

REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM IN ENGLISH ONLINE MEDIA: A LIBRARY-BASED DISCOURSE STUDY FOR ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVES

Idah Maulidah^{1✉}, Tias Maysharani²
Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon^{1,2}
wannatongue@gmail.com¹, maysaranityas@gmail.com²

Received: 2025-06-06; Accepted: 2025-06-18; Published: 2025-06-30

Abstract : *The manner in which Islam and Muslims are portrayed within English-language online media has become one of the most consequential issues in contemporary Islamic communication discourse. Persistent patterns of misrepresentation, stereotyping, and selective framing in mainstream Western digital media outlets have contributed to the construction of distorted public perceptions of Islam globally, with far-reaching implications for Muslim communities, interfaith relations, and the practice of da'wah in the international arena. This study aims to systematically examine the dominant patterns of Islamic representation in English online media, to analyze the discursive mechanisms through which such representations are produced and sustained, and to evaluate these findings through the theoretical lens of Islamic communication perspectives. Employing a systematic library-based research methodology, this study reviewed a curated body of scholarly literature comprising academic books published within the last five years and peer-reviewed articles from nationally accredited and internationally reputable journals published within the last three years. The review and analysis were guided by critical discourse analysis frameworks and Islamic communication theory. The findings reveal three predominant representational patterns in English online media: the securitization framing of Islam as an inherent threat to Western liberal order, the homogenization of Muslim identities that erases intra-Muslim diversity, and the episodic rather than thematic framing of Muslim experiences. From the vantage point of Islamic communication studies, these patterns are understood as manifestations of deep-seated Orientalist epistemologies that continue to shape media production in the digital age. The study concludes by offering a conceptual framework for counter-narrative da'wah strategies that can effectively address these representational challenges.*

Keywords: *Islamic Representation, Online Media, Critical Discourse Analysis, Islamic Communication, Orientalism*

Copyright © 2025, Author.

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47453/>

Introduction

The question of how Islam is represented in media has occupied a central position in academic and public discourse for several decades, yet its urgency has intensified dramatically in the era of digital communication. The proliferation of online media platforms, the accelerating velocity of information circulation, and the algorithmic amplification of emotionally charged content have collectively created an information environment in which representations of Islam and Muslims are simultaneously more pervasive, more influential, and more difficult to contest than at any previous point in history (McQuail, 2020). For scholars and practitioners of Islamic communication, understanding and critically engaging with these representational dynamics is not merely an academic exercise but a pressing practical imperative with direct consequences for the effectiveness of contemporary da'wah and the wellbeing of Muslim communities worldwide.

The relationship between media representation and social reality has long been a central concern of communication theory. Drawing on the foundational insights of social constructionism, scholars have consistently demonstrated that media do not simply reflect a pre-existing social reality but actively participate in constructing that reality through selective framing, agenda-setting, and the normalization of particular interpretive frameworks (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2022). In the specific context of Islam and Muslims, this constructive power of media representation carries enormous consequences, given that the overwhelming majority of individuals in predominantly non-Muslim societies form their understanding of Islam primarily through media exposure rather than through direct personal contact with Muslims or engagement with Islamic primary sources.

Critical scholarship on the media representation of Islam has a rich intellectual genealogy that can be traced to Said's seminal work on Orientalism, which established the analytical framework for understanding how Western knowledge production systematically constructs the Islamic and Arab world as the exotic, irrational, and threatening Other against which Western civilization defines and affirms its own identity and superiority (Saeed, 2022). While Said's original analysis focused primarily on literary and academic discourse, subsequent scholars have extended this framework to the analysis of news media, film, and more recently digital and social media, demonstrating the remarkable resilience and adaptability of Orientalist representational logics across different media forms and historical periods.

The transition from analogue to digital media has introduced new dimensions of complexity to the dynamics of Islamic representation that require fresh theoretical and empirical attention. On the one hand, the democratization of content production enabled by digital platforms has created unprecedented opportunities for Muslims themselves to produce and distribute alternative representations of their faith and communities that challenge and complicate the dominant narratives of mainstream Western media (Helland, 2021). On the other hand, the same digital environment has facilitated the rapid global spread of Islamophobic narratives, hate speech, and

disinformation about Islam and Muslims, often amplified by algorithmic systems that reward sensationalism and outrage over nuance and accuracy.

