

## Representations of Islam and Muslims in Media Addressed by Corpus-Based Approaches: Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract

*In the last decade, the synergy of corpus linguistics (CL) methods within critical discourse analysis (CDA) has gained increasing popularity. This study aims to review and analyse studies related to different representations of Islam and Muslims in mainstream and alternative media addressed by corpus methodologies. It seeks to identify cross-cutting themes, similarities and differences and offer a synthesis of the literature findings to map the research topics that covered Islam and Muslims in media. Research papers are systematically searched in Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar, IEEE Xplore, and Science Direct from 2000 to July 2021. A total of 8 articles are selected on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria. All these articles are incorporated coherently to answer four predetermined research questions. This systematic literature review results show that the studies focus to a great extent only on Islam as a religion only and Muslim women, not on other topics, that are discriminatorily portrayed in the western media. In terms of women's representations, they are depicted as either passive victims or active fighters. Whereas Islam is represented relatively negatively as an ideology, not a religion, and they use the reduction and confirmation hypothesis by selecting news articles to justify a predetermined idea.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The media is an important institution in society. It gathers, examines, and disseminates data about society's daily problems. The media is a crucial tool for influencing society. People turn to media sources for information on both personally significant aspects of society and other topics that are important to the entire society. Media sources play a massive part in societal influence because of their power and effective narrative techniques (Gass, 2015; Izuma, 2017).

How a country, group, or entire region is portrayed in the nation greatly impacts how laypeople and foreign authorities feel about it.

Nowadays, the media portrays Islamic countries negatively, sometimes for valid reasons. Due to the impact of media stories, interest in Islam and Muslims is growing on a global scale. Since September 11, 2001, also called "9/11," there have been numerous news stories regarding Islam and Muslims. The echo of inclusivity is now much more troublesome as a result of recent developments. Additionally, since perceived security threats have operated to make Islam and Muslims major subjects in global media, driving significant news coverage, issues involving Islam and Muslims, such as immigration and asylum, have been discursively linked. As a result, many academics are interested in researching and discussing the subject of Islam and Muslims (Zhang & Li, n.d.).

Researchers have examined these portrayals and the influence they have on the attitudes of the people in those and different regions using a variety of approaches. Scholars have used critical discourse analysis approaches to complete most of the research on this topic since the advent of discourse studies in the 1960s. Many of the researchers have received criticism for "cherry-picking" despite doing work that appears to be legitimate in order to support an already established premise. Since they rely on a small number of texts and the opinions of the researchers, it needs more academic rigor. Thus, in response to these criticisms, a number of academics have proposed a collaboration between corpus linguistics and discourse analysis (e.g., Baker, 2006; Stubbs & Gerbig, 1993).

The corpus methodologies offer more credibility and validity for the findings and the resultant conclusions (Al Fajri, 2019). The enhanced credibility and validity stem from using an objective approach to identifying themes in articles and using large samples, and these components enable both the breadth and depth of research. Limitations and objections related to the employment of a single approach can be removed by combining corpus linguistics "quantitative" with critical discourse analysis "qualitative." An empirical tool for linguistic analysis that uses corpora as the main data source and as a jumping-off point is called corpus linguistics (Cheng, 2012; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). However, critical discourse analysis views "language as discourse and social activity" and emphasises the importance of the "context" in the language (Fairclough, 2001, p.21).

This research examines how Muslims and Islam are portrayed in both traditional and alternative media. The research will include a synthesis of the articles to identify the cross-

cutting themes, similarities, and differences. This review aims to set the stage for a synthesis of the findings, from which the paper will draw conclusions and discuss their consequences.

### 1.1. Research Questions

RQ1: What are methodology designs followed in corpus-based studies on media representations of Muslims and Islam?

RQ2: What themes are focused on corpus-based studies on the media representations of Muslims and Islam?

RQ3: What are the similarities and differences cross-cutting themes of corpus-based studies on the media representations of Muslims and Islam?

RQ4: What are the implications of findings after synthesis and analysis of corpus-based studies on the media representations of Muslims and Islam?

### 1.2. Search Strategy

The literature search in this review covered research articles of peer-reviewed journals that are indexed in five renowned databases, namely, (1) Web of Science (Wos), (2) Scopus, (3) Google Scholar, (4) IEEE Xplore, and (5) Science Direct. The search strategy was generated by the following keywords with respect to each database search strategy:

(“corpus linguistic Islam” or “corpus linguistic Muslim” or “corpus-based approach Islam” or “corpus-based approach Muslim” or “corpus-assisted approach Islam” or “corpus-assisted approach Muslim” or “corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis Islam” or “corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis Muslim” or “corpus-based critical discourse analysis Islam” or “corpus-based critical discourse analysis Muslim”).

