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Contemporary Securitisation of Islam and Muslims: A Content Analysis of Twitter

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the securitisation of Islam and Muslims on Twitter, examining whether and to what extent securitised images are produced on the platform. It also analyses the dominant securitised themes and their sub-dimensions. Using empirical and sentiment analysis, the study investigated three trending hashtags: #banislam, #stopislam, and #racism. Findings revealed that the portrayal of Islam and Muslims was largely problematic, with the hashtags generating securitised content. Within the ideological threat dimension of Islam's securitisation, totalitarianism and Sharia law were the most prominent sub-themes. For the securitisation of Muslims, the dominant sub-dimensions were general Muslims and Muslim women. Hashtags #banislam and #stopislam contributed more extensively to securitised imagery than #racism. Although a few tweets portrayed positive or neutral views, the overall trend affirmed that these hashtags produced a predominantly securitised representation of Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, the analysis showed that more tweets focused on Islam as an ideological threat than on Muslims as an existential threat.

Keywords: Islam, Muslims, securitisation, Islamophobia, Twitter, social media

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Introduction

A bundle of "words" and "phrases" refers to the hostility of Western Muslims. The most popular name is Islamophobia. The use of the word Islamophobia in English comes from the case of Said (1985b). He initially wrote and included the stigmatised identity attached to Islam in his work on "Orientalism", which opened up Western ideas, creating derogatory representations of Muslims as "unusual" and "cruel" in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. He also added more besides this negative depiction such as the danger of jihad, violence and fear that Muslims (Arabs) would defeat Western civilisation and take over the control of the world. This rhetoric, according to Said, represents Muslims (Arabs) as a systematic distinction from the Western public as undeveloped, inferior and aberrant, while Arabs and Muslims of the East consist of the "heretical, undeveloped and inferior" (Said, 1978, 1985a).The concerns about Islamophobia have increased since the 9/11 incident, and terrorism is now considered a major threat to world peace and security.

A report by Runnymede Trust, "Islamophobia: A Challenge for All of Us" (1997), describes Islamophobia as anti-Muslim and anti-Islam. It also raises serious concerns about this hostility in the form of discrimination against Muslim communities, particularly the discrimination against Muslims in major social and political issues. In fact, geographically, the Runnymede Trust report has made Muslims and Islam appear as a 'Security Threat' (Runnymede Trust, 1997).

In the context of Islamophobia, Islam, in a dangerous term of "Islamophobia", implies an irrational or extreme fear of Islam and Muslims, but it does not denote Muslims and Islam as victims of hostility (Shooman, 2014). According to Singh (2016), in the United States, the effects of Islamophobia are designated by Muslims in several matters of concern: beard, dark skin and a scarf worn by terrorists led by ancient religious practices (Singh, 2016).

Similarly, Ansar (2013) concludes that anti-Islam and anti-Muslim thinking is rooted in and focused on closed theories about the number of Muslims: immutability, fragmentation and subjugation through jihad. Islam is seen as a motionless, monolithic block. It differs "obviously" from Western values and culture; the view is that there are not many common values, customs and traditions. Muslims are considered to be rude, sexist and irrational (Ansar, 2013).

Exploring the causes of Islamophobia, Jaspal & Cinnirella (2010) argues that Islamophobia's representation in the press is one of the potential causes and main reason for prejudice. The press encourages social and psychological manifestation of prejudice. Thus, as a result of press reporting, the reader feels fear, insecurity and hostility. Meanwhile, there should be new methods to change the negative representation and manage Islamophobic prejudice. At the same time, there is a need to discourage this kind of representation of Muslims because this may increase prejudice and intergroup threat (Ciftci, 2012; Doosje et al., 2009; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

From the perspective of the Islamophobic situations described above, we can conclude that some places view Islamophobia as the beginning of xenophobia - the fear of outsiders. Another approach, for example, is ECRI which describes it as racist and intolerant of Muslims and Islam. Almost every definition of Islamophobia refers to the fear and disgust directed at Muslims and Islam as a constructive concept.

Previous studies and scholars pointed out a prominent negativity in the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in global media. Similarly, there is a plethora of research available as evidence that the portrayal of Muslims and Islam on social media platforms is problematic. This trend of negativity worldwide regarding Islam and Muslims is increasing. All around the world, researchers have explored and identified different kinds of negative discourses associated with Muslims and Islam by the media.

It is important to find out the securitised nature of Islam and Muslims on Twitter and also the intention to analyse the securitised content produced on Twitter related to Islam and Muslims. This study contributes significantly to serving us and better understanding Islamophobia as a security threat theme and its sub-dimensions in social media networks. Hence, the objectives of the study are to evaluate whether Muslims and Islam are constructed as a security threat on Twitter, to examine the nature and extent of securitised Islamophobia directed towards Muslims and Islam on Twitter and to analyse the dominant securitised themes and their sub-dimensions on Twitter.

Literature Review

Islamophobia as a Security Threat

In the context of Islamophobia, Islam and Muslims as a threat, its security dimension and among different stereotypes, terrorism is one of the foremost stereotypes commonly used for Muslims through the broader media. Popular culture and mass media have generated stereotypes about "Arabs" and "Muslims" as terrorists. The media has also produced content against Muslims through films, news, cartoons and stories (Merskin, 2004).

