

COUNTERING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND MEDIA ANALYSIS

MELAWAN ISLAMOPHOBIA DI ERA DIGITAL: ANALISIS SOSIOLINGUISTIK DAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Digital media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and accelerating Islamophobia through hate speech, stereotypes, and negative representations. Anti-Muslim incidents have increased significantly, for example in the United Kingdom (5,837 incidents in 2024) and Australia (3,254 incidents from January–July 2025), exacerbated by linguistic bias in AI and the virality of online content. This study systematically reviews the literature on linguistic practices and discursive strategies in Islamophobic narratives in digital media, using narrative review critically oriented and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Literature searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar (2000–2025) and analyzed through thematic synthesis. The results show the use of negative lexical content, metaphors, framing, and othering that reinforce polarized narratives, while algorithms and clickbait journalism accelerate the spread of Islamophobic content. Counternarratives from Muslim communities, including the reappropriation of stigmatizing labels, demonstrate the potential for communal resistance and agency. These findings confirm the relevance of CDA and digital sociolinguistics and provide a basis for effective counternarrative strategies to address online stereotypes and discrimination.

Keywords: Digital Islamophobia; Critical Discourse Analysis; Digital Sociolinguistics; Hate Speech; Counter-Narrative

ABSTRAK

Media digital berperan penting dalam membentuk persepsi publik sekaligus mempercepat Islamofobia melalui ujaran kebencian, stereotip, dan representasi negatif. Insiden anti-Muslim meningkat signifikan, misalnya di Britania Raya (5.837 kasus pada 2024) dan Australia (3.254 insiden Januari–Juli 2025), diperparah oleh bias linguistik pada AI dan viralitas konten online. Penelitian ini meninjau secara sistematis literatur mengenai praktik linguistik dan strategi diskursif dalam narasi Islamophobia di media digital, menggunakan narrative review berorientasi kritis dan Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Pencarian literatur dilakukan di Scopus, Web of Science, dan Google Scholar (2000–2025) dan dianalisis melalui sintesis tematik. Hasil menunjukkan penggunaan leksikal negatif, metafora, framing, dan othering yang memperkuat narasi terpolarisasi, sementara algoritma dan jurnalisme clickbait mempercepat penyebaran konten Islamofobia. Counter-narrative dari komunitas Muslim, termasuk re-appropriation label stigmatisasi, menunjukkan potensi resistensi dan agensi komunal. Temuan ini menegaskan relevansi CDA dan sosiolinguistik digital serta menyediakan dasar bagi strategi counter-narrative yang efektif untuk menghadapi stereotip dan diskriminasi daring.

Kata Kunci: Islamofobia Digital; Analisis Wacana Kritis; Sosiolinguistik Digital; Ujaran Kebencian; Counter-Narrative

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital media has become a primary arena for shaping global public opinion over the past two decades. Advances in communication technology and the rise of social media platforms have made the digital space a primary channel for the exchange of ideas, representation, and the construction of social identities. As of January 2025, more than 5.24 billion social media user identities, which represents approximately 63.9% of the world's population, with an average usage time reaching 2 hours 21 minutes per day (The Global Statistics, 2025; Smart Insights, 2025). Overall, digital media consumption reached an average

of 7 hours 12 minutes per day, encompassing streaming activities, online news, and social media (Keevee, 2025). This fact demonstrates that digital media is not merely a communication channel but has become a dominant arena in shaping public perceptions of various issues, including the representation of Islam and the Muslim community.

As digital media has grown in importance, the phenomenon of Islamophobia has also significantly escalated online. Islamophobia, manifested in hate speech, stereotypes, and negative representations of Muslims, has become increasingly entrenched in digital public discourse. In the UK, the annual Tell MAMA report recorded a surge in anti-Muslim incidents: 5,837 cases throughout 2024, up from 3,767 in 2023 and 2,201 in 2022 (Reuters, 2025). Similar conditions were also found in Australia, where between January and July 2025, there were 3,254 indirect incidents (including online hate comments) and 96 live reports, with 26 cases occurring in just the first six months of the year (The Guardian, 2025). The trend of digital Islamophobia is also reflected in the United States. Following the victory of Muslim politician Zohran Mamdani, more than 6,700 Islamophobic posts with more than 419 million online interactions in just two weeks (Time, 2025). These figures confirm that digital media is not only a means of communication, but also an arena for the reproduction and normalization of hatred against Muslims.

