

Portrayal of Islam and Muslims on Face book by US Conventional Media

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Abstract

Social network sites are evolving with more significant role in news experiencing of users. Like other social networking sites Facebook is also a source of acquiring news by its users. The study investigated the projection of Islam on Facebook by US elite print media on their pages in the year of 2017. The study also focused on the nature /topic of the issues of Islam related news content shared on Facebook by these US print media. The content analysis approach is used to assess 45 news posts. 5 news posts found positive, 34 negative and 6 neutral.

Introduction:

Back to back innovations in digital world have brought about a new set of influences on every aspect of public's life including their news obtaining habits. The means of news proliferation in the current century is in a state like never before. News can be spread within seconds and minutes throughout the city, country/ state and eventually the whole world. This is the all-powerfulness of internet specifically social media, which makes this level of propagation possible.

News and Social Media:

Going through news via social networking sites is now spreading widely. Young adults show that they obtain news from their social networking sites' feeds. They get updated about current affairs with the help of feeds. Social networks are developing as places where intentional and incidental news consumption occurred. The

news shared in young people's feeds enhances their radius of information, in that they unintentionally encounter news they would have probably missed out. (Bergström & M. J. Belfrage, 2018)

Why Facebook?

Facebook is the most popular social networking site. Facebook currently has more than 2 billion monthly active users. Founded in 2004, it was the first among all social networking sites to surpass 1 billion registered accounts. (Statista, 2018)

Facebook still beats all other social media sites as news source; In terms of overall population, Facebook leads every other social media site as a source of news. The reason of this lead is that Face book has a large user base, as compared with other platforms. This makes the site most popular for news consumption. Nearly two-thirds of Americans (66%) use Facebook and a large portion of users acquire news from Facebook, which is similar to 2016. Among U.S. adults this is under half (45%) of Americans getting news on Facebook.

Although YouTube with a large user base i.e. 58% of the population, still a smaller portion uses YouTube for news consumption. The user base and the portion getting news on YouTube rose in 2017. This outcome as 18% of Americans uses YouTube for getting news. This made YouTube the second most common social media site for news now. But the fact is YouTube still far behind Facebook in terms of share of news consumption. (E. Shearer and J. Gottfried, 2017)

Role of News on Facebook:

News on Facebook is evolving through a higher pace. In US Facebook usage as news source is constantly rising. The proportion of Facebook users who say this platform serves as the source for news is 63 percent in 2015, which was 47 percent in 2013. The segment of Facebook news consumers has increased significantly. (Pew, 2015)

The Combination of Old Media and New Media:

The social media can become more influential when it combines with conventional print media. Because conventional print media is well-known for its authenticity (as compared with social media) and social media has an ability to spread the word promptly. The accounts or pages of newspapers and magazines on social media i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, etc. are followed and liked by a large number of people, to experience the authentic news while just scrolling down

to their news feeds. Since on social media anyone can create, upload or share the content, so authenticity is a question mark.

But the conventional media, which the audience has been trusting for decades, made this easy to their audience to get connect with them through social networking sites.

Now the print media also publish their content on their digital media outlets commonly known as their websites. The same news which they print in their print newspapers can be seen on their websites. Their Facebook pages contain the links of their websites in the form of posts. By clicking on the link of the post the whole news story opens on the website. People choose, read and share news stories of their own interest.

Literature Review:

Literature review includes the researches about, world print media Muslim portrayal, Western print media portrayal of Islam, US print media Islam/Muslim portrayal, Digital / social media news and news on Face book.

Liyakat analyzed how mainstream English dailies of India portray Muslims. The study revealed that Indian Media has created the hyper reality picture of Muslims. Researcher further discussed that the extreme negative projection has dangerous consequences which is possibly to place Muslims in a more disadvantageous position. (Liyakat, 2017)

Yusof observed that “the tendency patterns in labelling Islam associated with terrorism after the death of Osama Bin Laden”. The researchers found out that the media coverage of US and UK still have negative labelling towards Islam despite Osama Bin Laden’s death. Mostly issues covered, revolves around ‘war’ and ‘terrorism’ and very insignificant coverage on the reconciliation efforts establish for Islam and the West. (Yusof, 2013)