Furthermore, Ridouani (2011) explains how Islam is defined as unsuited to democracy in the world, especially in the West. Due to this kind of failure, all Muslims are considered suspicious, dangerous and

terrorists. In the past, the West described Arabs and Muslims with largely negative terms. However, after the 9/11 incident, different terms such as "fundamentalist," "terrorists," and "bloody" are commonly attributed to Muslims and Arabs.

Similarly, explaining the Sharia law discourse on social media, Ahmed (2020) found "cut off the 'hands' of the robs", "Islamic punishment", "women being killed and raped", "women punished to death for exiting Islam" on socia media. The West denies Islamic culture because Islamic culture is quite different from Western culture. Many stereotypes have been created, such as "Sharia law as a death culture", "ISIS and Islamic countries impose brutal punishments," and "Islamic doctrine as intolerance and violence".

The findings of Ghauri (2020) confirmed the existence of the "securitisation" discourse in The Australian Press editorial materials. Islam and Muslims were very openly presented in the Australian media as being a "security danger" to Australia, Europe and the West. The research shows that the editorial materials created a "securitised" perception of Islam and Muslims (Ghauri, 2020).

Tsagarousianou (2016) elaborates on the steady shift in rhetoric from an "exotic Islam" to a "dangerous Islam" that damages European values and security as a result of "securitisation" of Islam. According to her, acts of terrorism and political violence have indiscriminately associated Islam and Muslims, both inside and outside Europe, with "terrorist aggression" that is irrational and unyielding (Tsagarousianou, 2016).

A systematic analysis was conducted to provide insight into how Islam has been portrayed. The study asserts that despite much research and criticism, the mainstream media still frequently dehumanises racial and religious minorities by stereotyping them as having the traits of criminal, violent and antisocial behaviour (Weng & Mansouri, 2021). Certain foreign media outlets have portrayed Islam in the context of anti-Muslim insurgencies by depicting Muslims and Islam in a negative light and frequently associating them with violence, while non-Muslims, rather than Muslims, have been portrayed as the targets of terrorism (Saleem et al., 2021).

Islamophobia and Social Media

Allen (2015) points out that symbolic violence, in both verbal and physical violence, is a result of closed views of Islam. There are many examples of Islamophobia that practically include harassing Muslims due to their physical appearance and garments, for examples, ripping of their veils, physical aggression, discrimination in public places and different acts of violence against Muslims, specifically in religious spaces. Aggression against headscarf-wearing by Muslim women is strongly accelerated by Islamophobia through online anti-Muslim content and has a strongly gendered dimension (Allen, 2015).

The scholar, Coliandris (2012), explains that hate crimes have the potential to disseminate messages to specific communities. In this context, the Internet is a haven for such groups and individuals who use it efficiently to target individuals, groups and the marginalised public. There are many far-right groups which are engaged to counter this and name it as online bombing. Different searchers, online sources and webpages are used by far-right groups and other organisations to create a public presence on social media platforms to monitor these sites and platforms (Coliandris, 2012).

Awan (2016) argues about the common features of content with some interesting facts and similarities shared within these online groups. The results of the study established that Muslims are humiliated online through disgusting negative attitudes, physical threats, stereotypes, online harassment and discrimination. All these acts have the potential to incite prejudicial actions and violence because they ridicule and frighten groups and individuals. Similarly, Muslims are vilified and demonised through online content created. The pages and comments are clearly risk-oriented towards Muslim communities, and these images and posts may ultimately harm the communities (Awan, 2016).

Furthermore, in an article, Dostal (2015) analysed data showing that the characteristics and features of Islamophobia existing online are linked to three elements: the global connection allowed by the Internet, the spread of certain actors and the prevalence of so-called "fake news". The Internet helps the public to promote global exchanges and like-minded users. Anti-Islam hate groups can reach international and

national audiences. For example, the German Islamophobic movement "Pegida" quickly spread to different countries and attracted attention internationally (Dostal, 2015).

Online space is used to disseminate different forms of hate speech. Hall (2013) argues that the use of the Internet as a vehicle for hatred seems to be increasing, with hate groups expressing prejudice and hostility more casually. Awan (2014) defines Islamophobia as "anti-Muslim hatred for persecution, promoting intolerance through harassment, threatening behaviour, exploitation or intimidation by individuals on social media."

Facebook and other online platforms are used to spread hate speech that targets communities, especially Muslims. This kind of hate speech on online platforms can be threatening and thus can be an act to enhance the impact on the victims being targeted (Awan & Zempi, 2015).

In summary, Islamophobia on the Internet is communicated through verbal violence that portrays Islam as being mismatched with the West and demeans Muslims by arguing that Muslims should be eliminated from Western societies. It is also found that Islam as a religion is depicted negatively on social media. The dominant discourses on social media are related to jihad, bullying, threats to peace, threats of violence, hijab, mosque, terrorism, anti-Muslim hate speech and hate speech generally. The crux of these dominant tones realises Muslims as dangerous creatures, barbaric, threatening and inhumane.

Securitisation of Islam and Muslims

The series of events with immigrants in Europe and abroad requires the intellectual and educational challenges of contemporary Islam. It is increasingly important to avoid inciting Muslims or Islam and to reject the symbolic construction of rhetoric of terrorism and security (Uenal, 2016).

Existential threats are posed by migration to human security and national sovereignty. The perception of migrants as a threat has made its way to the forefront, and the securitisation process of immigrants is a contributing factor in creating migration as a threat to national security worldwide. All unwanted and illegal migrants are considered threats to the stability of a state. Hence, the security agenda has been linked to many aspects of policy measures against immigrants. Moreover, transnational threats and the war on terrorism have been linked to migration in Western debates (Wohlfeld, 2014).