This phenomenon demonstrates that Islamophobia not only functions as explicit hate speech, but also manifests in more subtle linguistic practices and discursive strategies. For example, research on AI-based language models has shown significant linguistic bias. GPT-3, one of the large language models widely used, associates words "Muslim" with "terrorist" in 23% analogy testing, indicating anti-Muslim bias in technology-based linguistic constructions (Abid, Farooqi, & Zou, 2021). On the other hand, other research shows that hate speech on social media spreads faster, more widely, and more influentially than non-hate content (Mathew et al., 2019). This suggests that language practices in digital spaces not only reflect societal perceptions but also reinforce entrenched discriminatory ideologies.

It is in this context that sociolinguistic approaches and critical discourse analysis (CDA) become highly relevant. These approaches allow researchers to examine how language, power, ideology, and technology interact to shape and disseminate Islamophobic narratives. By understanding the linguistic practices underlying negative representations of Muslims, this research not only contributes to theory development in language and media studies but also offers practical implications for developing strategies to counter narratives which are more effective in the digital realm.

Although extensive research on Islamophobia in digital media has been conducted, most studies tend to use quantitative approaches focused on content analysis, such as counting the frequency of specific words, themes, or representations in news stories, articles, and social media posts. While this approach can provide a general overview of the prevalence of Islamophobic discourse, it fails to delve into the deeper linguistic dimensions, particularly regarding how language is used as an ideological instrument to shape public opinion. In other words, there are limitations in connecting numerical representations with the discursive meanings inherent in language practices.

Furthermore, previous research has relatively rarely examined how linguistic practices interact with distinctive digital mechanisms, such as content distribution algorithms, the logic of virality, and user interaction patterns on social media platforms. This aspect is crucial because discourse is not only produced by specific actors but also mediated by digital systems that enable Islamophobic narratives to spread massively and rapidly. The lack of studies integrating critical linguistic perspectives with digital technology analysis leaves our understanding of the reproduction of Islamophobic narratives partial and incomplete.

Thus, there is an urgent need to fill this research gap through an approach that places linguistic practices and discursive strategies at the center of analysis, while also considering the digital ecological context that shapes the circulation of discourse. Such an analysis is not only

able to explain what is conveyed, but also how and why Islamophobic narratives are formed and spread in digital spaces.

This study aims to conduct a systematic review of the literature discussing linguistic practices and discursive strategies in the construction and dissemination of Islamophobic narratives in digital media. More specifically, it has three main objectives.

First, identifying and critiquing the patterns of linguistic representation used to frame Islam and Muslims on various digital platforms. This includes analyzing lexical choices, metaphors, rhetorical strategies, and narrative structures that contribute to stereotyping, stigmatization, or delegitimization.

Second, we examine how these discursive strategies interact with the characteristics of digital media, through algorithms, the logic of virality, and user engagement, thereby strengthening the spread of Islamophobic narratives. Thus, the analysis goes beyond the textual level and also considers the dimensions of distribution and consumption of discourse.

Third, to develop conceptual contributions that can be used to develop counter-narrative strategies. By understanding the linguistic and digital mechanisms of the spread of Islamophobia, this research is expected to provide a theoretical and practical framework useful for designing more effective communication interventions to combat stereotypes and discrimination against Muslims.

Based on the research gaps that have been described and the review objectives that are to be achieved, this study attempts to answer the following main questions: **How are linguistic practices and discursive strategies used in digital media to shape and disseminate Islamophobic narratives?**

This research question is designed to explore the linguistic dimension while connecting it with the digital dissemination mechanism, so that the resulting analysis can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of Islamophobic discourse in the era of platform-based communication.