### 1.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were imposed while attempting to identify the most related articles during the study selection process. The date of publication was set from 2000 to July 2021. This period was selected because it covered several major world events happening at that time (such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, war, etc.) by focusing on this timeframe that shows increasing coverage of Muslim representation in Western media. According to the additional criteria, all papers, which included reviews, conferences, books, and research papers, were limited to those in the English language across all the selected databases. The remaining criteria were concerned with the inclusion of all the papers that discussed representation of Islam and Muslims in media addressed by corpus-based methodologies. While the exclusion criteria in this study are research that does not meet the inclusion criteria and the study did not clearly state the method used. Also, research that could not answer research objectives.

### **1.4. Quality Assessment**

Quality assessment is needed to maintain the quality of the paper being reviewed. One way to do this is by reviewing only high-quality papers. Due to the limited number of papers that explore representation of Islam and Muslims in media addressed by corpus-based methodologies. It was quite difficult to do a quality assessment.

### **1.5. Data Synthesis**

At this stage, paper selection was done by considering whether the paper can help answer the research question and meet the inclusion and exclusion criteria. In this study, eight articles were obtained and after applying the research questions, inclusions, and criteria. The data from the paper is selected and the primary study findings are analysed and integrated to address the research questions.

## **2. ARTICLES**

Eight articles are included in this critical review. The following table summarises the articles that inform the critical review:

Table 1: Summary of articles

<b>Article Citation</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Methodology Designs</b>
(Al Fajri, 2019)	To explore how American newspapers represent Islam and Indonesian Muslims	Corpus-assisted discourse analysis methodology. keyword analyses, concordance analysis, and collocation analysis
(Gabrielatos et al., 2010)	To explore the differences in the diachronic changes in newspapers (pre 9/11 and post 9/11)	Corpus-based methodology. Detailed wordlist analysis, word sketches, concordance, and keyword analysis. Misspellings to capture all possible words some do not have conventionalised spellings
(Karimullah, 2020)	To explore how women are represented in English and Arabic online political corpora.	Corpus linguistic methods. Word sketches, semantic preference analysis, prosody analysis

(Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig, 2017)	To explore how the representation of Arab women in Western media at the time of the Arab Spring affected the conceptualization of Arab women by German university students.	Discourse analysis methods Corpus-linguistic methods
(Mustafa-Awad et al., 2019)	Explored the impact of how the representation of Arab women in Western media at the time of the Arab spring on the public opinion and changing the stereotypes with which they are described in Germany.	Discourse analysis Corpus-linguistic approaches
(Samaie & Malmir, 2017)	To explore the representation of Muslims and Islam in media stories in US media outlets.	Critical Discourse Analysis Corpus Linguistics Concordance analysis Collocation analysis Discourse-Historical Approach
(Terman, 2017)	To explore how the US news media outlets portray Muslim women.	Structural topic model Statistical analysis
(Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016)	To explore the discursive connections apparent in anti-feminism and Islamaphobia in alternative media	Critical Discourse Analysis Topic modelling

### **3. THEMES**

#### **3.1. Incongruities in representation**

The inconsistent portrayal of women in various contexts is one of the topics that come out of the analysis of the articles. The portrayal of women as both victims and activists seems inconsistent. While some Western media sites presented women as repressed victims, other publications recognized their role in the Arab Uprising by portraying them as activists (Mustafa-Awad et al., 2019). In contrast to the stereotype of Arab women as helpless victims, the media sources examined by Karimullah (2020) presented them as strong and capable of fighting for their rights despite the patriarchal and oppressive society in which they live. In addition, the stereotype of Arab women as victims conflicts with the idea of an Arab woman as a fighter.

Islam and feminism also seem at odds with one another (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016). The researchers' list of issues includes the explicit assertion that Islam inherently oppresses women. There are contradictions in the idea that feminists are silent about what appears to be male misogyny and the oppression of female immigrants among Muslims. Islam and feminism are at odds with each other because strong patriarchates, which perpetuate gender inequity in Muslim nations, are a fundamental tenet of the religion, and they go against the principles of feminism and gender equality.

#### **3.2. Rights, Empowerment, Oppression, Violence, and Activism**

The media's representation of Arab women centers on the common issues of oppression, violence, and rights. However, after the Arab spring, two words that activism and empowerment added to the lexical terms used to represent women in mainstream media. Another key finding from the corpora that Mustafa-Awad and Kirner-Ludwig (2017) examined was women's empowerment. However, the way that the theme of empowerment was handled, and the vocabulary terms used to discuss it in German and English media were different. One of the authors' highlights was the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize given to Yemeni Tawakkul Karman, Leymah Roberta Gbowee, and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia for their work in the battle for women's rights. The three ladies receiving a major international prize were perceived as empowering the Arab lady (Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig, 2017).