In addition, the closure for the effects and results of the 9/11 incident is highly needed because its results have turned into a stronger prejudice towards Muslims. This ultimately leads to predictions about institutional discrimination, especially in relation to security checks at airports and official buildings for Muslims and Arab people (Skitka et al., 2004).

Hoffman (2015) argues that in European and other Western states, jihadists have also returned in high numbers. That is bookkeeping for a large percentage of terrorist plots, and this poses a tremendous threat of violence in Western states as hundreds of refugees have been charged with the ideology of jihad (Hoffman, 2015).

Furthermore, Bergen (2016) argues that "national security terrorist" and "refugee protection policies" related offences in the U.S. since the 9/11 incident found that many people who had travelled abroad had attempted to perform jihad or join a jihadist group. He further argues that the "migration-related security threat" is most frequently articulated in policy circles and in the media, and it involves the entry of potential foreign terrorist operators into states (Bergen, 2016). Furthermore, a Department of Justice report (2016) asserts that extremists are continuously trying and making efforts to use migration channels to enter targeted states. They are considering whatever ways available to them. There are many examples as evidence, for instance, Tashfeen Malik entry case and San Bernardino killer's case. Perhaps, Iraqi nationals were arrested over the breaching of U.S. refugee programme (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

Moreover, Schmid (2016) puts it that terrorist groups have sought to radicalise and recruit vulnerable and often long-term refugees. Some scholars state that refugee camps serve as "breeding grounds" for terrorism and a "source of insecurity" for entire regions' host states. Syrian refugees reportedly face ISIL recruitment in Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian camps (Schmid, 2016). Furthermore, Faiola

(2016) puts it that many migrants to Europe have bad motives. Many migrants and refugees who enter Europe are potential terrorists who have been arrested while some have died during attacks or planning attacks. After several attacks by asylum seekers, Germany has undergone its processing mechanism for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who arrived recently (Faiola, 2016).

Hanson (2016) points out that the securitisation of Muslims is actually due to the lack of Islam and Muslim unity in Western societies, and it thrives through many factors such as the state, politicians, policy makers and the media. Discourses on Islam and Muslims have also led to public debates among moderate politicians and attempts to preserve Islam alongside Islam for Western civilisation (Hanson, 2016).

Thus, in American and European discussions, Muslims and Islam are protected as a security threat and a phenomenon that can be further studied under two broad categories. The two broad categories related to the security dimension of Islamophobia help to understand the conceptual threat process, ideological threat and existential threat. The ideological threat can be studied and understood in four sub-dimensions such as totalitarianism, jihadi, Wahahabism and Sharia law. Similarly, the existential threat aspect is classified as a threat to immigrants, women, refugees and general Muslims (Iqbal, 2010; Khan et al., 2020; Khan & Umbreen, 2022).

Therefore, have securitised images of Islam and Muslims been produced on Twitter? To what extent securitised images of Islam and Muslims have been produced on Twitter? What are the dominant securitised themes and their sub-dimensions pertaining to Islamophobia on Twitter?

Theoretical Framework

Securitisation Theory

The securitisation theory was applied in the 1990s by security study theorists (Buzan et al., 1998) from the Copenhagen School. This theory redefined the conceptual framework in security studies dealing with state and military organisations. This theory deals with the problems, distribution and disappearance of people (Richnovska, 2014). The theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 illustrates the process of securitisation, as outlined by Baykara-Krumme (2010). This framework, drawing from securitisation theory, shows how an issue becomes a matter of national security through labelling and political discourse. According to the author, the securitisation process involves framing an issue in a way that elevates it beyond political debate to something that requires urgent action, as demonstrated in the theoretical framework in Figure 1

Figure 1

The Process of Securitisation Source: (Baykara-Krumme, 2010)

Non-politicised > Politicised > Securitised
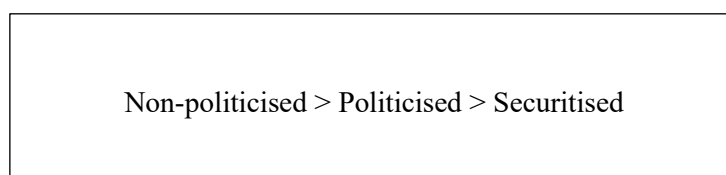
Lasten and Wastworth (2000) state that when something happens, by saying the words and by labelling it as a security issue, it becomes one. By presenting an issue as a national security issue, it is removed from the general political sphere and treated with a sense of urgency and risk. Secularism suggests that "recognisable memories, identities, images, metaphors and other issues, including those of the followers of Islam, create an admirable, yet worrying future." Furthermore, note that "the purpose of authoritarianism is, in this case, "let religion be religion". Securitisation is therefore not just about "security" and "the expansion of decorative tools". "The position of policy discourse on that issue is not only about efficiency but also about the problem of disrupting general rules, practices and politics" (Phillips, 2007).

Methods

Research Design

This research is an exploratory study as the researchers seek to understand more. The study attempts to lay the underpinning that will lead to future studies. Exploratory designs are often used to establish an understanding of what methodology would effectively apply to gathering information about the issue. Sentiment analysis identifies the sentiment expressed in a text and then analyses it. Sentence-level sentiment analysis was selected to classify an opinion in a sentence as expressing the positive or the negative to identify the sentiment expressed in each sentence (Tsytsarau & Palpanas, 2012). In this study, the researchers selected quantitative content and sentiment analysis of tweets to explore the securitisation of Muslims and Islam on Twitter. Investigating the Twitter platform can help us better understand how people express and disseminate their opinions about certain events because Twitter is a user-generated and free public forum.