2. METHODS

This study employed a narrative review approach with a critical orientation, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary theoretical lens to examine how linguistic practices and discursive strategies are mobilized in digital media to construct and disseminate Islamophobic narratives. Literature searches were conducted across major academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, ensuring comprehensive coverage of relevant scholarship. A combination of keywords was applied, such as Islamophobia, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, digital media, hate speech, and counter-narrative, in order to capture a wide range of interdisciplinary studies. To reflect the evolution of digital media and its discursive dynamics, the search was restricted to the period 2000–2025. The inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reports from reputable international organizations that specifically examined linguistic and discursive constructions of Islam or Islamophobia in digital media contexts. Conversely, the exclusion criteria eliminated non-academic opinion pieces as well as studies that addressed Islamophobia solely in political or security contexts without linguistic or discourse-focused analysis.

For the analysis, a thematic synthesis strategy was employed. This involved categorizing the reviewed literature into emerging themes, particularly focusing on (1) linguistic features and discursive strategies used to construct Islamophobic narratives, (2) media framing and representational patterns, and (3) counter-narrative practices aimed at challenging or mitigating Islamophobia. This methodological approach allowed for a systematic yet critical integration of findings across diverse studies, highlighting both dominant patterns and gaps in the existing scholarship.

3. RESULTS

The synthesis of the literature concerning the construction and contestation of Islamophobia in digital media spaces reveals several dominant themes reflected through scholarly analysis.

The first theme highlights the pervasive use of lexical choices and metaphorical representations linking Islam and Muslims to negative connotations. Terms such as “radical,” “terrorist,” and “civilizational threat” frequently emerge in discussions, illustrating how specific words can essentialize Muslim identity, effectively framing Muslims as existential enemies to the West. For instance, El-Sayed's work elucidates how selective lexical choices in media reinforce negative depictions of Muslim identity, emphasizing detrimental associations while downplaying any negative aspects related to non-Muslims (EL-Sayed, 2023). Furthermore, Langlotz and Muazzin argue that discursive strategies, including categorization and semantic reframing, perpetuate such cognitive models, thereby enhancing Islamophobic narratives (Langlotz & Muazzin, 2014). These representations manifest not only through direct discourse but also through metaphorical frameworks utilized in both media and scholarly discussions, reinforcing negative stereotypes and societal fears surrounding Muslims (Wanda et al., 2020;

The second theme revolves around framing strategies utilized in digital media, which play a critical role in shaping public perceptions. Binary oppositions such as "Muslim versus the West" perpetuate a polarized narrative that simplifies complex sociopolitical realities. Ghauri's examination of Australian press discourse identifies how rightist publications selectively frame Islam and Muslims to support anti-immigration stances and emphasize violence in Muslim societies (Ghauri, 2018; (Ghauri & Umber, 2019). This is compounded by the emotional charge in reporting, whereby images and narratives resonate deeply with existing biases, amplifying perceptions of threat (Ghauri & Umber, 2019) Baker, 2010). Additionally, Jamil et al. demonstrate that print media articulates a distorted version of reality, which significantly contributes to shaping societal attitudes toward Muslims, often crystallizing them as danger-laden others (Jamil et al., 2023).

The literature also highlights patterns of identity discourse and othering, which frame Muslims as outsiders in the global sociopolitical landscape. This is supported by the work of Dar, who points out that Muslims are often stigmatized through biased reporting that misrepresents the faith, thereby constructing a singular, negative identity (Dar, 2016). Similarly, Hossain and Gala's research reveals that narratives within digital spaces foster a definition of Muslims that predominate through a lens of conflict and threat (Ghauri & Umber, 2019). This practice normalizes implicit biases and fosters a culture of othering, where the everyday public discourse reflects and reinforces narratives of marginalization (Wanda et al., 2020; .

