

REVIEW OF CORPUS-BASED STUDIES IN THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN THE WESTERN MEDIA

Ashwaq Alsulami

School of Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics, Bangor University, Wales,
United Kingdom

E-mail: ashwaq.rj@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to develop a comprehensive review of literature on the attitude of Western media including films and magazines, towards Muslims and the Islamic religion by way of reviewing existing studies in relevant literature. The findings from the sources considered are used in making inferences and conclusions about the general attitude of some Western media towards Muslims and the Islamic religion, whilst also analyzing some of the terminologies used in reference to Muslims, especially Muslim Women. The impact of the identified attitude was highlighted and the conclusion of the study is that most of Western media holds a highly negative and condescending view towards Muslims and the Islamic religion.*

KEYWORDS: *corpus, Muslims, Islam, Western media.*

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, attempting to, understand the role of the media in shaping the way in which things, or people, are viewed has remained difficult, despite the availability of rich information in literature associated with this issue. This difficulty normally emanates from the fact that the media cannot directly be linked to developments associated with its reporting (Akbarzadeh and Smith 2005). Changes in attitudes amongst people towards a given issue cannot be directly associated with the media reports since individuals are not forced to take a particular view by the journalists, movie actors or celebrities, as they watch the TV, read newspapers and articles or listen to the various sources of media reporting. (Brown, Brown, and Richards, 2015, pp. 50-8).

However, there is massive scientific research evidence that indicates the part played by the media in influencing the attitudes and views of the masses about matters of interest. Therefore, although there is no evidence directly linking the media to the negative hate towards Islam and the Muslims, the role of the Western media on this issue cannot be gainsaid. Many studies have been conducted on the role of the Western media in advancing a negative attitude towards Muslims and Islam (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2012). Moreover, a look at the existing media reports and article publications in Western countries proves the point that some Western media has a negative attitude towards the Muslims and Islam (Ahmed and Matthes, 2017). The most affected victims of this negative attitude are the Muslims from the Middle East.

This research is based on reviewing some of the relevant literature studies that used a corpus-based approaches as a methodology to establish the common attitude of Western media towards Muslims and the Islamic religion. The specific purpose of the study is to investigate the manner

in which Muslims and the Islam religion are viewed from the perspective of Western media. It is vital to note that Western media incorporates social networking platforms within the West, movies, magazines, newspapers and mainstream media such as the leading news channels (Al-Hejin 2015, pp. 19-46). Also, the study sought to find out some of the notable terms and phrases applied by the people managing and working within Western media while addressing Muslims and Islam religion. Moreover, the interest of the researcher is to critically evaluate earlier studies on this matter and how using corpus-based approaches were useful in addressing their research questions. The current paper reports the findings of the literature review based researches on this matter.

The structure of the paper includes an introduction and a section describing the methodology and study methods applied herein. Further, the paper includes a critical analysis of the theory, as well as the concepts used in literature. Followed by the discussion of findings and the conclusions drawn from the inferences made.

In guiding this specific research, the following two research questions were addressed:

1. What is the attitude of Western Media towards Muslims and Islam?
2. What are the most commonly used words relating to Muslims and Islam in the Western media?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various authors have dealt with the issue of the media's representation of Muslims and the Islamic religion. Firstly, it is accepted among those authors that there is a general hostile attitude towards Muslims and Islam in the West and the existence of a negative image of Islam and Muslims in the Western countries has been addressed (Al-Hejin, 2015). The author focused on how Muslim women (MW) and their Hijab are presented on the BBC News website. Importantly, his article was structured so as to build two specialised corpora of articles from the BBC and Arab News channels relating to MW. His research on the two websites was based on two semantic categories; namely: Islam and females (Al-Hejin, 2015, pp. 24). The results found that the Hijab was one of the top semantic categories collocating with MW on BBC News. In addition, the BBC News stated that MW are forced to wear the Hijab, they are passive and need support to be aware of their rights.