The main purpose of choosing the Twitter platform is that it remains an important platform to keep people up to date and stay connected through the exchange of quick and frequent messages. By aiming on Twitter, this study will give us a better understanding about Twitter in relation to how this platform produces securitised images of Islam and Muslims and how it has been used to generate online securitised Islamophobia. However, the researchers hope that this study will address these issues and concerns.

In this study, the population was tweeting from July 1, 2020, to December 30, 2020, with tweets embedded with hashtags #stopislam, #racism and #banislam. The study focuses on the hashtags #stopislam, #racism and #banislam related to Muslim and Islam. In order to gather appropriate tweets, the researchers immediately made a visual representation of the Twitter account. The unit of analysis of this study was a single tweet text having anti-Islam and anti-Muslim content. The researchers collected the tweets embedded with hashtags #stopislam, #racism and #banislam from July 1, 2020 to December 30, 2020 and marked "known" by using the Twitter search software API. The API, short for "Application Programme Interface", is a programme that provides access to Twitter for social information In this study, a purposive sampling method was used.

The researchers collected tweets written in English, but geographical boundaries were not set. Twitter users were in different geographical locations of the world. Indeed, tweets in the database are based on and refer to different countries, as analysed below. Thus, the analysis of tweets from different parts of the world allows an international understanding of securitisation ideologies that can be consistent with themes, sub-dimensions and practices around the world.

Due to limited time, resources and finance, it was not possible for the researchers to collect data or information of whole tweets embedded with hashtags #stopislam, #racism and #banislam during this period. To get the desired results within these limitations, the researchers collected the information and selected 200 tweets as a sample from each hashtag.

Data Collection Methods and Data Analysis

A coding sheet was formulated. Not all tweets were Islamophobic, as some tweets showed support and empathy for Muslims and non-Muslims, while others were unbiased. Islamophobic or securitised tweets were coded after examination of tweets according to their content on Muslims and Islam.

For the measurement of the data, this study was divided into two main themes: "Securitisation of Islam" and "Securitisation of Muslims". Two broad categories related to the security dimension of Islamophobia help to understand the conceptual threat process, ideological threat and existential threat. The ideological threat can be studied and understood in four sub-dimensions: totalitarianism, jihadi, Wahahabism and Sharia law. Similarly, the existential threat aspect is classified as a threat to

immigrants, refugees and general Muslims (Iqbal, 2020), and the researchers added a sub-dimension, "women as a security threat". The researchers adopted these categories to explain and interpret the available data while putting them into certain sub-dimensions. This methodology helps to find out how

much rage image of Muslims and Islam was portrayed and how it was produced on Twitter. The statistical analysis was carried out for frequency distribution, the volume of tweets, and the percentage of proportions. The results of the study were presented in tables and charts.

Operationalisation and Coding

To carry out this research and answer the research questions as set out above, a coding sheet was developed. The following is the conceptual coding of variables. Tweets were placed and coded according to positive, negative and neutral categories. The researchers adopted the variables for the data collection from "five walls of Islamophobic hate", as validated by Imran Awan in "Islamophobia online inside Facebook's walls of hate", Awan (2016), and it was adapted to Twitter to carry out this study. As the primary tool developed by Oboler (2013) for the publication "Islamophobia on the Internet", the adaptation did not require significant modifications, as applied to Facebook by Awan (2016). The same methodology was used by Khan et al., (2020) on Twitter to analyse Twitter hashtags. This rationalises that the tool can be extended to all the platforms the network offers, including Twitter as used by (Civila et al., 2020) on Twitter.

In the securitisation process, speakers present some issues as a threat to the audience; the said process is the trick of securitisation. However, successful securitisation only occurs when the securitisation proposal is recognised by the audience (the object referred to), and the securitisation issue is considered a threat. More precisely, speakers take safe actions. The next issue is designed as a threat, and in the end, the object must accept it; this poses a threat to complete the securitisation process. This theory has been found to be used in a complete, contemporary form. It has great descriptive power, and it applies to a variety of security issues.

Securitisation is the process of turning an insecure problem into a security problem (Messina, 2016). According to Cesari (2012), securitisation refers to extraordinary actions that are next to the rule of law; it is a thrill for the survival of the community due to emergencies. Theorists say that secularism functions outside the realm of politics because it responds to an existential threat. It includes actors who see Islam as a threat to secular and political standards and advocate extraordinary measures to control it (Buzan et al., 1998).

Hence, the securitisation theory provides a strong theoretical basis to analyse how Islam and Muslims are portrayed as security threats. Previous literature shows that Islam and Muslims have often been constructed as threats to the West in various ways. Many people perceive Islam and Muslims as violent or as threats to cultural and physical security, particularly in relation to terrorism (Ciftci, 2012). As a result, terms like global terrorism, fundamentalism, Islamic jihad, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism have been used to label and stigmatise Muslims. These depictions contribute to an irrational, global fear of Muslims. The theory of securitisation thus helps contextualise how such narratives are framed and disseminated, especially on platforms like Twitter.

To carry out this research and answer the research questions, a coding sheet was developed to classify tweet content into meaningful categories. These categories were informed by existing models of online Islamophobia and were specifically adapted for the Twitter context. Figure 2 illustrates the coding framework used, outlining key variables and their operational definitions related to types of engagement with Islam and Muslims.