Furthermore, digital platforms are identified as exacerbating these dynamics. Algorithmic curation is shown to prioritize extremist or sensationalist content, promoting a cycle of virality that perpetuates Islamophobic hate speech within online communities (Wanda et al., 2020; . The phenomenon of clickbait journalism, as highlighted in the literature, notably influences the spread of such harmful narratives, showcasing a need for critical engagement with how digital media content is consumed and disseminated (Ghauri & Umber, 2019).

Finally, emerging counter-narratives from Muslim communities and allies illustrate potential avenues for resistance against this pervasive Islamophobia. Scholars like Tariq et al. highlight strategies of re-appropriation where stigmatizing labels are reclaimed, often resulting in the construction of narratives that emphasize solidarity and positive coalition Tariq et al., 2021). These counter-discourses reflect a transformative potential within digital spaces, asserting their role as arenas not just of marginalization but also of resilience and communal agency where affirmative Muslim identities can be represented and celebrated (Wanda et al., 2020; Tariq et al., 2021).

4. DISCUSSION

The pervasive issue of Islamophobia, particularly as it manifests through digital media, has gained significant scholarly attention in recent years. The linguistic practices underpinning Islamophobic discourse extend beyond mere hate speech, establishing a hegemonic framework that is perpetuated and intensified via online platforms. Such practices are reinforced through specific lexical choices, metaphorical constructions, and framing strategies collectively producing narratives promoting fear, distrust, and stereotyping of Muslims, embedding these sentiments within broader structures of power and ideology.

Tariq and Iqbal emphasize the importance of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) in unraveling how prejudiced ideologies, such as Islamophobia, are linguistically constructed and legitimized. This methodology highlights both surface content and deeper rhetorical features that reveal the normalization of exclusionary practices through discourse (Tariq & Iqbal, 2023). Moreover, Chao discusses how digital spaces facilitate the legitimization of Islamophobia, asserting that discussions regarding Islam in online spaces follow patterns reminiscent of historical American folk theories of racism (Chao, 2014). This interplay between language and power, particularly in digital contexts, underscores how online platforms serve not only as spaces for engagement but also as arenas for the proliferation of Islamophobic narratives.

Expanding on the role of social media, Horsti illustrates that digital technologies have accelerated the spread of Islamophobic ideologies, effectively embedding these sentiments within cultural representation (Horsti, 2016). Similarly, Aguilera-Carnerero and Azeez analyze how "Cyber Islamophobia" has emerged as a force articulating negative representations of Muslims, asserting that social media amplifies these stereotypes far beyond traditional media's reach (Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016). Such narratives contribute to the normalization of Islamophobia, transforming it into a prevalent societal discourse that is reinforced through how communities engage with and interpret digital content.

Additionally, Farokhi and Jiwani address the resistance to Islamophobic discourses, showcasing how Muslim women leverage digital platforms to combat stereotypes and create counter-narratives (Farokhi & Jiwani, 2021). This highlights a dual dynamic where digital spaces can perpetuate hegemonic ideologies while simultaneously providing platforms for marginalized voices to challenge and disrupt prevailing narratives. Furthermore, Cervone et al. examine the broader implications of derogatory language, elucidating how these forms not only instigate psychological impacts but also entrench group hierarchies through the implicit legitimization of hateful rhetoric (Cervone et al., 2020).

The mechanisms through which these narratives are spread also warrant attention. Digital algorithms and intertextuality play crucial roles in facilitating the viral nature of Islamophobic content. Khamis outlines how digital tools are utilized by Muslim communities to counteract the very narratives that seek to marginalize them (Khamis, 2023). Thus, the dynamics of digital media reflect a complex interplay between the dissemination of hate and the cultivation of counter-resistances, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of how language and technology intersect in the realm of Islamophobia.