It was found that western media reports negatively about Southeast Asian Muslim countries – Malaysia and Indonesia. Mostly articles which cover the Islamic and Muslim related issues of the region still show a negative bias. (Hassan and Omar, 2017)

Bowe analyzed six frames; No Peace frame, Reconciliation, Journalistic Balance, Religious Intolerance, Peace Religious Difference. Two of the frames found

negatively and only one found positively valanced. The rest of the three were neutral. (Bowe, Fahmy and Matthes 2015)

It was discovered “a thematic pattern of terrorism coverage” that serves Orientalism and a culture of fear of Muslims/Arabs/Islam, who are working together, against a ‘Christian America,’ while domestic terrorism is portrayed as less threatening, which are considered as “isolated events by troubled individuals.” (Powell, 2011)

It was found that journalists mostly cover the news stories about Middle Eastern Muslim women on their rights violation. Contrastingly, media report other societies’ women when their rights are respected, even news about Muslim countries, having good record of women’s rights, also based on gender inequality and women rights violation. But some non-Muslim countries where women’s rights are violated, receive nearly no attention. (Terman 2017)

It was concluded that portrayal of Muslim countries by US magazines was measured more unfavorable as compare to favorable, because the ratio of negative coverage was greater than the proportion of positive coverage. (Ali, 2012)

Mitchell Found the most common sources Americans get the online news from. They discovered that the online news consumers in America prefer two pathways over others, social media and news organization websites. (Mitchell, Gottfried, 2017)

In another study, the nature of Face book news was analyzed. Seeking news on Facebook is common but incidental. US adults mostly visit Facebook without the intention of news consumption. They use Facebook for other reasons and nearly eight in ten of them incidentally come across the news. (Mitchell, Kiley, 2013)

Research Gap:

In the light of literature reviews, it is cleared that the many researchers have worked on Islam and Muslim media portrayal, in US, UK and other non-Muslim countries of the world. But there is a lack of research about the framing of Islam and Muslims in Facebook news by the conventional print media. Keeping in mind the

importance of news diffusion through Facebook, this study will uncover the image of Islam made by these conventional print media of US, with their news posts on their Facebook pages.

Objectives

The comprehensive objective is to investigate the depiction of Islam and Muslim related issues and concomitantly the image of Muslim community in Social media of the conventional mainstream USA's print media.

The specific objective is to measure Islam's portrayal in the news posts shared on Facebook by US elite print media on their accounts in the year of 2017.

The second specific objective is to study the nature /topic of the issues of Islam related news content shared on Facebook by these US print media during the sample period.

Hypothesis:

To verify the objectives hypothetical statements are developed. The hypothesis is formulated after a thorough literature review. In formulating these hypotheses, literature review is inspiration.

H1 - The conventional US print media give Islam a negative image/frame more than positive on FB

H2 – Islamophobia is propagandized in Face book news posts by US conventional print media.

Methodology:

According to the nature of the topic, qualitative approach has been adopted. The researcher has applied the methodology of content analysis in order to assess the Islam/Muslim related news on Facebook by mainstream US print media, in 2017. The scope of this study is confined to online news posts of Facebook only.

Sample Selection Criteria

This study analyzed the news posts of Facebook pages conventional print media in 2017. For sample selection, amongst the highest circulated newspapers' Facebook pages, 3 are selected. Initially, selection of newspaper of specific states is made with following procedure.

US mainly can be divided into 3 regions east coast, west coast and central region.

West Coast: includes Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, and Nevada.

East coast: includes Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, etc.

Central region: includes Texas, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, etc

According to [statista.com](https://www.statista.com) state- wise GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of these three states is higher than other states of US in 2017 - California, Texas and New York. And these belong to three different regions of US i.e. California is from west coast, Texas is from central region and New York belongs to east coast. From these three states highest circulating newspapers were picked out.

1. The Wall Street Journal (New York)
2. The Dallas Morning News (Texas)
3. Los Angeles Times (California)

The news posts of verified Facebook pages of The Wall Street Journal, The Dallas Morning News and Los Angeles Times are assessed.