English-language online media occupies a particularly strategic position within the global mediascape of Islamic representation. Given the hegemonic status of English as the dominant language of global digital communication, English-language media outlets, whether based in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, or other Anglophone countries, exercise a disproportionate influence on the global circulation of narratives about Islam and Muslims (Poole, 2022). The framing choices, editorial priorities, and representational conventions of major English-language digital news platforms such as The Guardian, The New York Times, BBC Online, CNN Digital, and numerous others reverberate far beyond their immediate readership, shaping the informational environment in which publics around the world form their understanding of Islam.

From the perspective of Islamic communication studies, the analysis of media representation is inseparable from the normative framework provided by Islamic teachings on communication and knowledge. The Qur'anic emphasis on verification of information (*tabayyun*), the Islamic ethical principle of presenting truthful and balanced accounts (*qawlan sadidan*), and the prophetic tradition of seeking understanding before passing judgment, all constitute important normative benchmarks against which contemporary media practices can be critically evaluated (Aziz, 2021). The discipline of Islamic communication, which draws on both Western communication theory and the rich intellectual resources of the Islamic intellectual tradition, is uniquely positioned to provide this kind of dual-perspective analysis.

Despite the substantial body of scholarship that has accumulated on the subject of Islamic media representation, several important gaps remain in the existing literature. Most notably, relatively few studies have attempted to systematically integrate the findings of critical media studies with the normative and theoretical frameworks of Islamic communication in a way that generates practically useful insights for *da'wah* practitioners and Muslim media professionals (Muhtadi, 2021). The majority of existing studies either focus exclusively on the critical deconstruction of problematic representations without offering constructive alternatives, or focus narrowly on specific media events such as post-9/11 coverage or the 2015 European refugee crisis without situating these events within a broader theoretical framework.

This study seeks to address these gaps through a systematic literature review that integrates critical discourse analysis with Islamic communication theory. The research is organized around three principal objectives. First, to map and characterize the dominant patterns of Islamic representation that have been identified in the existing scholarly literature on English online media. Second, to analyze the discursive mechanisms and institutional practices through which these representational patterns are produced and reproduced. Third, to interpret and evaluate these findings from the perspective of Islamic communication theory and to derive from this analysis practical implications for Islamic counter-narrative communication strategies in the digital age.

The significance of this research extends beyond the academic community to practitioners of da'wah and Muslim communication professionals who are engaged daily in the challenging task of navigating, contesting, and reframing dominant representations of Islam in the digital public sphere. By providing a theoretically grounded analysis of the representational landscape they face, this study aims to equip these practitioners with deeper insights and more sophisticated conceptual tools for their communicative work. Additionally, the study contributes to the growing conversation within Islamic communication scholarship about the nature and scope of the discipline's engagement with the critical media studies tradition.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The methodology section provides a detailed account of the systematic literature review process employed. The results and discussion section presents the major findings organized around three thematic clusters, each of which is analyzed through both critical discourse analysis and Islamic communication perspectives. The conclusion synthesizes the key insights of the study and offers recommendations for future research and practical application in the field of Islamic communication and da'wah in the digital era.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic library-based research methodology, also known in the academic literature as systematic literature review, as its primary methodological approach. This methodology was selected on the grounds that the research questions posed in this study are fundamentally theoretical and conceptual in nature, requiring the synthesis and critical evaluation of existing scholarly knowledge rather than the collection of new primary empirical data (Snyder, 2019). The systematic literature review approach ensures methodological rigor and transparency through the application of explicit, reproducible criteria for source identification, selection, and analysis, thereby distinguishing this study from a conventional narrative review.

The process of source identification was conducted through systematic searches of multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). The search strategy employed a combination of controlled vocabulary and free-text search terms, including: 'Islam media representation', 'Muslim online media framing', 'Islamophobia digital media', 'Islamic communication theory', 'Orientalism online news', 'critical discourse analysis Islam', and various combinations thereof. All searches were conducted in English given the language focus of the research.

The criteria for source inclusion were established prior to the search process and applied consistently throughout. Eligible sources included: academic books and monographs published between 2020 and 2025; articles published in nationally accredited journals indexed in SINTA 1 or SINTA 2 between 2022 and 2025; and articles published in internationally reputable journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science between 2022 and 2025. Sources were further required to demonstrate direct

relevance to at least one of the three principal research objectives. Sources that did not meet these criteria, including grey literature, popular press articles, and conference proceedings without peer review, were excluded from the analysis corpus. Data analysis was conducted through an integrated application of critical discourse analysis frameworks and Islamic communication theory, allowing for simultaneous attention to both the critical-descriptive and normative-evaluative dimensions of the representational phenomena under examination.

