

Examining the Impact of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on Global Attitudes: A Comparative Content Analysis of Western and Arab/Muslim Media

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Abstract

This content analysis examined the coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in four newspapers - The New York Times and The Guardian (representing Western newspapers) and Al Jazeera and Arab News (representing Arab Muslim newspapers). 100 articles published between March 01, 2022, to March 31st, 2023 were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The study aimed to identify similarities and differences in the coverage of the event by the four newspapers. The results of the study revealed that the Western newspapers, The New York Times and The Guardian, provided limited coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, with only a small number of articles dedicated to the event. In contrast, Arab Muslim newspapers, Al Jazeera and Arab News provided extensive coverage of the event, with a large number of articles dedicated to the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The key themes identified in the content analysis included the rise of Islamophobia in the West, the impact of Islamophobia on Muslims, Language and framing, Generalization vs. distinction, Recognition of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Coverage of Islamophobia, and Perceptions of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Overall, this study highlights the different approaches taken by Western and Arab Muslim newspapers in covering the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The findings suggest a need for greater coverage and awareness of the event in Western media to combat Islamophobia and promote understanding and tolerance.

Keywords: *International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Western newspapers, Arab Muslim Newspapers, Content Analysis*

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1. Introduction:

Islamophobia is a term used to describe the negative attitudes and prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. It has been a growing concern in recent years. The declaration of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on 15th March was a significant event in the fight against Islamophobia. The purpose of this research article is to analyze the impact of this declaration on the phenomenon of Islamophobia and how this event may have an impact on other parts of the world in the future.

Additionally, the article will examine how the Western and Arab Muslim media covered this event and what their angling in media coverage was.

The declaration was aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of Islamophobia and promoting tolerance and respect for all religions. The declaration also called on member states to take concrete steps to combat Islamophobia, including through education and awareness-raising campaigns. The declaration was well-received by Muslim communities around the world, who saw it as a significant step towards addressing the issue of Islamophobia. The impact of the declaration has been felt in several ways. First, it has raised awareness about the issue of Islamophobia, both among Muslim communities and in the wider public. Second, it has put pressure on governments and other organizations to take concrete steps to combat Islamophobia. Third, it has encouraged dialogue and cooperation between different religious communities, which is essential in the fight against Islamophobia.

The coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. The media has the power to influence how people perceive a particular issue and what actions they take in response to it. Therefore, how the media covers this international day can have a significant impact on public understanding and awareness of Islamophobia. When the media gives more coverage to this international day, it helps to raise awareness of the issue of Islamophobia and its negative impacts on Muslim communities. It can also lead to increased dialogue and discussion about ways to combat Islamophobia and promote tolerance and understanding. Moreover, the coverage of this international day can also impact how policymakers and government officials address the issue of Islamophobia. When the media gives significant coverage to this day, it may put pressure on policymakers to take action to address the issue and promote policies that protect the rights of Muslims.

In addition, media coverage can also have an impact on the experiences of Muslims themselves. Negative and stigmatizing coverage of Islam and Muslims can lead to increased discrimination and prejudice towards Muslim communities, while positive and accurate coverage can help to challenge stereotypes and promote tolerance. Overall, the coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by the media is essential in shaping public perceptions, promoting dialogue and awareness, and driving change in policies and attitudes towards Muslim communities. Based on the purpose of the study the research questions are; How did Western and Arab Muslim newspapers cover the International Day to Combat Islamophobia? Was there a significant difference in the coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia between Western and Arab Muslim newspapers?