Sample Size

15 Facebook news posts of each of 3 newspapers have been analyzed. The total number of news posts analyzed is 45. News posts include news stories and opinion-based stories shared on Facebook pages in the form post.

The keyword Islam used after the name of newspaper in search bar on FB. From the search results first 15 news post which fall in the criteria of the research are included in the study.

Construction of Categories for the Study:

The study analyzed the nature of content on three qualitative parameters - positive, negative and neutral.

Positive Posts: The stories in which the highlighted issues, related to Islam are positive or represented in a positive way and the stories about Muslim countries which give a picture of development and positive happenings in their political, economic and social sector.

Negative Posts: The Stories in which highlighted issues, related to Islam are negative or represented in a negative manner. The news stories about war, terrorism, distraction, chaos, anarchy, political, social and cultural instability relating or apparently relating to Islam

Neutral Posts: The stories issues related to Islam show a balanced picture that neither only emphasis on positive nor only negative aspects of the Islamic economic, political and social life.

Observations and Findings:

The content analysis of 45 articles shows these significant results. The following tables contain news headlines and frame/image measured with the help of qualitative approach, although the number of positive, negative and neutral articles has been given.

News posts and Framing

P= positive

N= negative

Neu= neutral

Table 1: The Wall Street Journal

	News	Frame
1	Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Islam's Most Eloquent Apostate	N
2	The Islamic State-Linked Militant Fueling a Violent Philippine Showdown	N
3	Islamic State Sinks Its Teeth Into the Philippines	N
4	Islamic State Gains in Remote Syria Outpost	N
5	France Issues Warning to Islamic State Recruits	N
6	How Islamic State's Caliphate Crumbled	N
7	Islamic State Dam Warning Sparks Chaos in Raqqa	N
8	Islamic State-Linked Militants Targeted in Southeast Asian Sea Patrols	N
9	Islamic State Militants Blow Up Historic Mosque in	N

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	Mosul, Iraqi Military Says	
10	Iraq Military Contradicts Claim U.S.-Led Coalition Airstrike Killed Civilians, Blames Islamic State	N
11	Malaysia Arrests Nine Over Suspected Ties to Islamic State	N
12	Islamic State Video Threatens China With Homegrown Fighters	N
13	The Truth About Muhammad Ali and the Draft	N
14	Islamic State Stakes Global Claims as Territory Shrinks	N
15	Online Islamists Cast U.S. Bans as War on Islam	N

Results:

P: 0

N: 15

Neu: 0

Table 2: Los Angeles Times

	News	Frame
1	Islamic style is showing up on catwalks, in mainstream stores and on non-Muslim women	P
2	Like an invisibility cloak, Latina Muslims find the hijab hides their ethnicity — from Latinos	Neu
3	You know who else likes U.S. gun laws? Islamic State	N
4	Yes, radical Islamic terrorism is different	Neu

5	The 'caliphate' is all but lost, yet Islamic State's threat remains potent	N
6	Trump actually win the war against Islamic State	N
7	The long and bloody battle for Mosul	N
8	Islamic State strikes back with female suicide bombers as Iraqi forces advance in Mosul	N
9	Bill Maher's 'Real Time' interview with Milo Yiannopoulos fuels new criticism	Neu
10	Muslims fast in Ramadan to practice compassion and self-restraint. Terrorists see it as a time to step up violence	Neu
11	Islamic State claims responsibility for Paris shooting that kills 1 officer and wounds 2 others	N
12	The terrorist threat posed by Islamic State isn't going away	N
13	'Obscene and hateful' graffiti spray-painted on Islamic center in Roseville, police say	Neu
14	Iraq's offensive against Islamic State militants in western Mosul sends thousands on trek for safety	Neu
15	'Mother of all bombs' kills 36 Islamic State militants in Afghanistan, sparks mix of anger and praise on the ground	N

Results:

P: 1

N: 8

Neu: 6

Table3: The Dallas Morning News

	News	Frame
1	Man charged with hate crime in Texas mosque fire	P
2	Political correctness contributed to NY's Islamic	N