One of the terms used to describe women during this time in German media was "female activism." According to the corpora examined by Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig (2017), Arab women were portrayed in the media as fighters. One of the corpora used to define Arab women in German media was violence, and they were depicted in the media as victims rather than as violent offenders. The references to violence, in accordance with Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig (2017), are in relation to the government forces' response to the revolt. In Tahrir

Square, Egypt, there were instances of sexual assault against women. According to the article by Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig (2017), government agents have raped women in Libya. Female activism and violence are themes that frequently appeared together in German media during this time because the government utilised physical and sexual assault as a tool to repress female activism (Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig, 2017).

The notion of oppression has frequently been used to characterize Arab women. German media continued to explore this issue throughout the rebellion by utilizing English word equivalents like a ban. These terms were mentioned in conjunction with the driving limitations imposed on Saudi Arabian women by German media. The corpora that Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig (2017) used for their investigation also included rights. This theme is connected to the limitations on women in the Arab world and the consequent denial of rights. Sports and driving restrictions are among the activities that the writers specifically mention. The authors did point out that sports restrictions only applied in a few Arab nations, and Saudi women were the only ones subject to driving bans.

From a news perspective, how Arab women are portrayed in Western media varies. Terman (2017) investigates how Arab women are portrayed in American media. Some themes go through all of the other topics. For instance, the author emphasizes gender equality, oppression, and rights (Terman, 2017). However, the author is more concerned with how the topics are explored. One of the newly discovered insights is that Muslim women are considered newsworthy by American media outlets since the society they live in regularly violates their rights. The author claims a confirmation bias hypothesis due to reaching concluding that there is no change in the content and portrayal of news stories regarding Arab women, even though there is extensive coverage of these stories. The author also draws attention to a reduction theory, according to which the social experiences of Muslim women and women from the Middle East and North Africa are reduced to two features, namely gender equality and women's rights, by American media outlets when they report on them (Terman, 2017). When characterising Arab women, marriage frequently comes up in the corpus evaluation of English-language media, especially regarding forced and underage marriages. The authors emphasized how common this issue is in Yemen, and the writers particularly emphasised the development of the issue among Syrian refugees.

### **3.3. Extremism, Radicalism, Violence and Terrorism**

The media in the United Kingdom portrays Islam as more of an ideology than a religion (Gabrielatos et al., 2010). Media journalists in the UK more often use the adjective "Muslim" to discuss governmental concerns like legislation and politics than they do to describe religious



issues. The United Kingdom's media frequently discusses Muslims and Islam in the context of terrorism, social conflicts, or armed conflict and portrays all Muslims as a single community distinct from the west. Devastation, violence, social unrest, and mortality are related problems in these debates.

According to Al Fajri's (2019) research, Muslims are also portrayed in American news channels as being involved in terrorism and extremism. The author cautions readers, nonetheless, by pointing out that themes of terrorism and extremism predominated during the time that followed terrorist attacks carried out by militant Indonesian "Muslims." This caution is supported by a concordance study that revealed the use of the keywords Al Qaeda, Bashir, Jemaah Islamiyah, and others to describe discussions of the terrorist assaults carried out by these groups between 2002 and 2006 in American media outlets. The 2004 bombing of the Australian embassy and the 2002 and 2005 bombs in Bali are only a few incidents (Al Fajri, 2019).

Muslims are also described as being aggressive, religious, extreme, and Islamic extremist terrorists (Samaie & Malmir, 2017). In American media, Muslims are portrayed with a limited number of modifiers. The American media outlets utilise discursive strategies of nomination to create the image of Muslims, claims a study by (Samaie & Malmir, 2017). This strategy labels the social players as either belonging to in-groups or out-groups or having either a positive or negative connotation. Regardless, there is a broad trend in American media to portray Muslims as violent extremists. The latter use violence to radicalise their religion in their societies further (Samaie & Malmir, 2017).

### **3.4. Similarities and Differences**

Foreign media generally portrays Islam or Muslims as unfavorable, using a negative connotation, even when they play a minor role in a reduction hypothesis. Al Fajri (2019) asserts that most of Indonesia's Muslims live moderate lives and adhere to a tolerant interpretation of Islam. A small number of Muslims in Indonesia have decided to live based on extreme ideologies. However, the American media took an interest in the small radical portion of the significant population. This argument is consistent with the confirmation theory, which Terman (2017) referred to, according to which media outlets will focus on the details that help them portray the ideal scenario. One can understand the trepidation of researchers like Terman (2017), even with media independence, when a small, negative cohort in a population obtains their attention, but a more significant cohort that participates in oppositional actions is not even given a passing mention.



