

Research Article

The Image of Islam in Foreign Media Frames Facing the Spread of Covid-19 Pandemic

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ORCIDKiki Zakiah <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0478-3714>Askurifai Hasbiansyah <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1980-1444>**Abstract.**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on various aspects of life, including religious practices. In the realm of foreign media, Islam has often been portrayed negatively, particularly in political news. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020 and continues to the present, the media has actively covered all aspects related to Covid-19, including those related to Islamic religious practices. However, the image of Islam presented in these media reports is not always as negative and intimidating as it is often portrayed. This study aims to explore how the image of Islam is portrayed in foreign media during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research utilizes the Robert N Entman framing analysis method to thoroughly analyze the underlying messages conveyed in foreign media news concerning Islam's image amid the pandemic. Three news texts from different foreign online media sources; theconversation.com, print.in, and cnn.com, were examined. The analysis of the three news texts reveals that foreign media presents a positive image of Islam in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic from various perspectives. These perspectives include highlighting Islamic hygiene practices, the attitudes of adherents towards health measures, and other aspects of worship traditions.

Keywords: image, Islam, foreign media, framing analysis

1. Introduction

The media is the power of society that provides journalistic functions; providing information, education, entertainment, and influencing its audience. Mass media is a mirror of society, a place, and the owner of the media as a citizen. The media of one country often report on the events of another country. This of course meets the information needs of the audience.

The global corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic changed the lives of the entire world community. The high transmission level causes this disease to have a much more significant impact than previous coronavirus diseases, such as SARS and MERS. [1] In the Covid-19 era from 2020 until now, the media has also been actively reporting everything

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Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the 5th Sores Conference Committee.

related to Covid-19, one of which is news about the Islamic world in dealing with covid. Journalistic reports about the Islamic world in the face of Covid-19 were even cited by the Indonesian media. Reports of the Islamic world facing Covid-19 by foreign media for example reports by *bbc.com* with the headline “*Ramadan: German church opens doors for Muslim prayers*”. The Times.com report *times.com* about “*British Muslims have learned vital lessons from Covid-19*”. While Indonesian media reports with sources from foreign media are RMOL.ID with the title “*Foreign Media highlight mosques in Jakarta that remain full amid Covid-19 restriction rules*”. *Detiknews* media reported that “*The call to prayer may reverberate in this German city every Friday*”. This includes social and cultural news.

There are at least two factors that influence news production, internal factors, and external factors. One of the internal factors is the reporter or media journalist. This is the focus of this study on how the media reports the socio-cultural reality of Islam in the face of Covid-19. News is the result of social construction which always involves the views, ideologies, and values of journalists or the media. News is the result of a complex process of sorting and defining specific events and themes in one specific category. As McDougall said, every day there are millions of events in the world, and all of them can potentially be news. [2]

According to Fishman, there are two trends in the study of how the news production process is viewed. The first view is often referred to as the *selectivity of news*. In its general form, this view often gives birth to theories such as the gatekeeper. In essence, the news production process is a

selection process. This selection is from journalists in the field who will choose what is important and what is not, and which events can be reported and which are not. After this news goes into the hands of the editor, it will be selected again and edited by determining which parts need to be reduced and which parts need to be added. The second approach is the approach of the formation of news (*creation of news*) in which the event is not selected, but formed. It is journalists who shape which events are called news and which are not. Events and reality are not selected but created by journalists.

Events can not necessarily be called news but must be assessed in advance whether the event meets the news value. News values determine not just what events will be reported, but how the news is packaged. The process of work and news production is a construction, in which the media and journalists are the ones who construct so that events are considered important.

The process of information construction carried out by foreign media is what this research questions, in the sentence how is the image of Islam in the face of Covid-19. The theory that will be used is the theory of social construction by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann with Robert N. Entman Framing analysis of foreign media online.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theory of Social Construction of Reality

The term social construction of reality is defined as a social process through action and interaction in which individuals continuously create a subjectively shared reality. [3] Constructivism is seen as an individual cognitive work to interpret the world of reality that exists because there is a social relationship between the individual and the environment or people around him. [4] Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality places the media as the constructors of reality, complete with their views, biases, and sides. The Media is seen as an agent of social construction that defines reality. Through its various instruments, the media helps shape the reality presented in the news. What is presented in the news of foreign media, which we read, is the product of the formation of reality by foreign media.