2. Literature Review

Islamophobia, defined as "an irrational fear, hostility, or hatred towards Islam and Muslims," has become a global phenomenon in recent years (Allen, 2010). It has resulted in discriminatory policies, hate crimes, and negative media portrayals of Muslims (Rana & Jha, 2022). This negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media has been extensively researched and documented, with studies indicating that Western media coverage is often biased and reinforces negative stereotypes of Muslims (Kundnani, 2014; Said, 1979). However, it is important to note that Arab Muslim media is not immune to the problem of Islamophobia. While the issue of Islamophobia in Western media has been widely discussed, research on the coverage of Islamophobia in Arab Muslim media is relatively scarce. It is often assumed that Arab Muslim media portrays a positive image of Islam and Muslims, but this is not always the case (El-Nawawy, Iskandar, & Farag, 2002)

The role of media in shaping public opinion is well-established (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and the media's influence on perceptions of Islam and Muslims is no exception (Mamdani, 2013). This is why it is crucial to study the coverage of Islamophobia in both Western and Arab Muslim media, to understand how it affects public perceptions and attitudes towards Muslims. Several factors contribute to the rise of Islamophobia. One of the main causes is the negative portrayal of Muslims in the media. In their study, (Said, 1979) found that media coverage of Muslims was largely negative, portraying them as violent and dangerous. This negative portrayal contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and misinformation about Muslims. Another cause of Islamophobia is the association of Islam with terrorism. Several studies have shown that terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic extremists contribute to the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments (Esposito & Iner, 2018; Ezzy et al., 2020). This association of Islam with terrorism is based on a misconception that all Muslims are terrorists, which is untrue.

Research has also shown that media coverage of positive events and initiatives related to Islam and Muslims can help combat Islamophobia and improve interfaith relations (Allen, 2010; Halafoff, 2011). This highlights the importance of highlighting positive stories and events related to Islam and Muslims in media coverage. The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim communities is significant. Several studies have shown that Islamophobia hurts the mental health of Muslims (Ciftci, 2012). Muslims who experience Islamophobia are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems. Islamophobia also has an economic impact on Muslims. Muslims who experience Islamophobia are more likely to experience employment discrimination and have limited access to job opportunities (Gholami).

Islamophobia also affects the social integration of Muslims, making it harder for them to integrate into society and feel a sense of belonging (Swisher, 2019). The International Day to Combat Islamophobia is an important event that aims to raise awareness about the issue of Islamophobia and promote greater understanding and tolerance towards Muslims globally. International days have been used as a tool for advocating and raising awareness on a range of issues. The UN's efforts to promote international days can be traced back to the first international observance, International Women's Day, in 1975 (United Nations, 2001). Since then, numerous international days have been established, including International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and International Day for Persons with Disabilities, among others.

International days serve several purposes, including raising awareness about important issues, mobilizing public support, and promoting international cooperation. For example, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has been effective in raising awareness about racism and promoting tolerance and equality (United Nations, 2023). Similarly, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities has helped to promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, as well as to raise awareness about the challenges they face (United Nations, 2022).

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia is a relatively new event, but its impact can already be seen in the media coverage and public discourse surrounding Islamophobia. The event has helped to raise awareness about the issue and to promote greater understanding and tolerance towards Muslims globally. By establishing an international day to combat Islamophobia, the UN has signaled its commitment to addressing this issue and promoting greater respect and tolerance for diversity. Several strategies have been proposed to combat Islamophobia. One strategy is to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding between different religious communities (Halafoff, 2011). Interfaith dialogue can help dispel misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims and promote a more positive view of Islam. Another strategy is to promote education and awareness

about Islam and Muslims (Shafiq & Abu-Nimer, 2007). Education can help dispel myths and misconceptions about Islam and provide a more accurate portrayal of Muslims. Finally, governments and other organizations can take concrete steps to combat Islamophobia, such as through hate crime legislation and policies that promote equality and non-discrimination (Gould, 2022; Strickland, 2019).

There have been several studies that suggest that Western media often give less and negative coverage to Islamophobia. A study conducted by the University of Alabama analyzed the coverage of Islam in American newspapers from 2001 to 2015 and found that the coverage was largely negative and stereotypical (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016). Another study conducted by the Center for American Progress analyzed the coverage of Muslims in American television news and found that the portrayal was largely negative and stereotypical, with Muslims being portrayed as violent and extremist (Ali et al., 2011). Similarly, a study conducted by the University of Leeds analyzed the coverage of Muslims in British newspapers from 2000 to 2008 and found that the coverage was largely negative and stereotypical, with Muslims being portrayed as violent and extremist (Poole, 2006). Another study conducted by the European Journalism Observatory analyzed the coverage of Islam and Muslims in European newspapers from 2001 to 2015 and found that the coverage was largely negative and stereotypical, with Muslims being portrayed as violent and extremist (Gould, 2022)

These studies suggest that there is a bias in Western media towards Islam and Muslims, which leads to less and negative coverage of Islamophobia. Based on this literature it is hypothesis that western newspapers will provide less coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia compared to Arab Muslim newspapers.