Figure 2

Coding of Variables

Variables	Types of Engagement
Totalitarianism	Representation of Islam on Twitter as fascist ideology, anti-feminist, authoritarian, fundamentalist, threat to ruling forces, autocratic, tyrannical, undemocratic, and against freedom of speech.
Jihad	Militant interpretation of Islam; jihad as a threat to Western nations and Muslim governments; guides Muslims to fight local jihad with their governments; spoils stability and peace by invading jihad forces.
Sharia Law	Sharia demands political supremacy over constitutional law; aims to transform the West into an Islamic state; includes calls to ban Sharia; portrayed as incompatible with Western systems and a guide to terror or illegality.
Wahhabism	Wahhabi ideology depicted as fueling violence and jihad; associated with ISIS and similar groups.
General Muslims	Portrayed as aggressive, terrorist, indistinguishable from extremists, a threat to women, and warlike; associated with features like beard, dark skin, or religious passion (Ciftci, 2012; Oswald, 2005; Uenal, 2016; Singh, 2016).
Muslim Women	Depicted as security threats for wearing hijab or niqab; associated with terrorism; subjected to bans on religious dress in public spaces (Mirza, 2013).
Immigrants	Framed as threats to security, sovereignty, and national identity; associated with terrorism or disruption (Skitka et al., 2004; Vakil, 2009).
Refugees	Seen as linked to extremism or jihad ideology; refugee camps viewed as breeding grounds for terrorism and instability (Hoffman, 2015; Schmid, 2016).

To ensure the reliability of the research, as referred to consistently as a method of measurement, the researchers conducted a survey of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim hashtags, made a list of different hashtags by searching on the Internet and found the number of tweets during the period. The researchers obtained analytics on selected hashtags by using Sprout Social. The researchers also discussed the hashtags reports with scholars. Finally, the researchers selected the top three hashtags from the list. API software was used for retrieving tweets. The same methodology and instruments were used by Khan et al., (2020) to analyse Twitter hashtags in the securitisation of Muslims. Additionally, this study took into consideration validity which refers to how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure. To ensure validity, the researchers conducted sentiment analysis and applied an instrument of analysis, the technique of data collection by Awan (2016) with some significant modifications, as the primary tool developed by the Oboler (2013) for the publication of "Islamophobia on the Internet" and adopted by Civila et al. (2020) for Twitter. The study also validates the finding by Khan et al., (2020) in analysing Twitter hashtags related to securitisation of Muslims.

Findings

In this chapter, the results of the study will be explained. The researcher analysed the Tweets under hashtags, categorised the tweets into the positive, negative and neutral and explained the results of the study in tables. Tweets regarding Islam and Muslims with negative words, verbs, and phrases are considered the securitised tweets; favourable and supportive words are considered positive, while the third category is neutral. The data analysis techniques include the analysis of the sentences tweeted and

the whole text of the tweets, the interpretation and the analysis of the data. The prominent texts including verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases and sentences were pointed out.

Figure 3

Distribution of the Tweet Hashtags Related to the Sentiments

Theme	Sentiment	#StopIslam N (%)	#BanIslam N (%)	#Racism N (%)
Ideological Threat	Positive	9 (4.5%)	8 (4%)	5 (2.5%)
	Negative	65 (33%)	83 (42%)	6 (3%)
	Neutral	21 (10.5%)	5 (2.5%)	0 (0%)
Existential Threat	Positive	10 (5%)	13 (6%)	36 (18%)
	Negative	42 (21%)	36 (18%)	28 (14.5%)
	Neutral	16 (8%)	3 (1.5%)	7 (3.5%)

Figure 3 illustrates the ideological threats in the tweets on #stopislam, #banislan and #racism. Results show that 32.5% of the 200 tweets on #stopislam, 41.5% on #banislam and 3% on #racism were securitised. In the category of the existential threat, 21% of the tweets on #stopislam, 18% on #banislam and 14% on #racism were found securitised.

Figure 3 also shows that the neutral tweets on ideological threats on #stopislam, #banislan and #racism were 10.5%, 2.5% and 0% respectively. On existential threats, 8%, 1.5% and 3.5% of the tweets were neutral respectively. Figure 3 also shows evidently that the positive tweets related to ideological threats on #stopislam, #banislan and #racism were 4.5%, 4% and 2.5%, while for existential threats, 5%, 6% and 18% were positive respectively. It is clear from the above table that both ideological and existential threats were dominant in #stopislam.

Figure 4

Distribution of Securitised Themes in the Securitised Tweets

Theme	#StopIslam N (%)	#BanIslam N (%)	#Racism N (%)
Ideological Threat	65 (32.5%)	83 (41.5%)	6 (3%)
Existential Threat	42 (21%)	36 (18%)	29 (14.5%)

Figure 4 reveals tweets on the ideological threat theme of securitisation: 32.5% on #stopislam, 41.5% on #banislam and 3% on #racism. On the existential threat theme of securitisation, 21% of the tweets were on #stopislam, 18% on #banislam and 14.5% on #racism. Figure 4 clearly shows that in the process of securitisation of Muslims and Islam, the ideological threat was dominating on #stopislam and #banislam with 32.5% and 41.5% of the tweets on these two hashtags respectively, while the existential threat was dominating on #racism with 14.5% of the tweets on this hashtag.