In his book, 'Discourse analysis and media attitudes', Paul Baker (2013) combined Corpus Linguistics and discourse analysis methods to show this negative image. The book focused on the role that British National Press play in representing Muslims and Islam after the tragic attacks on 9/11. His main focus was on answering this question; Is the British Press prejudice against Muslims? He analyzed different types of news texts and 140 million words by using corpus-based approach to answer this question. He searched on the collocations of the five forms of the term Islam which are *Islam*, *Islamic*, *Islamism*, *Islamist*, and *Islamists*. He posited this question, Does the term *Islam** attract the use of the term *Terror**? The finding was that the five forms of the word Islam collocate with the four forms of the term Terror which are *Terror*, *Terrorism*, *Terrorist* and *Terrorists*. Additionally, from 1998 to 2009 most of British press mentioned Muslims in the context of conflict. Another example that has been analyzed by Baker is representing Muslim women in the news. Such as, 'Kabbani' was interviewed by a magazine and asked to take part in a debate about Islam and it was a total shock to see that any important aspects pertaining to the rights of women were completely ignored. In fact, all the references and debates about Muslim women were inaccurate and dishonest.

Rochelle Terman's article (2017), which analyzed the concept of Islamophobia and Western media representations of Muslims and Islam was another study that address the negative image of Muslims in the Western Media. The article concentrated on the portrayal of the Islamic culture, especially when it comes to gender parity. The theory of gendered orientalism, used in this study, formed the basis for the research conducted by Rochelle Terman (2017, pp. 489-502). Terman (2017, pp. 489-502) applied the theory to examine the representation of Muslim women in the U.S. news media. He tested the quantity and substance of the coverage given by the United States media stations. He stated that some journalists of Western media houses are likely to report about the women in Middle East countries only when their rights are violated. However, the same journalists do report about women in other societies when their rights are respected. It shows a determined intention of consistent portrayal of the Islam culture as one, which does not respect women. Moreover, Shahram Akbarzadeh (2005), in his book 'The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media', discussed that the media in Australia in the pre and post September 11 period proved that the print media represent Islam and Muslims by using negative images and by reproducing negative stereotypes about the culture and religion of Muslims.

In an article written by Saifuddin Ahmed (2012), empirical evidence showing the negative Western media attitude towards the Muslims and Islam is adduced. Ahmed elected to conduct a primary research to establish the general attitude towards the Muslims and Islam in Western media outlets including Hollywood films. According to Ahmed (2012, pp. 279-306), there is empirical evidence indicating that the influences of the Western media over the existing attitudes towards Muslims and Islam are strong.

The study done by Ahmed focused on the youths and reviewed the level of media influence on the attitudes of young people in the West towards Muslims and Islam. Ahmed used participants who had preference of BBC, Fox News and Aaj Tak as their favorite media outlets. The findings of Ahmed's study indicated a strong negative attitude among the youths as a result of the influence on them by their favorite media stations.

In most Hollywood films, the Arabs are portrayed as villains, cowardly and barbaric. The Arabs and Muslims in the Hollywood movies are stereotyped as people who are always up to something bad and lack basic morals. Jack Shaheen (2001, p. 13) gave a good analysis of the misrepresentation of Arabs and Muslims in his work. His work is based on an analysis of 900 Hollywood films. Following his detailed analysis of the Hollywood films, Shaheen (2001, p. 15) concludes that these movies portrayed the Middle East in quite exotic terms. According to Shaheen (2001, p. 16), these exotic terms stoked bad feelings, loathing and distrust. Shaheen (2001, p. 23) clearly states that the Hollywood's portrayal of Arabs and Muslims as a pestilential was overtly alienating and real racism. Jon Semmerling (2006, p. 43) also added his two cents on this discussion by noting that Hollywood was incessantly constructing a view of Arabs and Muslims as evil.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a literature review. The corpus-based approaches were employed in the collection of information in most of the reviewed researches. It involves an analysis of the concepts and theories related to the topic using materials from existing literature. Moreover, some of the Western media publications and Hollywood movies are also analysed to show some of the obscene and disparaging terms, as well as the phrases used to represent Muslims and Islam in

a negative way. The research questions for this paper have been addressed by researchers using corpus-based approaches.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Muslims and Islam have been a subject to western media, thus many writers have tackled it in their books and articles. The purpose of this literature review-based study was to find out the general attitude of Western media towards Muslims and Islam and to establish the resultant effects. The general view of all the references used was then identified to support the position that some Western media have a condescending and negative attitude towards Muslims and Islam. This negative attitude has had a negative effect on the way the public views Muslims and the Islamic religion. The negative stereotyping of the Arabs and Muslims within the Hollywood movies has become so significant that it has caused the disapproval of people from the Middle East as bad people.

