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ISLAM ON YOUTUBE

Online Debates, Protests, and Extremism

Ahmed Al-Rawi

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To Alaa with my love

Preface

The idea of this book was first shaped and later developed during the time I worked as an Assistant Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Erasmus University (EUR) in the Netherlands. It must be mentioned here that the academic environment at EUR inspired me to write and pursue the idea of this book as I found encouragement, guidance, and different kinds of support from many colleagues, especially Jeroen Jansz, Susanne Janssen, Jacob Groshek, David Novak, Yuping Mao, Emma Hamilton, and Joyce Neys. From Canada, I have to thank the following professors for their encouragement and support: Yasmin Jiwani (Concordia University), Karim Karim (Carleton University), and Sandra Gabriel (Concordia University). Finally, I am indebted to my family for giving me the time to complete this book, especially my lovely daughters: Wejd and Rend. This book is dedicated to my wife, Alaa Al-Musalli, who kindly acted as a second coder in the data analysis. I must also express my sincere thanks to Palgrave Macmillan's copy editors and media and communication editors especially Felicity Plester, Martina O'Sullivan, and Heloise Harding for their continuous support, understanding, and encouragement to pursue this project despite the long delays that occurred. Finally, some parts of this book have appeared in other peer-reviewed publications.

Montreal, Canada — Ahmed Al-Rawi

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This research study analyzes the online reaction in relation to the popular street demonstrations that took place in different parts of the Muslim world as a protest against the perceived insults against Islam and Prophet Muhammed. The main focus is on the online reaction toward these issues, which give a complementary view to what actually happened on the ground. The work is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis since it analyzes thousands of clips and the accompanying comments associated with these controversial issues.

Keywords Islam · Online protests · Flaming · Extremism · Far right Ummah

The significance of this book lies in the fact that it delves into the online public reactions towards certain controversial issues related to Islam and the West. Aside from its empirical findings, there are some arguments made including the claim that the controversial issues examined in this book provide the necessary context and justification for collective and connective action. Incidentally, the instigators of these controversial issues belong to a group of far right and anti-Islam groups that seem to coordinate their global efforts and act based on the premise of freedom of speech, yet their actions often lead to online and offline protests. The debates that ensued are mostly characterized by flaming as there are two main groups (pro- and anti-Islam) that often show extremist views

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as both over-generalize and negate the others by regarding them as inferior. I also argue that Islam is an imagined religion because the religious identity is a relative matter, and there is no homogenous Islam. Muslims identify with Islam in various ways because of their different understandings of this religion. Finally, YouTube is an online public sphere that seems to offer its users a platform for free expression, functioning like an alternative media outlet, while computer-mediated framing acts like as a bottom-up flow of information to counter stronger information flows coming from mainstream media or other sources of information.

In *Who Speaks for Islam?* (2007), Esposito and Mogahed reported the results of interviews and questionnaires administered by the Gallup World Poll survey. The study examined the way Muslims think about different topics like jihad, 9/11, democracy, women's emancipation, and the West, with the findings revealing important public attitudes. This research also aims to gather information on the views about certain issues but employs different methods by investigating the comments and posts uploaded on the Internet. This is done to understand what this highly important segment in different Arab and non-Arab countries—regarded as influential and possibly educated since they can write and use the computer—believes. In particular, the project's aim is to show the impact of some Western encounters with Islam and how they influenced the lives of people living in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The research analyzes the online reaction in relation to the popular street demonstrations that took place in different parts of the Muslim world as a protest against the perceived insults against Islam and Prophet Muhammed. The main focus is on the online reaction toward these issues that give a complementary picture to what actually happened on the ground. The work is based on quantitative and qualitative analyses since it analyzes thousands of clips and the accompanying comments associated with these controversial issues.

In our modern time, social media plays a major role in people's lives and the Muslim world is no exception. With the growing Internet penetration in the Arab world especially after the Arab Spring events, Internet and social media are becoming increasingly important. Some scholars believe that social media can become instrumental in uniting and sometimes radicalizing the public in relation to political and social issues. The most recent example to support this claim is related to the protests that erupted in the Arab world in September 2012 due to one YouTube clip that was made against Islam and its Prophet.