A reduction hypothesis is also evident in how American media covers the social affairs of Muslim women and women from countries in the Middle East and North African areas. Several facets of women's social affairs in these areas can make for interesting news stories. Nevertheless, the majority of the stories emphasize women's rights and gender equality (Terman, 2017). The way Muslims are portrayed in Indonesia also supports the reduction argument. After 2006, the way Muslims were portrayed in American media channels altered. The way Muslims are portrayed in Indonesia also supports the reduction argument. After 2006, the way Muslims were portrayed in American media channels altered. Before 2006, allusions to the Bali bombings affected how Indonesian Muslims were portrayed; after that year, references to terrorism and extremism referred to ISIS. After reviewing additional random articles, Al Fajri (2019) validated what Terman (2017) referred to as the reduction hypothesis. Al Fajri (2019) discovered that although Indonesian Muslims were mentioned in the news articles, they were not the primary subject of the writing. Instead, the news stories focus on how the nation's foreign policy was fighting ISIS and radicalism, with Indonesian Muslims being given simply a passing mention.

The way Arab women are portrayed in German and American media has started to diverge. The United States media outlets appeared to broadcast negative stories about Arab women, but the German outlets covered both positive and negative news reports about them (Mustafa-Awad et al., 2019).

### 3.5.Synthesis and Analysis

Researchers have developed much of the current theories on the portrayal of women in mainstream media and other social circles utilising critical discourse methodologies. These research attempts have come under heavy fire for their shallowness and narrowness. Al Fajri (2019) argues that some of the criticism levelled in critical discourse analysis stems from the fact that it necessitates "cherry-picking" appropriate samples of data that support the researchers' hypotheses. All of the articles chosen for this critical review employed corpus linguistic techniques. To enable a thorough comprehension of how women are portrayed in society, the authors of the articles used a sizable sample of linguistic data collected from news stories and social media forums. Reviewing articles using corpus approaches yields insights motivated by thorough coverage and impartial theme identification.

The extensive data samples employed in the studies using corpus approaches also help the researchers' results to be more broadly applicable. The variety of language data that researchers employ, along with the corpus approach, further strengthens the credibility and validity of the final study (Al Fajri, 2019). These advantages are used in this critical evaluation to identify the

common themes emphasised in the articles, their similarities and differences, and the implications of the discussions and conclusions highlighted in the articles.

Despite some similarities, Islam and Muslims do not all receive the same treatment in the Western media. The German media has displayed some qualities of fairness with the assessment of the article, demonstrating their coverage of both positive and negative news articles.

Following the Arab spring, topical frames describing German perceptions of women show positive and negative perspectives (Mustafa-Awad et al., 2019).

The assessment enables one to identify several potential transitional points. Although Arab women have historically been portrayed as passive victims of their society, the association of this theme with their activism suggests that they may eventually move from being passive victims to active advocates for their rights (Mustafa-Awad & Kirner-Ludwig, 2017). It would be interesting to understand whether such a shift is also obvious in other spheres of social life in Arab countries. The information provided is a factual portrayal of some aspects of social life in the Arab world, notwithstanding the reduction and confirmation hypotheses emphasized in the articles and the potential effects such biased reporting may have on the formation of attitudes. Women's transformation from passive victims to activists for women's rights in countries that are becoming more patriarchal will alter regional discourses.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The media significantly impacts how social discourse is shaped and informed, and people's opinions are influenced by how social issues are covered. Western media has unfairly portrayed the Arab world, with images of this region often failing to capture all the distinctive aspects of local social events. The research on these issues using Critical Discourse Analysis methodologies has received criticism for lacking breadth, credibility, and validity because of possible confirmation bias. Researchers have solved the limitations of Critical Discourse Analysis methodology through corpus-linguistic methodologies, enabling a thorough investigation into how Muslims and Islam are portrayed in Western mainstream and alternative media. This critical evaluation examined the representation of Muslims and Islam in eight articles utilizing corpus approaches.

Inconsistencies in portraying women are one of the issues that keep coming up. They are perceived as both active fighters and passive victims. Positively, the Western media acknowledges the significance of women in the development and results of the Arab Spring. However, it is clear that the former perception of women as helpless victims overshadows their

activity and rebellion, so even if they demonstrate their empowerment and actively contribute to establishing peace in their community, their reputation as helpless victims continues. In any case, the encouraging reports in the media convey the potential development of women as active social trendsetters. The acknowledgement of their efforts.

The review also demonstrates that people regard Islam more as an ideology than a religion, and it is also linked to terrorism, devastation, extremism, and radicalism. However, it should be mentioned that others disagree with the idea of the blanket condemnation of a religion based on the errant actions of a select group are noted. The reduction and confirmation hypothesis arguments support these dissenting opinions. News reports tend to favor a predefined idea due to reduction and the confirmation hypothesis. The way that society perceives Muslims and Islam is biased as a result of this behavior. One of the articles showed a reduction and confirmation hypothesis' effect on attitudes. It is unlikely that the way Muslims and Islam are portrayed in Western media will soon change for the better. However, employing corpus-linguistic methodologies has allowed realising the positive elements in news coverage.

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