On the basis of the evidence currently available about the negative representation of Muslims and Islam in the West, it seems fair to mention that developments in the Middle East have contributed to shape this negative image. Some of the developments in the Middle East that continue to shape the perceptions of Muslims and Islam in the West including Wars or the bad behaviour of some Muslim minority. In surah Al-Zalzalah in the Quran: chapter 99 verses 8 Allah says, "Whosoever does good equal to the weight of an atom (or a small ant), shall see it, and whosoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom (or a small ant), shall see it." (IqraSense.com, 2018). Therefore, those minorities do not follow real Islamic beliefs. In fact, Islam is based on peace and Justice. Islam means Peace. It is classified as the second largest religion in the world with over 1.8 billion followers (Wikipedia, 2018). The majority of those Muslims do not spend their live-in conflict and they are peaceful. Focusing on bad behaviour of small minority is not considered to be newsworthy. Finally, human has good and evil in any group or race. It cannot be generalized over one group than other.

Implications of the Study

This research helps readers and users to best understand the views of various articles and books that have reviewed Islam and Muslims. It will significantly help readers of the relevant articles and books to be more informed and have a more accurate interpretation of the content contained therein. In addition, it helps to substantiate some of the concepts used in the articles which should be valuable to the readers. The major implication of the research report is that it gives more assertion to the view that the Western media has a negative attitude towards the Muslims and Islam religion. The intention of the research is that it may prompt an increased concern among the media policy makers in the West to start to bring the media houses back in order. Therefore, this study greatly speaks to the concept of global citizenship which should be on the mind of every person who reads it. Also, the media should focus on what makes communities, societies and the human race as a whole live in a peace, rather than to create negative images of one or more groups of people, particularly based on their religious beliefs, practices and traditions.

References

- Ahmed, S. and Matthes, J., 2017. Media representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A meta-analysis. *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 79, No. 3, pp. 219-44.
- Ahmed, S., 2012. Media portrayals of Muslims and Islam and their influence on adolescent attitude: An empirical study from India. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 279-306.
- Akbarzadeh, S. and Smith, B., 2005. The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media. *School of Political and Social Inquiry*, p. 4.
- Al-Hejin, B., 2015. Covering Muslim women: Semantic macrostructures in BBC news. *Discourse & Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 19-46.
- Alsultany, E., 2012. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. nyu Press, pp. 21-3.
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C. and McEnery, T., 2012. Sketching Muslims: A corpus driven analysis of representations around the word 'Muslim' in the British press 1998–2009. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 255-78.
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C. and McEnery, T., 2013. *Discourse analysis and media attitudes: The representation of Islam in the British press*. Vol. 8, p. 11. Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, L., Brown, J. and Richards, B., 2015. Media representations of Islam and international Muslim student well-being. *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 69, pp. 50-8.
- Duin, J., 2016. News Media in the Arab World: A Study of 10 Arab and Muslim Countries. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 3, p. 702.
- Gabrielatos, C., 2009, November. Corpus-based methodology and critical discourse studies: context, content, computation. In *Siena English Language and Linguistics Seminars (SELLS)* p. 2.
- Reinhart, A.K., 1995. *Before revelation: The boundaries of Muslim moral thought*. (p. 24). SUNY Press.
- Shaheen, G, J. 2001. *'Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People'*. (pp. 13-23). Olive Branch Press.
- Terman, R., 2017. Islamophobia and Media Portrayals of Muslim Women: A Computational Text Analysis of US News Coverage. *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 3, pp. 489-502.
- Törnberg, A. and Törnberg, P., 2016. Combining CDA and topic modeling: Analyzing discursive connections between Islamophobia and anti-feminism on an online forum. *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 401-22.

Poole, E. and Richardson, J.E. eds., 2010. *Muslims and the news media*. (Vol. 6, p. 21). IB Tauris.

“Islam.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 12 May 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam.

IqraSense.com. (2018). *Surah Al-Zalzalah (Chapter 99) from Quran – Arabic English Translation*. [online] Available at: <http://www.iqrasense.com/quran-surahs/surah-al-zalzalah-chapter-99-from-quran-arabic-english-translation.html> [Accessed 13 May 2018].