand, in its most robust (medical) sense, a common symptom of obsessive neuroses. However, in a more muted way regarding mental and emotional behavior, a strong dislike, an irrational or instinctive fear.

Islamophobia is the stereotyping of Muslims, according to Hajjat and Mohammad (2013). It's a way of thinking whereby the actions and words of alleged Muslims are attributed to their alleged religious beliefs. Therefore, it permanently labels Muslims as followers of Islam (Hajjat & Mohammad, 2013). "Islamophobia" is a valid term, according to Gottschalk, Greenberg, and Greenberg (2008), because it captures the essence of people's fear of Muslims in general (Gottschalk et al., 2008). Islamophobia is an ideological concept that imperialism and nationalism have implanted into the American psyche, as proven by the research presented in Sheehi (2010). Islamophobia, according to Cesari (2011), is a "modern and secular anti-Islamic discourse" that ignores the influence of some Christian discourses on Islam in her analysis, despite centering her attention primarily on the European

context (Cesari, 2011). According to Thomas Deltombe, we must distinguish between "Islamophobia of a racist type (the Muslim as an ethnic category or Islam as a foreign element) and the legitimate criticism of religious dogmas, whatever they may be." According to Allen, Islamophobia is a complex discourse that draws heavily from Europe's long history of anti-Islamic polemic and its close relationship with the Muslims who live on its borders. According to Allen (Allen, 2010), Islamophobia is not an ideology that creates a false impression of Islam and Muslims (Allen, 2010). Several academics and experts have attempted to define Islamophobia, with one settling on "the intolerance of the religious and cultural beliefs of Muslims" (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007).

## **Web 2.0**

The individual, group, and institutional routines are shaken up due to ICTs (Siebdrat, Hoegl, & Ernst, 2009). Web 2.0 tools (O'Reilly, 2007) and social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) have ushered in this new emergence. These methods introduce user-generated content, and collaborative communication to the forefront, as referenced by (Boughzala & De Vreede, 2010). Fundamental to these platforms are the concepts of self-expression, social interaction, and content creation. Thus, we can define Web 2.0 as "Attempts to decipher the rules of success on the Internet, which have sparked a commercial revolution in the computer industry. Rule #1: Develop better software as more people use it by taking advantage of the cumulative power of user-generated content, and social interactions" (Jam, 2019; S. Khan, Shahbaz, & Jam, 2019; Musser & O'reilly, 2006).

Nonetheless, knowledge is created when network actors communicate and share information. We do this by having conversations, incorporating new ideas, etc. Blogs, platforms, social networks, etc., are all examples of well-known Web 2.0 applications.

## **Social Networks**

To my knowledge, the term "social networks" was first used by scholars in a 1954 article by John Arundel Barnes. Since Barnes's invention, networks have also been widely used to categorize the myriad connections among people and organizations. Improvements in information technology and communication networks are crucial to the evolution of "social networks."

Internet and virtual society as a whole, including the concept of social networks, have gained traction in recent years, as evidenced by the exponential growth in the number of people using these platforms since they were first made available online.

The age of the information and communication revolution is undeniably upon us. The Internet has become a vital tool in the modern media landscape. Since no country, regardless of its technological and military level, can deprive citizens of access to information, the emergence of the Internet has affected the media and all economic, social, political, and security fields. This has raised the question of the sovereignty of States over their territory (Abu Asbah, 2010).

Social networking sites have expanded rapidly in recent years to meet users' growing expectations for various features and monetization opportunities. There is considerable disagreement among academics when it comes to defining social networks. According to Preece and Maloney-Krichmar (2005), social networking sites are spaces where users work together toward shared objectives. The site is governed by policies, which include a set of guidelines suggested by the site administrator (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). These so-called sites are distinguished by their collaborative nature and the sharing of knowledge, making them a point of convergence for Internet users' professional and personal goals (Aguiton & Cardon, 2007; Hamid, Jam, & Mehmood, 2019; Waheed & Kaur, 2019).

Nonetheless, today, people are members of multiple social networks at once (Boyd (2010)). These networks are websites that allow users to create a page where they present themselves to the general public in accordance with a specific system that brings together a set of users with whom they share, with access to their page, the information available. You can't simply copy and paste this link into your paper; instead, you need to (Boyd, 2010) to see how the links from different sites differ. Actors in these networks are intertwined through various types of relationships (friendships, information sharing, collaborative projects, etc.). These networks rely on a steady stream of communication between their nodes.

About the communication spaces provided by social networks, we find, on the one hand, textual and

audio-visual writing as well as several means of leisure, entertainment, and, on the other hand, the opening to other spaces where one can express their opinions and attitudes freely and peacefully, apart from social and political issues.

### **The Rise of Islamophobia in Social Network**

The first online social networks appeared in 1995 in the United States and, by 2004, had spread to the rest of the internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Characteristics of such networks include:

1. The ability to disseminate information globally.
2. A mechanism for exchanging data within the network.
3. A medium for communication between its users.

Since the end of the twentieth century, violent and hostile reactions to Islam and Muslims have resulted from terrorist attacks committed by fanatical or recruited Muslims and members of various fundamentalist organizations worldwide. The media's coverage of Islam-related topics underwent a sea change in the wake of these attacks. Terrorist attacks gave the media a chance to create a fictional representation of Muslims and their faith, illustrating the radical shift that has taken place in the dissemination of knowledge about Islam since (Gudel, 2002) work.