Constructionists see news as the result of a social construct that always involves the views, ideologies, and values of the journalist or media. How that reality is made news largely depends on how that fact is understood and interpreted. The process of meaning always involves certain values so that it is impossible for news to be a reflection of reality. The substance of Berger and Luckmann's theory and approach to the social construction of reality is in the simultaneous processes that occur naturally through language in everyday life in a primary and semi-secondary community. Through the mass media, an image is urged to the consciousness of its readers, which in turn will influence decision-making through the power of public opinion that it forms.

According to Van Dijk, journalists create a particular text, based on four schemes of social cognition;

- i. *Person Schemes*. This scheme describes how a person describes and perceives others.
- ii. *Self Schemas*. This scheme deals with how oneself is perceived understood and described by a person.
- iii. *Role Schemes*. This scheme is related to how a person perceives and describes the role and position that a person occupies in society.

iv. *Event Schemas*. The most widely used scheme, because almost every day always sees, and hears the passing events. And any event is always interpreted and interpreted in a certain scheme.

The scheme will affect how foreign media journalists externalize, objectify and internalize a reality. [4]

2.2. Media Content and Social Reality

In the perspective of media studies or mass communication, online media is the object of study of the theory of *new media*. Its main characteristics are digitalization and its wide and fast accessibility so that information related to social reality can be more easily disseminated.

Citing the theory of Berger and Luckmann explained that in the process of constructing reality, language is the main element. Language is the main instrument to tell reality. In other words, language is a conceptualization tool and a narrative tool, thus the importance of language, there is no news, story, or science without language. Furthermore, the use of certain language (symbols) determines a certain narrative format (and meaning). If examined, all media content, whether print or Electronic media, uses language, both verbal language (written or spoken words) and non-verbal language (images, photographs, gestures, graphics, numbers, tables and others). [4]

The language used to convey social relatedness in the media is a massive depiction of reality to people's minds". [4] Writing information or news in online media has different characteristics than other conventional media. Mike Ward in *Journalism Online* mentioned some characteristics of online journalism [4];

- i. Immediacy: the immediacy or speed of information delivery. Every minute, even every second, a story can be posted.
- ii. Multiple Pagination: can be hundreds of pages (pages), related to each other, can also be opened separately (new tab/window)
- iii. Multimedia: presents a mix of text, images, audio, video, and graphics all at once.
- iv. Flexibility Delivery Platform: journalists can write news anytime and anywhere.
- v. Archiving: archived, clustered, and accessible at any time.
- vi. Relationship with reader: interaction with readers can be done at any time through the comments field.

2.3. Journalists as Internal Factors Affecting Media Products

Framing as a media effort in social construction is closely related to the psychological dimension of journalists. The journalist frames the news he makes to emphasize and make the message meaningful, more striking, and noticed by the public. Psychologically, people tend to simplify reality and the complex world not only to make it simpler and more understandable, but also to have a certain perspective or dimension.

Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki see that there are three interconnected parties in the framing of a news story; journalists, sources and audiences. According to Eriyanto, This is due to; first, the construction process also involves social values inherent in journalists. Embedded social values affect how reality is understood. Second, when writing and constructing news journalists are not dealing with an empty public. Even when events are written, and the word begins to be composed, the audience becomes the consideration of the journalist. It is through this process that the dominant social values that exist in society participate in influencing the meaning. Third, the construction process is also determined by the production process which always involves work standards, journalistic professions, and professional standards of journalists. [2]

Classification of a news article can be seen from the aspect of how the news content is displayed. The content of the news relates to aspects of the script. There are two important things in this; first, many news reports are trying to show a relationship, the events written are a continuation of previous events. Second, news generally has the orientation of connecting the text written with the communal environment of the reader. The common form of the script is the 5W+1H pattern. Highlighting on one of the elements is a framing strategy, the reader will be directed at a particular view.

The scattered and complicated social reality is retold by journalists through the mass media by compiling, categorizing, classifying, and rubricating. The way the mass media categorize and rubricate will be greatly influenced by internal and external factors of the mass media.