In conclusion, the landscape of Islamophobia as mediated by digital technologies is characterized by a duality of reinforcement and resistance. The patterns of discourse surrounding Islamophobia reveal not merely individual biases but highlight deeply entrenched societal ideologies perpetuated through online interactions. Understanding these dynamics requires an intersectional approach that recognizes the power of linguistic practices and the pivotal role of digital media in shaping public perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the core propositions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which emphasizes the relationship between language, power, and ideology. The review highlights how digital sociolinguistics can serve as a complementary analytical framework, foregrounding the ways in which linguistic choices interact with

technological infrastructures to shape public perception and social hierarchies. By situating Islamophobic discourse within both linguistic and digital contexts, this study contributes to the emergence of digital sociolinguistics as a vital field for understanding contemporary communication phenomena.

The practical implications of these findings are equally significant. Policymakers and media regulators can draw on insights from this review to develop more informed strategies for countering hate speech online, particularly by recognizing the discursive mechanisms that underpin Islamophobia. Likewise, Muslim communities and advocacy groups can leverage these insights to craft counter-discourses through digital storytelling, re-appropriation of stigmatizing labels, and the promotion of positive identity narratives that challenge dominant negative representations.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. Access to real-time data regarding algorithmic behavior remains restricted, limiting the ability to fully analyze the dynamic interplay between platform design and content circulation. Additionally, variations in cultural, political, and social contexts across different regions constrain the generalizability of findings, as patterns observed in one setting may not uniformly apply elsewhere.

In light of these findings and limitations, several future research directions emerge. First, digital ethnographies of Muslim communities online could provide richer insights into the lived experiences and communicative strategies employed in resisting Islamophobic narratives. Second, comparative analyses across platforms—such as TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube—could illuminate platform-specific affordances and constraints that shape discourse. Finally, there is potential for the development of AI-driven counter-narrative models, integrating linguistic and algorithmic insights to proactively identify and mitigate the spread of Islamophobic content. Collectively, these research agendas aim to advance both theoretical understanding and practical interventions in combating digital Islamophobia

5. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Islamophobia in the digital era demonstrates a complex interplay between linguistic practices, discursive strategies, and technological mechanisms. This review highlights that Islamophobia is not limited to overt hate speech but also manifests through subtle linguistic choices and discursive constructions that collectively produce narratives promoting fear, distrust, and stereotyping of Muslims. Lexical items such as “radical,” “terrorist,” and “civilizational threat,” along with metaphorical and framing strategies, serve to essentialize Muslim identity and depict Muslims as existential threats.

Digital media platforms, particularly social media, play a crucial role in accelerating the dissemination of Islamophobic narratives and embedding negative perceptions within cultural representations. Algorithmic content curation tends to amplify extremist and sensational content, creating viral cycles that perpetuate hate speech, while clickbait journalism further reinforces these harmful narratives.

At the same time, the landscape of Islamophobia in digital spaces is marked by dual dynamics of reinforcement and resistance. While Islamophobic discourse reflects deeply rooted societal ideologies and is perpetuated through online interactions, Muslim communities and allied actors actively engage in counter-discourse. Strategies such as the re-appropriation of stigmatizing labels and the promotion of positive Muslim identities exemplify efforts to contest and transform these narratives.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the core propositions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by demonstrating the relationship between language, power, and ideology, and underscore the relevance of digital sociolinguistics as a framework for analyzing how linguistic choices interact with technological infrastructures to shape public perception and social hierarchies. Practically, these insights can inform policymakers and media regulators in developing effective strategies to combat online hate speech, while providing Muslim

communities and advocacy groups with a basis for designing impactful communication interventions to challenge stereotypes and discrimination.

Despite these contributions, limitations remain, including restricted access to real-time algorithmic behavior and variations in cultural, political, and social contexts that limit generalizability. Future research should explore digital ethnographies of online Muslim communities, conduct comparative analyses across social media platforms, and develop AI-based counter-narrative models to proactively identify and mitigate the spread of Islamophobic content. Overall, this review emphasizes the importance of an interdisciplinary approach that acknowledges both the power of linguistic practices and the critical role of digital media in shaping public perceptions of Islam and Muslims, while advancing strategies to counter Islamophobia effectively.

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