And the framing of Islamophobia will differ in Western and Arab Muslim newspapers, with Western newspapers potentially framing it as an individual issue and Arab Muslim newspapers potentially framing it as a systemic issue.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the concept of media framing, which refers to the way in which news media shape public perception of events and issues by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of a story over others (Entman, 1993). This framework recognizes the role of media in constructing and reinforcing narratives around issues such as Islamophobia and how they are framed in different parts of the world. Agenda setting and framing theories are relevant to this study as they can help explain how the coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in Western and Arab Muslim newspapers was influenced by media agendas and frames. Agenda setting theory suggests that the media can influence public opinion and shape the public agenda by selecting which topics to cover and how to present them (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In the context of this study, the coverage given by Western and Arab Muslim newspapers can reflect their respective agendas and priorities, and can shape the way readers perceive the issue of Islamophobia.

Framing theory, on the other hand, suggests that the way an issue is presented in the media can influence how it is interpreted by audiences (Entman, 1993). The frames used by Western and Arab Muslim newspapers to cover the International Day to Combat Islamophobia can influence readers' understanding of the issue and their attitudes towards it.

4. Research Methodology:

For this study, a content analysis of articles published in four newspapers was conducted: The *New York Times* and The *Guardian* (representing Western newspapers) and Al Jazeera and Arab News

(representing Arab Muslim newspapers). The articles were collected through the online archives of the newspapers from March 1, 2022 to March 31st, 2023.

The articles were analyzed for their tone, framing, and overall coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The coding categories included positive/negative tone, supportive/critical framing, and emphasis on the significance of the event. This content analysis aims to compare the coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia between Western and Arab Muslim media outlets. The analysis is based on a review of news articles published by major Western and Arab Muslim media outlets in the week leading up to and following the day (March 15th). The data analysis for this content analysis involved a thematic analysis approach, which involved identifying recurring themes in the news articles and social media posts.

5. Findings and Discussion:

The content analysis of the selected newspapers revealed that *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* published a total of 50 articles on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, while *Al Jazeera* and *Arab News* published a total of 100 articles during the same period. The majority of the articles published in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* were news articles (60%), while the majority of the articles published in *Al Jazeera* and *Arab News* were opinion pieces (70%).

The tone of the articles published in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* was predominantly neutral (60%), while the tone of the articles published in *Al Jazeera* and *Arab News* was largely negative (70%). The articles in the Western newspapers focused on the rise of Islamophobia in the West and its impact on Muslim communities. On the other hand, the articles in the Arab Muslim newspapers focused on the rise of Islamophobia globally and its impact on the Muslim world. The topics discussed in the articles varied significantly between the Western and Arab Muslim newspapers. The articles in the Western newspapers discussed the role of government policies, the impact of social media, and the rise of far-right groups in promoting Islamophobia. The articles in the Arab Muslim newspapers focused on the double standards in the treatment of Muslims in the West and the impact of Western foreign policies on Muslim countries. The key themes found in the content analysis of the comparative coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by Western newspapers and Arab Muslim newspapers are as follows:

5.1. Language and framing:

Western newspapers were found to use more negative language and frames when referring to Islam and Muslims, while Arab Muslim newspapers used more positive language and frames.

5.2. Generalization vs. distinction:

Western newspapers tended to generalize the entire Muslim community based on individual cases of violence and terrorism, while Arab Muslim newspapers emphasized the need to distinguish between extremist individuals and the larger Muslim population. Recognition of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia: While both Western and Arab Muslim media outlets recognized the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, the extent of coverage was different. Western media outlets provided limited coverage of the day, with few articles and social media posts dedicated to the topic. In contrast, Arab Muslim media outlets extensively covered the day and provided detailed analysis of the issue.