Figure 5

Distribution of Ideological Threat Sub-dimensions Related to the Tweets

Sub-dimension	#StopIslam (N)	#BanIslam (N)	#Racism (N)
Totalitarianism	151	2018	14
Sharia Law	44	5713	2
Jihad	30	115	0
Wahhabism	0	0	0

Figure 5 shows the distribution of ideological threat sub-dimensions related to the tweets. The results show that 16.5%, 20.5% and 2.5% of totalitarianism tweets were on #stopislam, #banislam and #racism respectively; 10.5%, 10.5% and 0% of tweets with a Sharia law theme were on #stopislam, #banislam and #racism respectively, while 5.5%, 6% and 0% of tweets with a jihad theme were on #stopislam, #banislam and #racism respectively. It is clear from the above table that in the ideological threat category, the totalitarianism sub-dimension of securitisation was dominating on #banislam compared to other themes of securitisation.

Figure 6

Distribution of Existential Threat Sub-dimensions Related to the Tweets

Sub-dimension	#StopIslam N (%)	#BanIslam N (%)	#Racism N (%)
General Muslims	19 (9.5%)	24 (12%)	22 (11%)
Women	9 (4.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (1.5%)
Immigrants	10 (5%)	10 (5%)	4 (2%)
Refugees	4 (2%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of existential threat sub-dimensions across tweets. The *General Muslims* category showed the highest representation, accounting for 9.5%, 12%, and 11% of tweets using the hashtags #StopIslam, #BanIslam, and #Racism, respectively. In the *Women* category, tweets constituted 4.5% for #StopIslam, 0% for #BanIslam, and 1.5% for #Racism. The *Immigrants* category recorded an equal proportion of 5% for both #StopIslam and #BanIslam, and 2% for #Racism. Lastly, the *Refugees* category had the lowest representation: 2% for #StopIslam, 1% for #BanIslam, and 0% for #Racism.

These results indicate that within the existential threat category of securitisation, the *General Muslims* sub-dimension was most prominent, particularly in tweets using #BanIslam, compared to the other sub-dimensions.

Figure 7

Distribution of Ideological Threat Sub-dimensions Related to the Tweets Reach

Sub-dimension	#StopIslam (N)	#BanIslam (N)	#Racism (N)
Totalitarianism	151	2,018	14
Sharia Law	44	5,713	2
Jihad	30	115	0
Wahhabism	0	0	0

Figure 7 illustrates that in ideological threat sub-dimensions, totalitarianism, sharia Law and jihad securitisation tweets reach on #banislam was on the top. The Sharia law sub-dimension was on the top with the maximum reach, totalitarianism on the second and jihad on the third. It is clear from the above

table that in the ideological threat category, the tweets reach of totalitarianism sub-dimension was dominating with higher tweets reach on #banislam, and Sharia law category was also dominating on #banislam compared to other sub-dimensions of securitisation.

Figure 8

Distribution of Existential Threat Sub-dimensions Related to the Tweets Reach

Sub-dimension	#StopIslam (N)	#BanIslam (N)	#Racism (N)
General Muslims	44	167	142
Women	18	0	21
Immigrants	33	16	22
Refugees	6	4	0

Figure 8 illustrates the tweets on existential threat sub-dimensions related to Muslims. Results show that the tweets on general Muslims were dominating with the maximum reach. The women's category was dominant on #stopislam. More tweets were found in the immigrants' category on #stopislam. It is clear from the above table that in the existential threat category, the tweets achieved higher tweets reach on #stopislam, #banislam compared to #racism.

Figure 9

Distribution of Dominant Securitised Themes Related to the Tweets Reach

Securitised Theme	#StopIslam (N)	#BanIslam (N)	#Racism (N)
Ideological Threat	225	7,846	6
Existential Threat	101	207	185

Figure 9 elaborates on the dominant securitisation themes related to securitisation of Islam and Muslims on the basis of tweets reach. It shows that the ideological threat was dominating on #banislam, and the existential threat was also dominating on #banislam with the maximum reach compared to other hashtags.

Discussion

This study found that the majority of the tweets on hashtags #stopislam, #banislam and #racism tweets were securitised. The researchers found 261 tweets out of the sample of 600 tweets having securitised themes and sub-dimensions, while very few tweets were found positive. These hashtags contained the material posted on Twitter hashtags pertaining to anti-Muslim and anti-Islam content. The researchers identified tweets related to Islam and Muslims with negative words, verbs, and phrases considered securitised Tweets. Both the category related to Islam as an ideological threat and the category related to Muslims as an existential threat were divided into four categories. Among these securitised tweets, 107 securitised tweets were posted on #stopislam, 119 tweets on #banislam and 35 tweets on #racism. The prominent texts, including verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases and sentences were pointed out.

The researchers found "totalitarianism" as the dominant sub-dimension of the ideological threat in the context of the securitisation of Islam. The negative category contained tweets with negative words, verbs, phrases and sentences embedded with hashtags about Islam and Muslims such as the following:

> "Islam is a terrorist organisation", "Islam is only a kind of barbaric mentality", "Islam creates terrorism for all", "Muhammad was a war leader", "Islam is death and violence", "Islam creates violence against people for no reason", "Islam gives an excuse to Muslims to be

terrorists and murder non-Muslims", "Islam is a religion of radicalisation", " Islam and freedom do not go together"

The process of securitisation normally refers the act of labelling or considering someone or a group of people as a security threat. It may also be called a securitisation move. It also includes debating someone or certain groups of people as threatening discourse, pressure in adoption of laws, legislation and policies. It includes discussion in the ruling circles showing certain segments of society as a security threat. It also includes police controls, immigration laws and steps taken by the government as a way to preserve the security of citizens for protection against attacks. The phenomena of securitisation contextualise Islam as an ideology spreading from Afghanistan and Iraq to European countries. The perception prevails that Muslims were incapable to meet challenges of liberal ideologies and Western political development in their past.