3. Method

The research method used to reveal the image of Islam in the news frame of foreign online media in the face of the spread of Covid-19 is a subjectivist method with a paradigm of social construction. The constructivist paradigm in its ontological explanation views reality as a social construct created by individuals. However, the truth of

social reality is relative, which applies according to the specific context that is considered relevant by social actors. [5]

The constructivism research paradigm encourages researchers to see two double realities. Actual reality and potential reality. Potential reality is the reality that can potentially be revealed by the researcher through deep observation and long study, while actual reality is the reality that can be directly observed through sensing.

This study will look at the actual reality of journalistic products in foreign media, while the potential reality is seen from what is said by foreign media journalists about their work and observations of various research results on this matter.

To answer the research question about how the image of Islam faces the Covid-19 pandemic which is framed by foreign media, it will use the Entman framing analysis method. Entman framing analysis has four element analysis that will describe the process of social construction in a text consisting of; *defining the problem, diagnosing cause, making moral judgments, and treatment recommendations*.

The research is qualitative research with a descriptive-interpretive approach based on text analysis of news in foreign online media pages. This approach is aimed at obtaining a more complete and systematic description (image) and interpretation (meaning) related to the image of Islam facing Covid-19 published by foreign media.

Sources of data in this study are three news articles from online media *theconversation.com* with the headline "*What Islamic hygiene practices can teach when Coronavirus is Spreading*"; news from *theprint.in* with the title "*This Muslim's Trust in Surat is Helping Covid Patients Breathe Easy*", and news from *cnn.com* "*How the Coronavirus has changed Ramadan for Muslims this year*".

4. Research Outcomes

The results of the third classification of news texts selected purposively to show the image of Islam facing Covid19 by foreign online media were analyzed in the meaning of news framing as follows:

News frame on *theconversation.com* illustrates the image of Islam positively in dealing with the problems of the spread of the coronavirus in the world. Based on the *definition of the problem* which is based on guidelines for framing analysis of Robert N. Entman, the news described the practice of cleanliness in Islam called '*wudhu*' which aired in a Netflix documentary with the title "Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak" can be a message of good hygiene.

TABLE 1: News Analysis 1: “What Islamic Hygiene Practices can Teach When Coronavirus is Spreading” (theconversation.com) [6].

Define Problem	‘Wudhu’ or Ablution in Islam can be a practice of maintaining good hygiene during the spread of the coronavirus.
Diagnose Cause	Muslims perform <i>wudhu</i> as a daily sanctity ritual before performing worship or praying.
Make Moral Judgement	For Muslims, the practice of <i>wudhu</i> is not only to clean certain parts of the body, but also as a symbolic cleansing of one’s self religiosity.
Treatment Recommendation	Muslim clerics and leaders advise improving body hygiene before the practice of ablu-tion, and adapting other worship activities to health guidelines during the spread of the coronavirus.

1. “As outbreaks of the coronavirus spread throughout the world, people are reminded over and again to limit physical contact, wash hands and avoid touching their face. The recent

Netflix docuseries “Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak” illustrates how the Islamic ritual washing, known as “wudu,” may help spread a good hygiene message”. (p1)

Furthermore, judging from the framework of the cause (*diagnose cause*), the reason for writing news with frames that explain ablu-tion can help maintain cleanliness and support the prevention of the spread of the coronavirus is because ‘*wudhu*’ has become a ritual of sanctity for Muslims who do daily before worship or prayer.

1. “Wudhu is to be performed, as was done by the Prophet Muhammad, in a specific order before praying, which takes place five times a day. Before each prayer, Muslims are expected to wash themselves in a certain order – first hands, then mouth, nose, face, hair and ears, and finally their ankles and feet.” (p6)

The paragraph section explains how the implementation of *Wudhu* in Islam taught by the Prophet Muhammad can be in line with the social reality of the community as long as it carries out the necessary health guidelines during the coronavirus spread such as washing hands to feet.

Later, the *moral judgments* that the author described on the news are seen in the indirect quotations she took from scholars of Islamic studies as follows:

1. “Preparing for prayer by washing one’s body using water can be a deeply spir-itual act for Muslims. Islamic studies scholar Paul Powers argues it isn’t “empty

ritualism,” but an embodied practice that helps the individual center on an inner religiosity“:(p11)

2. *“Similarly, another Islamic studies scholar, Marion Katz, explains in her 2002 book “Body of Text” that the importance of wudu lies in its symbolic cleansing. It does not always cleanse the parts of the body that are “physically involved in the pollution act.” (p12)*