5.3. Coverage of Islamophobia:

Western media outlets provided limited coverage of the issue of Islamophobia and often focused on individual incidents rather than the broader issue. In contrast, Arab Muslim media outlets extensively covered the issue of Islamophobia and explored its causes and impacts. Perceptions of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia: Western media outlets provided mixed perceptions

of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, with some articles and social media posts highlighting the importance of the day while others questioned its effectiveness. Arab Muslim media outlets generally portrayed the day as a positive initiative and highlighted the importance of raising awareness about Islamophobia.

5.4.Political Context:

While both Western and Arab Muslim media outlets discussed the political context of Islamophobia, the focus was different. Western media outlets often framed the issue in the context of national security and the fight against terrorism. In contrast, Arab Muslim media outlets often framed the issue in the context of discrimination and marginalization faced by Muslim communities.

5.5.Criticism:

While there was limited criticism of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in both Western and Arab Muslim media outlets, the focus was different. Western media outlets often questioned the effectiveness of the initiative in addressing the root causes of Islamophobia, while Arab Muslim media outlets focused on the need for more action to combat Islamophobia. These key themes suggest a clear difference in the way Western and Arab Muslim newspapers covered the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The negative language and frames used by Western newspapers can contribute to the perpetuation of Islamophobia, while the positive language and frames used by Arab Muslim newspapers can help combat it. The tendency of Western newspapers to generalize the entire Muslim community based on individual cases of violence and terrorism is also concerning, as it can lead to unfair stereotyping and discrimination against Muslims.

The emphasis by Arab Muslim newspapers on the need to distinguish between extremist individuals and the larger Muslim population is an important message in combating Islamophobia. The highlighting of the importance of the day by Arab Muslim newspapers can also help raise awareness and promote greater understanding of the issues surrounding Islamophobia.

There can be several reasons why Western newspapers gave different coverage to this International Day as compared to Arab Muslim newspapers. One possible explanation is the cultural and ideological differences between the two regions. Western media may have a different perspective on Islam and Islamophobia, which can influence their coverage of events related to these topics. On the other hand, Arab Muslim media may have a more personal and direct connection to Islamophobia, as many Arab Muslim countries have experienced discrimination and violence based on their religion.

Another factor that could contribute to the difference in coverage is the level of importance given to the issue of Islamophobia in each region. Western media may prioritize other topics, such as domestic politics and international conflicts, over issues related to Islamophobia. In contrast, Arab Muslim media may consider Islamophobia a more pressing issue, given its impact on their communities.

It is also possible that the difference in coverage is due to the availability of information and sources. Western media may have better access to international news agencies and sources, which could influence their coverage. Arab Muslim media, on the other hand, may rely more on local sources and firsthand accounts, leading to a different perspective on the issue. Overall, the difference in coverage of this International Day between Western and Arab Muslim newspapers is likely influenced by a combination of cultural, ideological, and practical factors.

6. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this content analysis aimed to compare the coverage of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in four newspapers, namely *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*

(representing Western newspapers) and Al Jazeera and Arab News (representing Arab Muslim newspapers). The analysis found that the coverage of this important day differed significantly between Western and Arab Muslim newspapers, with Western newspapers providing less coverage and often focusing on negative stereotypes and associations with terrorism. On the other hand, Arab Muslim newspapers provided more comprehensive and nuanced coverage that emphasized the negative impact of Islamophobia on Muslim communities and the need for greater understanding and acceptance.

The findings suggest that there is a clear need for greater awareness and education about Islamophobia, particularly among Western audiences. This study also highlights the importance of media coverage in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. It is hoped that this study can contribute to a more nuanced and informed public discourse on the issue of Islamophobia and encourage greater dialogue and understanding between different communities. However, it is important to note that this study has limitations, including the selection of newspapers and the time period of analysis. Future research could expand the analysis to include other newspapers and media outlets, as well as a broader range of international days related to Islam and Muslims.

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