Western politicians also consider Islam a totalitarian fascist ideology. Similarly, Islam has many trappings of religion. It connects more with totalitarian ideologies such as communism and needs to be treated as such. Mozaffari (2017) also declared that Islam is a totalitarian political ideology and demands submission to Islam and the Sharia from its followers. Furthermore, the totalitarian ideology is enforced by conversion of non-believers to the religion of Islam, and this has been referred to as a fundamental transformation. This study endorses the finding of scholars that security experts who categorise Islam as a major security threat. This perceived threat has resulted in measures and bills to prevent the spread of Sharia and Islamic Law. The negative sentiments about Sharia have also been expressed in professional discourses on different occasions.

The use of such words, verbs and phrases by Twitter users produced a negative and securitised image of Islam as a religion in the totalitarian fascist ideology and endorsed the themes and securitisation of Islam.

The second dominating category related to securitisation of Muslims in the theme of the existential threat is general Muslims. The researchers found "general Muslims" as the dominant sub-dimension of the existential threat in the context of the securitisation of Muslims. The negative category contained tweets with negative words, verbs, phrases and sentences embedded with hashtags about Islam and Muslims such as the following:

> "Muhammad, the terrorist, created armies to control and take over everything and everyone", "hardline Muslim", "religious extremists", "violent radicalisation", "Muslims are kidnapping and forcing conversion marriages", "Muslim man beheaded in the street", "Muslims murdered non-Muslims in Paris", "Islamists riots"

The finding shows that a large segment of tweets considered Muslims in opposition to the Western public as Muslims are passionate, violent and supportive of terrorism because the Western public see Muslims as threatening to their well-being and culture. The finding also endorses the previous research that Muslims are regarded as pagan, primitive, irrational and supporting acts of terrorism and violence. Muslims are considered suspicious, dangerous and terrorists.

The researchers found the third dominating category of the ideological threat which was Sharia Law. The negative category contained tweets with negative words, verbs, phrases and sentences embedded with hashtags about Islam and Muslims such as the following:

> "hateful misogynist Sharia, it is legal for a man to rape his wife", "Quran Approves Terror, Sex Slavery and Taxing Non-Muslims", "Quran is a book of hatred", "Sharia has a lot of hatred for non- Muslims", "Sharia laws slowly being implemented in Europe", "impose Sharia"

The study further endorses the finding of Khan et al., (2020) on the Sharia law discourse on social media as it found large content directly related to the threat to the ideology available on Facebook. Therefore, a number of national politicians and states have adopted this understanding and now considering the adoption of legislation banning Sharia (Tenety, 2011).

The researchers also found a fourth category of the existential threat which was Muslim women as a threat. The negative category contained tweets such as the following:

>"Dog hijabs coming soon in a mosque near you", "Muslim women cover their face and hair, not their brain", "No more hijab cage for women's"

As Muslim women, wearing hijab becomes a potential security challenge, and they are also viewed as supporters of terrorism. Particularly in the West, veil coverage can be a way to express the identity of Muslims, specifically in religious spaces. Aggression against headscarf-wearing by Muslim women is strongly accelerated by Islamophobia through online anti-Muslim content and has a strongly gendered dimension. It has been observed that recently, many European countries adopted burqa bans but did not prohibit the veil, and some prohibited the veil. It was due to the securitisation of Islam and Muslims in European countries which created this particular situation. The evidence from previous literature shows that this process was strengthened after the 9/11 incident.

Next, the researchers discovered a sub-dimension of the ideological threat which was jihadism. The negative category contained tweets such as the following:

>"Jihad means to war against non-Muslims both offensive and defensive", "Islamic State jihadists", "jihadist threat", "jihadist attack", "Jihadists are ruining your country wanting to change it into a caliphate"

In addition, the researchers found a sub-dimension of the ideological threat which was immigrants. The negative category contained tweets such as the following:

>"If we do not finally ban Islam and re-migrate Muslims, the West will die", "Muslim migrants are gifts to our countries", "This is what happens when you allow too many Muslims in our countries", "Stop Muslim Immigration"

The effects and results of the 9/11 incident ultimately led to particular security checks at airports and official buildings for Muslims and Arab people (Skitka et al., 2004). After that, immigration in the USA became a matter of national security (Spencer, 2007). The labelling of immigrants as a security threat creates chaos and does more harm to the American society than it does to protect them, as it develops racist attitudes and negative perceptions of immigrants as the enemy.

Furthermore, the researcher discovered a sub-dimension of the ideological threat which was refugees. Minor evidence was found about this category. As far as the national security of Europe is concerned, refugees have come to be seen as direct threats to states. Among refugees, some communities are alleged to support armed conflicts in their countries of origin, and some are alleged to support terrorist activities. Hundreds of refugees in Europe have been arrested and charged with the ideology of jihad (Hoffman, 2015). "Migration-related security threat" is most frequently articulated in policy circles and the media. This involves the entry of foreign potential terrorist operators into states (Bergen, 2016). Syrian refugees reportedly face ISIL recruitment in Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian camps (Schmid, 2016).