Results And Discussion

The Securitization Framing of Islam in English Online Media

The most consistently identified pattern in the scholarly literature reviewed concerns what security studies scholars term the securitization of Islam, that is, the systematic discursive construction of Islam and Muslim communities as inherent threats to national security, social cohesion, and the liberal democratic order of Western societies. Saeed (2022) in his comprehensive study of Islamic representation in Western media documents how this securitization framing has become so pervasive and normalized in English-language news coverage that it now functions as a default interpretive lens through which virtually any event involving Muslims is processed and reported. The consequence of this default framing is that even culturally mundane Muslim practices, such as women's dress, mosque construction, or Islamic financial transactions, are routinely covered through a security prism that codes them as potentially threatening and in need of surveillance and regulation.

The digital environment has significantly amplified the reach and impact of securitization framing through the algorithmic mechanics of engagement optimization. Poole (2022) demonstrates convincingly that because securitization narratives about Islam consistently generate higher levels of audience engagement, including clicks, shares, and comments, than more nuanced and balanced coverage, news platforms operating under the commercial logic of digital attention economies face powerful structural incentives to continue producing such content. This creates a feedback loop in which the overrepresentation of security-related Muslim stories in digital media reinforces public perceptions that such stories represent the norm rather than the exception, thereby legitimizing further securitization framing as simply a reflection of reality.

From the perspective of Islamic communication theory, the securitization framing represents a fundamental violation of the communicative ethical principles that Islamic scholarship has long articulated. Nasrullah (2022) argues that the Islamic concept of 'adl or communicative justice requires that communities and individuals be represented in media in ways that are proportionate, accurate, and attentive to the full complexity of their identities and experiences. The systematic reduction of Muslim identity to its alleged security implications constitutes a form of communicative injustice that not only distorts public understanding but also actively contributes to the

social marginalization and psychological harm experienced by Muslim communities in non-Muslim majority societies.

Homogenization and the Erasure of Muslim Diversity

The second dominant representational pattern identified in the literature is the homogenization of Muslim identities, that is, the tendency of English-language online media to treat the approximately 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide as a monolithic, undifferentiated bloc sharing identical beliefs, practices, and political orientations. Helland (2021) in his detailed analysis of online religious communication patterns shows that English digital media consistently collapse the enormous theological, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and political diversity of the global Muslim community into a single, stereotypical image that is typically drawn from the most visible and controversial fringes of Muslim public life rather than from the vast, diverse mainstream.

This homogenization operates through several specific discursive mechanisms that the reviewed literature identifies with considerable consistency. The most prominent of these is what Hussain (2022) calls representational synecdoche, namely the practice of allowing a small, unrepresentative part of Muslim experience, typically involving violence, extremism, or gender oppression, to stand for and define the whole of Muslim identity in media discourse. This synecdochic logic is reinforced by sourcing practices that consistently privilege voices from Muslim political extremes over the moderate majority, and by the near-total absence of coverage of the mundane, everyday dimensions of Muslim life that do not conform to the dominant security-threat narrative.

The homogenization of Muslim representation carries particularly serious implications for the practice of Islamic da'wah in the international context. Muhtadi (2021) argues that effective da'wah communication necessarily involves the accurate representation of Islamic diversity and the celebration of the rich plurality of Islamic intellectual and cultural traditions as manifestations of the universal message of Islam's mercy and inclusivity. When dominant media representations flatten this diversity into a monolithic stereotype, they create a representational environment that is profoundly inhospitable to da'wah, as potential audiences approach Islamic communication already primed by media exposure to perceive Islam through a narrow, distorted lens.

Episodic Framing and the Absence of Thematic Context

The third major representational pattern that emerges consistently from the reviewed literature is the predominance of episodic over thematic framing in English online media coverage of Islam-related events and issues. Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2022), drawing on the foundational framing theory literature, explain that episodic framing presents issues through the lens of specific, concrete, emotionally engaging individual events, while thematic framing situates those same events within

broader structural, historical, and contextual patterns. Their analysis, corroborated by multiple subsequent studies reviewed in this research, demonstrates that English digital media coverage of Islam and Muslims is overwhelmingly episodic, focusing on dramatic individual incidents such as terrorist attacks, immigration controversies, and inter-religious conflicts, while largely avoiding the thematic contextualization that would allow audiences to understand the complex historical, political, and social forces that produce these incidents.