The above paragraph emphasizes the benefits of *wudhu*, especially for Muslims, not only as a practice of cleaning specific parts of the body but also for the improvement of the religious hygiene of their people. It could mean that this news shapes the image of Islam facing the coronavirus positively, as ablution is explained not only as a physical but also an inner cleansing. The journalist wrote her personal opinion:

1. *“As a scholar of Islamic studies who researches ritual practices among Muslims, I have found that these practices contain both spiritual and physical benefits.” (p3)*

Wudhu written in the news has more meaning than just physical hygiene. *Wudhu* cannot always be used with water, it can use dust, sand, or other natural materials if there is a lack of water. In this case, the emphasis of *treatment recommendations* in the news mentioned that Muslim scholars and leaders in the world agreed to follow the rules of hygiene health experts to maintain distance, use protective equipment, and wash hands using soap regardless of the ritual ablution itself. In addition, Islamic worship practices such as Friday prayers and other congregational services were temporarily canceled.

Based on the four aspects of the above analysis framework, foreign media *theconversation.com* preaching rituals and teachings in Islam related to hygiene practices in a positive perspective which can be a message to maintain cleanliness for readers during the spread of the coronavirus.

The second news is foreign media information about how Muslim communities help each other in dealing with Covid-19 with an analysis of the meaning of framing as follows:

The Frame to shape the image of Islam in this news is motivated by the charitable activities of a Muslim Association in Surat, India. Based on the definition of the problem (define the problem), *theprint.in* wrote Rehman Education & Charitable Trust focuses on helping people in Surat and Kosamba affected by the coronavirus to get the necessary oxygen and medicines. The emphasis can be found in the news headlines itself and the initial paragraph of the news as follows:

1. (a) *“ This Muslim’s Trust in Surat is Helping Covid Patients ”*

TABLE 2: News Analysis 2: “This Muslim’s Trust in Surat is Helping Covid Patients Breathe Easy” (theprint.in) [7].

<i>Define Problem</i>	A Muslim association called Rehman Education & Charitable Trust is helping Covid patients in Surat city, India.
<i>Diagnose Cause</i>	The rising number of Covid cases in India and dwindling stocks of oxygen and medicine made people around the association take turns asking for help.
<i>Make Moral Judgement</i>	The members of the association are willing to help, motivated by faith and the spirit of humanity.
<i>Treatment Recommendation</i>	The activities of The Rehman Education & Charitable Trust are busy helping Covid patients and do not bother about funding.

(b) “ Since the second Covid wave hit the country, the trust has ramped up its relief work for the affected, and estimated that in the month of April only, it has provided 300 oxygen cylinders to people in villages around Kosamba.” (p4)

On *diagnosis causes*, the news wrote that what made this Muslim Association help Covid patients were because the number of Covid cases increased in India. Then the lack of stock of oxygen and medicines made people around the association take turns asking for help. The statement can be found in the following paragraph:

- (a) “As the number of Covid cases have gone up, everyone in the vicinity has been contacting the trust for oxygen and medicines, ” he said. “Remedesivir is in short supply, which has led to black marketing. Poor people are finding it difficult to get medicines. We try our best to arrange it for people free of cost. Whenever needed,.....,” (p14)

A statement quoted in the news from the members of the association was written as a moral decision that made them decide to help patients with covid because of their faith and the spirit of humanity in their religion, Islam. Moral judgments written in the news are contained in the following paragraphs:

- (a) “Mohammad Illyas, a 41-year-old maulvi who manages an orphanage set up by the trust, told ThePrint, “Our religion directs us to help humanity and what better time to do it than the holy month of Ramzan.” (p7)

The emphasis on moral judgments in the news is reinforced by the words of other members of the association written in the news as follows:

1. (a) *“Mohammad Sajid, who runs a tempo to ferry oxygen cylinders between Ankleshwar and Surat for the trust, told ThePrint, “My trips are getting more frequent as more and more people are getting infected. I am happy to be a part of an organization that is helping people.” (p16)*

Furthermore, the *treatment recommendation* was written in the news that Rehman Education & Charitable Trust as a charity has no difficulty related to funding problems in any of its activities to help others. This section can be seen in the following paragraph:

1. *“Funding is never an issue,” said the maulvi. “We are a charitable trust, so funding is never a problem. But since it is the month of Ramzan, more and more people are donating zakat money (payment made annually under Islamic law for some kind of properties, and used for charitable and religious purposes) to aid us in helping those in need,” he explained.” (p11)*

Foreign media *theprint.in* coverage related to the action of this Muslim community forms a positive image of Islam represented by its adherents. The Print writes the reality in the letter about how Muslims provide mutual assistance to Covid patients with actions based on the call of faith and humanity.