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	terror attack	
3	Shariah law protesters, some toting rifles, gather in front of North Texas Islamic center	N
4	Muslims and Christians, this season remember your common love for Jesus	P
5	Trump reportedly shared highly classified information with Russians	N
6	Muslim Gold Star family that scolded Trump helps raise money for Islamic advocacy group in Dallas	P
7	It's time for Muslims to talk about sexual misconduct among our Islamic preachers	N
8	U.S. drops 'mother of all bombs' on caves used by Islamic State in Afghanistan	N
9	DMA's Islamic Art Exhibition will last 12 years!	P
10	Trump deserves some credit for Islamic State successes	N
11	Islamic State carries out suicide attacks on Iran's parliament, shrine	N
12	Marvel Comics artist allegedly inserts references to anti-Christian protest in new X-Men book	N
13	Syria is a stain on Obama's legacy	N
14	Man gets 28 years in plot to behead blogger who organized prophet Muhammad cartoon contest in Garland	N
15	Suspect arrested in deadly bombing at Ariana Grande concert in England	N

Results

P: 4

N: 11

Neu: 0

Table 4: Image / framing of Islam in FB news posts

Newspapers		P	N	Neu	
WSJ		0	15	0	
LAT		1	8	6	
TDMN		4	11	0	
	Total	5	34	6	45

WSJ: The Wall Street Journal

LAT: Los Angeles Times

TDMN: The Dallas Morning News

Discussion:

The finding shows a clear image what is propogandised by US media. The total number of negative news posts is greater than positive news post. All of The Wall Street Journal's sample news posts are resulted as negative. Neither positive nor neutral news post present in the whole sample. Los Angeles Times scored 8 negative, only one positive and 6 neutral news posts from the sample of 15. The Dallas Morning News analysis showed 4 positive, 11 negative and zero neutral news issues highlighted in news posts.

The news is mostly hard type news, US media still feed their readers with a negative perception about religion Islam. Islamophobia is found in the assessed news posts. When the keyword "Islam" is used to find news related Islam, a heavy majority of news posts about terrorist groups are obtained. Which are characterized as negative in this study. And the remaining news posts other than highlighting terrorist groups, projects war, crime, chaos, conflict, attack, etc. and terms like "radical Islamic terrorism," "Islamic terror attack," "anti-Christian," etc. are used in news stories. The proportion of positive issues found in the selected news post are much less. And this resulted proportion is far from reality.

Conclusion:

This study disclosed that the Facebook pages of US newspapers following the same strategy as of the conventional print media, to defame Islam and Muslim

community by posting more negative news than positive. The negative news is not necessarily based on lies and falsehoods. These negative stories are the true stories showing a single side of picture, a half-truth. Religion Islam is propagandized as a religion given teaching of barbaric laws, promoting terrorism. Muslim countries are shown as the most anarchic places of the world, busy in doing war and having no peace. Muslims are imaged by these news stories as uncivilized, chaotic individuals, with zero tolerance.

There is no representation of peaceful Muslim countries and civilized practicing Muslims and real peaceful teachings of Islam, and if there is any representation it is extremely low in proportion.

US media don't usually highlight the Muslims and their countries efforts in eradicating the terrorism but if they highlight they give most of the credit to US, who according to media helps Muslim countries in terrorism eradication.

Recommendations:

- US media should spread constructive and fair content whether print or digital and play their role in conflict resolution. News, articles, opinions and other material which highlights international peace, harmony and corporation is highly recommended.

- Likewise, US media should give a balanced image of Islam and Muslims. Muslim Countries who have progressed in different sectors such as industry and trade must be highlighted with their positive potentials, Inclusive of focusing on political, cultural and social disorders.

- Muslim countries' soft image should be projected as they possess very rich art, architecture, culture and civilization. Media should show this side of Islam and Muslims as well to eliminate the wrong image from the minds of Americans and rest of the world.

- Terrorism which is associated with Muslims in the whole world due to false media framing. US media must highlight the exact state of the Muslims community as the major victims of terrorism by themselves, throughout the world.

- Last but not least, the articles and opinions of Muslim experts must be published relating to different issues such as politics, international relations, women rights and most specifically the issues about religion Islam, to erase ambiguities present in the minds of non-Muslims.

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