Twenty-two positive tweets were found to be related to the ideological threat, and 29 positive tweets were related to the existential threat. This category contained tweets such as the following:

>"The voice of justice, peace and beloved religion Islam, Allah will bless you soon champion", "Islam' targets ALL Muslims in France, for the terrible actions of a few people. No other group, religious or other, is ever targeted this way"

The use of such phrases or sentences by Twitter users produced a positive image of Islam and Muslims.

Twenty-six tweets were found neutral in each category of the ideological threat and existential threat. This category contained tweets such as the following:

> "Innocent people", "of all races", "vulnerable targets", "Muslims are victims", "Quran holy book", "women and children", "war", "equal rights", "Muslims welcomes, peace, humanity"

The use of such phrases or sentences by Twitter users was marked as neutral about Islam and Muslims.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to explore the securitisation of Islam and Muslims on Twitter and to analyse the themes and sub-dimensions under which Islam and Muslims were securitised. It is concluded that Twitter has created a securitised image of Islam and Muslims. Totalitarianism as a sub-dimension of the ideological threat in the context of the securitisation of Islam is dominating on Twitter. In these hashtags, Islam is portrayed as a totalitarian fascist ideology. Twitter produces a higher number of tweets, likes, retweets and replies in this category. This also shows that on Twitter, Islam has been securitised as a totalitarian fascist ideology with many trappings of religion; it connects more with totalitarian ideologies such as communism. Islam is viewed as a totalitarian political ideology that demands submission to Islam and the Sharia from its followers. Furthermore, the totalitarian ideology is enforced by the conversion of non-believers to the religion of Islam, and this has been referred to as a "fundamental transformation". Twitter has created an image of Islam as a threat, portraying Islam as rigid, anti-free speech, authoritarian and incompatible with the West.

Similarly, Twitter promotes a more secure image of Islam in areas such as jihadism and Sharia law. Following totalitarianism, these hashtags create a securitised image of Islam as a supporter of jihadism, demonstrating that jihadism poses a significant security threat to the world. Moreover, the third dominant category of ideological threat was Sharia law. As a result, a number of European states and national politicians have accepted this understanding and are now considering legislation prohibiting Sharia. Furthermore, Twitter also produces a securitised image of Muslims. In immigrants as a security threat category, the study concludes that Muslim illegal migrants are considered a threat to the stability of states. The security agenda of states has been linked to many aspects of policy measures against immigrants. The effects and outcomes of the 9/11 incident eventually led to special security checks for Muslims and Arabs at airports and government buildings. The labelling of immigrants as a security threat creates chaos and does more harm to American society than it does to protect them, as it develops racist attitudes and negative perceptions of immigrants as the enemy.

Moreover, Twitter creates an image of women as security threats, with women wearing hijabs as posing a security risk and as supporting terrorism. Many European countries have recently adopted burqa bans but did not prohibit the veil, and some did prohibit the veil. It was the securitisation of Islam and Muslims in European countries which created this particular situation. As the evidence from previous literature shows, this process has been strengthened since the 9/11 incident.

Twitter also produces images of refugees as a security threat; refugees have come to be seen as direct threats. Among refugees, some communities are alleged to support armed conflicts in their countries of origin, and some are alleged to support terrorist activities. The most frequently articulated refugee issue in policy circles and the media is in relation to the entry of potential foreign terrorist operators into states. Many migrants and refugees who enter Europe are potential terrorists and have been arrested, while others have died during attacks or are planning attacks.

Finally, the study concludes that on Twitter, in the process of securitising Islam and Muslims, more tweets have been found in the ideological threat category rather than Muslims as the existential threat category. Islam has acquired a level of salience in the public debate through the securitisation process. Muslims are equated with migration, extremism and terrorism and framed as a security threat. Islam is represented as a totalitarian, fascist and fundamentalist ideology promoting extremism and violence, thus providing the ideological ground for terrorist acts. Additionally, Islam is also labelled as a totalising religion, and because of this universalistic tendency, Muslims pose a great ideological threat to European civilisation. Twitter produces a more securitised image of Islam than Muslims. As a result of

securitisation, a number of European states and a number of national politicians are now considering the adoption of legislation banning Sharia. The "securitisation" of Islam has been made possible by political and terrorist violence, as well as "public safety" doubts. Islam religion, Islamic communities and culture are not only viewed as a huge "societal threat" in Europe but also as an "irritating anomaly". Consequently, when discussing Islam and Muslims in Europe, politicians, legislators and other influential figures frequently use the terms "terrorism", "fundamentalism", "Islamic militancy" and "jihad".

Limitations and Future Directions

Twitter API software only retrieved 2000 tweets out of 16.8 thousand tweets during the six months. Only English-language tweets were retrieved for this study, while other languages were ignored. The researchers were unable to obtain the locations of tweets. The researchers, due to the short span of time, selected half of the retrieved tweets. In future, other researchers can explicitly identify other themes and sub-dimensions of ideological and existential threats. Future researchers can extend this study to other communication means such as television, films, newspapers and other social media platforms. They can also extend this study to other hashtags on Twitter as hundreds of anti-Islam and anti-Muslim hashtags were found on Twitter in this study. Future researchers can apply other methods of research on these important phenomena. Some tweets have many hashtags. In future, a potential method or tool can be used to count each tweet with many hashtags as one time or one count only because in some cases, one tweet contains multiple hashtags.

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The author(s) have declared that no competing interests exist.

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