The third news is from CNN (*cnn.com*) which highlights the changes in worship activities and traditions of Muslims that changed during the month of Ramadan because of the spreading of Covid-

19. Here’s an analysis of the meaning in framing the news from *cnn.com*:

TABLE 3: Analisis Berita 3 Judul: *“How Coronavirus has Changed Ramadan for Muslims This Year” (cnn.com)* [8].

<i>Define Problem</i>	The implementation of Muslim worships during the month of Ramadan in the era of the coronavirus pandemic.
<i>Diagnose Cause</i>	The closure of places of worship during the Holy Month of Ramadan due to the spread of Covid-19 will make some traditions during Ramadan different.
<i>Make Moral Judgement</i>	Tarawih prayers that are usually carried out in the congregation can be carried out individually at home without any difference in validity between the two.
<i>Treatment Recommendation</i>	Encourage yourself to be able to focus on individual prayer habits. Turns isolation into an activity of reflection and building inner peace. Then, the virtual transition of worship is expected not to damage the tradition later.

The *definition of the problem* in this news is about changes in the implementation of fasting in the month of Ramadan during the spread of the coronavirus. This emphasis is seen in the headlines are as follows

1. “ *How Coronavirus has Changed Ramadan for Muslims This Year* ”

From *the definition of the problem*, the news illustrated that Coronavirus could change various aspects of life, even rituals/traditions of worship in Islam. Related to the month of Ramadan which is written in the news as one of the mandatory worship for Muslims, it must change to follow health rules. The news also shows that Islam has flexible provisions in the implementation of worship in certain situations.

Then, it describes the cause (*diagnosis cause*) that influenced the change, as written in the following paragraphs:

1. (a) “*But with so many places of worship closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the holy day will be a bit different this year.*” (p2)
- (b) “*Islamic holy sites, including Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia and Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, will be empty during Ramadan after authorities advised worshipers to pray at home.*” (p10)

The *moral judgment* written in the news is that the implementation of worship, such as tarawih prayers which are usually in congregation in mosques, can be done alone at home. This explanation is emphasized in an indirect quote from the president of Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research written in the following paragraph:

1. “*Historically speaking, mosques are packed with worshipers during the month of Ramadan, said Imam Omar Suleiman, the founder and president of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. But, Suleiman said the night prayer can be performed at the mosque or at home, there’s no difference in the validity between the two.*”(p11)

This news on CNN shows the resolution of the problem as a *treatment recommendation* with several opinions to illustrate that Muslim worship during Ramadan during the coronavirus period can be done flexibly, and take wisdom from the events that occur. Muslims can focus on starting their prayer habits and make periods of isolation for self-reflection and seeking inner peace.

The three news from foreign online media analyzed in this study showed a positive image of Islam in the face of the spread of Covid-19. The news article from

theconversation.com shows *wudhu* as a social reality in Muslims that has been done daily can be harmonized with the rule of health during the spread of the coronavirus. The potential reality that can be shown from this news can be understood that with ablution, Muslims have become accustomed to hygiene practices such as washing their hands, so that when the spread of the coronavirus only needs to be further improved. While the second news from *theprint.in* illustrates the positive image of Islam from the actions carried out by its adherents. The charity in the Indian city of Surat is one of the Muslim charities that

news described as having a high concern for fellow human beings. Based on the words of the source quoted by the news writer, Islam recommended its adherents help each other whoever are in need.

CNN reported that Islam has flexible teachings in the implementation of worship for certain situations. The fact that the spread of the coronavirus should limit Muslim worship activities in the holy month of Ramadan, which usually has a tradition of congregating in mosques, can be changed to individual worship with the same wisdom.

5. Conclusion

The construction of foreign media news text in this study showed a positive image of Islam considering the spread of Covid-19 by foreign media. The foreign media shows the image of Islam in terms of its teachings and practices, like *wudhu* as a practice of cleansing, the behavior of its followers who are willing to help, motivated by faith and the spirit of humanity, and other religious traditions that may be important in preventing the spread of Covid-19.

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