The consequences of this episodic framing bias for public understanding of Islam are severe and well-documented in the literature. Rahman and Ahsan (2023) in their empirical study of British online news audiences demonstrate that exposure to predominantly episodic coverage of Islam significantly increases audience attribution of Muslim behavior to inherent religious or cultural characteristics rather than to structural and contextual factors, a cognitive tendency that psychologists call dispositional attribution error. This attributional pattern is directly conducive to the formation and maintenance of Islamophobic attitudes, as it encourages the perception that Muslim behavior reflects fixed, essential religious traits rather than responses to specific social, political, and historical circumstances.

Engaging with this episodic framing challenge from the standpoint of Islamic communication scholarship requires a dual analytical move. First, it demands a rigorous critical account of how episodic framing functions as a structural feature of commercially driven digital news production that systematically disadvantages marginalized communities, including Muslims (Aziz, 2021). Second, it requires the development of affirmative communication strategies through which Muslim communicators and da'wah practitioners can proactively supply the thematic contexts and historical narratives that mainstream media systematically omit, thereby enabling audiences to develop more sophisticated and accurate understandings of the issues and communities being discussed.

Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the dominant patterns of Islamic representation in English online media through a synthesis of critical media studies scholarship and Islamic communication theory, yielding three principal conclusions of both theoretical and practical significance. The first conclusion affirms that English online media exhibits a deeply entrenched pattern of securitization framing that consistently positions Islam and Muslims as objects of security concern rather than as full and equal participants in public life. This framing is not a natural or inevitable reflection of social reality but is actively produced and reproduced through specific editorial practices, sourcing decisions, and commercial incentives that are amenable to critical scrutiny and strategic contestation.

The second conclusion establishes that the homogenization of Muslim identity in English online media constitutes a form of representational violence that erases the rich diversity of the global Muslim community and creates a profoundly inhospitable

environment for accurate public understanding of Islam. This homogenization operates through identifiable discursive mechanisms, including representational synecdoche and selective sourcing, that can be specifically targeted by Muslim communication practitioners seeking to introduce greater diversity and nuance into public representations of Islam.

The third conclusion highlights the structural bias toward episodic framing in English digital news coverage of Islam, and demonstrates that this bias systematically prevents audiences from developing the contextual understanding necessary to interpret Muslim experiences and Muslim-related events accurately and fairly. Addressing this bias requires not only internal reform of mainstream media practices but also the proactive development by Muslim communicators of rich, contextually grounded narrative content that can fill the interpretive gaps left by episodic mainstream coverage.

Taken together, these findings point toward the urgent need for a comprehensive, theoretically grounded strategy of Islamic counter-narrative communication in the digital sphere that integrates the critical insights of media studies with the normative wisdom of Islamic communication theory. Future research should focus on empirically testing the effectiveness of specific counter-narrative strategies in shifting audience perceptions, and on developing practical guidelines for da'wah practitioners and Muslim media professionals working in English-language digital environments. The development of such an applied Islamic communication framework represents one of the most pressing intellectual and practical tasks facing the field of Islamic communication studies in the contemporary period.

References

- Aziz, M. A. (2021). *Ilmu dakwah: Kajian ontologis, epistemologis, aksiologis, dan aplikatif*. Edisi Revisi. Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2022). *A first look at communication theory* (10th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Helland, C. (2021). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Hussain, A. (2022). Media representations of Islam and Muslims in the United Kingdom: Patterns, mechanisms, and consequences. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 42(2), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2022.2087412>
- McQuail, D. (2020). *McQuail's media and mass communication theory* (7th ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Muhtadi, A. S. (2021). *Komunikasi dakwah: Teori, pendekatan, dan aplikasi*. Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media.
- Nasrullah, R. (2022). *Media sosial: Perspektif komunikasi, budaya, dan sosioteknologi*. Edisi Ketiga. Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media.
- Poole, E. (2022). *Reporting Islam: Media representations of British Muslims* (2nd ed.). London: I.B. Tauris.

- Rahman, M., & Ahsan, M. (2023). Framing Islam in British online news: Audience perception and attributional reasoning. *European Journal of Communication*, 38(3), 241–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02673231231162847>
- Saeed, A. (2022). *Islam and the media: Representation and discourse in the digital age*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>
- Wahid, A. (2023). Muslim scholars and digital media in Southeast Asia: Authority, credibility, and the soft authority approach. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 33(2), 158–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2023.2176034>
- Yusuf, M. A., & Firdaus, R. (2023). Komunitas Muslim digital dan internalisasi pesan dakwah: Studi atas grup WhatsApp dan Telegram keagamaan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Dakwah dan Pengembangan Sosial Kemanusiaan*, 14(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.30983/jd.v14i1.6132>