The global spread of Islamophobia can be traced back partly to the US-led War on Terror. Media coverage of Islam and Muslims also increased in tandem with this trend. While some speak out in defense of Islam to counter Islamophobia, the attitudes of some Muslims have helped shape the stereotypes that are then spread through the media.

Indeed, the West paints the Muslim insurgent as a radical who looks to religious texts to justify his violent acts and believes he must wage jihad against the West.

French journalist Thomas Deltombe discussed in depth how Islamophobia is constructed in the media and how media portrayals of Islam have influenced public perception.

In recent years, Islamophobic acts have become increasingly common on social media platforms, even though users from any socioeconomic background can sign up for an account and share their thoughts or comment on the posts of others (Awan, 2016). The author (? , ?)awan2016islamophobia investigated the impact of Islamophobia on the social networking site Facebook. His investigation into online bigotry directed at Muslim communities spanned one hundred pages, posts, and comments on Facebook. The online and offline environments for Muslims have become more hostile due to these Islamophobic acts (Awan, 2016). Merkel met with Zuckerberg to discuss online racism after several incidents in Germany, which took in thousands of Syrian refugees in 2015. The European Union, on the other hand, has coerced Facebook into signing "a new European Union Code of Conduct that commits it to review and remove hate speech from its European sites within 24 hours of its publication."

According to the review of related literature, it follows that social networks have also contributed to the dissemination of the concept and constitute a space for discussion regarding a phenomenon, so they are not an exception to this rule.

As such, we discuss the dissemination of Islamophobia and the perspectives of our social media users as part of our research. The following section will focus on this issue.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Tensions between the East and West, or Islam and the West, have always existed, fueling bigotry, stereotyping, and violence against Islam and Muslims. In this case, social media provides a venue for anonymous online speech, which can lead to Islamophobic and hostile acts, both virtually and physically.

All socio-professional groups in France were represented in our sample of 110 social network users. This survey was conducted from the twentieth of October to the fifteenth of December 2020. We have opted to utilize a web-based survey and a content analysis program to accomplish this.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Level of Study**

To investigate the possible correlation between respondents' levels of education and the number of times they connected to social networks, we inquired about the former from the latter group. However, only 14% of those

who participated in the survey have what is considered a modest education level, meaning they have yet to attend college.

### **The Use of Social Media**

The vast majority of respondents admitted to using social networks because these platforms allow them to communicate with other members of their networks, be seen and recognized by others, and offer feedback on third parties' publications.

### **Time of Using Social Media**

According to previous studies, all of the people interviewed had a significant seniority in their social networks, which reflected their strong presence in their lives.

### **Type of Social Networks of Use**

The results indicate that Facebook has the most extensive user base, followed by YouTube and Twitter. Users of Facebook have claimed that the platform grants them access to features and capabilities unavailable on rival social networks. According to those we spoke to, Facebook plays a pivotal role in people's lives because it provides them with a central hub for sharing information and fostering lasting relationships. Facebook also allows users to create custom information pages, surveys, photo albums, video albums, and other applications that can be used as communication tools; it guarantees promotion via its advertising inserts. At last, the entire Facebook community has confirmed getting the news in real-time. It's essential to consider the needs of your business when deciding which other social networks to use.

### **Islamophobic Acts on Social Media Sites**

The vast majority of respondents stated that they had encountered photographs, videos, or written expressions on the various social networks that they use that are critical of Islam and Muslims. The other respondents justified that freedom of expression justifies the presence of words. They discovered through the interviewees' responses that Facebook is the social network utilized most frequently by individuals who harbor Islamophobic sentiments on the internet.

### **Islamophobic Expressions (Saracens, Mohammedans, Maghreb, Arabs, Halal, Muslim terrorist, Muslim Insurgent)**

Those who responded that Islamophobic acts are part of freedom of expression found that these words feature Islamophobic expressions, resulting in most respondents confirming these acts.

### **Contribution of Social Networks to the Spread of Islamophobia?**

That said, 77.6% of interviewees confirmed that social networks contribute practically to the spread of Islamophobia, while 22.4% said the opposite.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article draws attention to a possible link between Islamophobia and online communities. Our theoretical research and the findings of the empirical study conducted using our interview guide initially confirmed this connection. As a result, we infer that the respondents appreciate the utility of social networks for various purposes. They counter that social media, as a form of media, is consistent with other forms of media (print or audiovisual) in its contribution to the dissemination of Islamophobia.

Thanks to our investigation, we have been able to compile an inventory of the data and theoretical and empirical knowledge about this phenomenon and draw attention to the connections between the elements that act on it. As a result, she elucidated the issue and its root causes, namely the rise of Islamophobia in online communities. Our findings would add to the body of knowledge in the humanities, particularly in areas like media studies.

Several definitive answers to our research question have been uncovered through this investigation; the most important of these is the confirmation that social networks heavily influence the spread of Islamophobia. However, this study also reveals some restrictions; for example, it was challenging to compile a comprehensive literature review due to the small number of studies that examined the link between Islamophobia and online



communities. However, since the bulk of our survey was fielded in Morocco, our sample was restricted to French nationals residing in or regularly visiting the country. Traveling in France presents enough challenges to warrant this restriction. With a lengthy questionnaire taking an average of 30 minutes to administer, gathering just 20 responses would necessitate a lengthy stay and substantial financial resources.

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