It is important to note here that empirical studies on social media religious use in the Arab world are few and mostly limited to certain Arab countries (Abdullah 2007a, b; Bunt 2009; El-Nawawy and Khamis 2009; Whitaker and Varghese 2009; Aouragh 2011). The main part of the project is based on the discussion and analysis of the political debates that were generated in the Muslim world on some controversial issues such the Muhammed's Cartoons, burning the Quran, and "Innocence of Muslims" film.

Indeed, there are numerous encounters that deserve to be studied in detail, but only four case studies have been incorporated in this book. Other important incidents include the online reactions towards banning the niqab and burkini in France, Charlie Hebdo's caricatures of Muhammed, Ground Zero Mosque, and the banning of minarets in Switzerland. With regard to the latter, a referendum in Switzerland was held in November 2009, and 57.5% approved banning the construction of new minarets in the country. The minaret ban attracted the attention of fellow European activists famous for their anti-Islamic views including Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Indeed, one of the earliest contemporary controversial issues is Salman Rushdi's *Satanic Verses* (1988). Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa in 1989 against Rushdie heightened the tension over this issue, which was regarded as a blasphemous topic by devout Muslims. However, the Iranian government did not continue supporting the fatwa against Rushdie, especially with the coming of the more moderate government of President Mohammad Khatami, which publicly announced that it did not back it in 1998. Despite this fact, Rushdie's controversial book was brought into attention once more in September 2012, which coincided with the release of "Innocence of Muslims" anti-Islamic film on YouTube. Hassan Sanei, chairman of the 15 Khordad, which is affiliated with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, increased the bounty over killing Rushdie to $3.3 million. Other controversial encounters include the release of the 11minutes 'Submission' film in 2004 by the former Dutch MP, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and its director Theo van Gogh. The latter was stabbed to death by a Moroccan-Dutch citizen in the Netherlands in the same year. Other incidents include the 'Everybody Draw Mohammed Day', which was organized in May 2010 as a reaction against censoring the US TV show 'South Park 201'. The program producers decided to stop airing the show in April 2010 because it involved Prophet Muhammed. In general, it is very hard to include all of these issues in one publication due to the lack of space, but I believe it is very

important for future researchers to pay close attention to the above incidents in order to get a better insight into their online and probably offline influence.

In terms of the book's structure, this chapter presents the methodology and theoretical framework including understanding how YouTube has become part of the global public sphere for online activism and protests, with emphasis on the concept of online Ummah. The rationale behind using four case studies only is that the empirical findings are similar in connection to the analysis of videos and comments. Other case studies like some of the ones cited above could have been included in this book, but the results would have not been largely different. Further, there seems to be some high level of global interest in some of the case studies included here especially the "Innocence of Muslims" film and the "Muhammad cartoons" controversy. By using the worldwide Google Explore search from 2004 to 2017, I examined the word "Muhammed," which reached its highest peak in 2006 coinciding with the increasing popularity of the Muhammed cartoons incident. By examining the top 25 terms associated with "Muhammed", 12 terms in different languages reference the above incident, showing the importance of this event. Also, I searched for the word "Muslims" and it reached its highest peak in 2012, which is also the same year the "Innocence of Muslims" film was released. In this regard, the term "innocence" is ranked in third and fourth place in relation to their association with "Muslims."

The following chapters deal with four case studies that have received intense online discussion on YouTube. Chapter 2 concentrates on the online reaction to the Muhammed's cartoons controversy. The publication of 12 cartoons depicting Muhammed by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten on the September 30, 2005 created a great deal of controversy over self-censorship, freedom of speech, and accusations of religious incitement. Several protests were organized by Muslim activists, and later tens of people were killed and hundreds injured due to the violent reactions. Chapter 3 concentrates on the burning of the Quran incidents. Terry Jones' proposal to burn 200 copies of the Quran was first sent on Twitter but turned within a couple of months into an international crisis. Jones suggested burning the Muslims' holy book on the anniversary of 9/11 attacks in 2010, calling it "International Burn a Koran Day," then he rallied support in order to "bring awareness to the dangers of Islam and that the Koran is leading people to hell," as he claimed. The fourth chapter deals with the short film "Fitna," which was

produced by the Dutch MP, Geert Wilders, while the final chapter discusses the "Innocence of Muslims" YouTube film. This was a 14-minute anti-Islam film directed and produced by Sam Bacile (Nakoula Basseley Nakoula) and his son Abanob. All of the above case studies are linked because they resulted in online and sometimes offline protests.

In brief, the research project aims at understanding the online reaction towards issues related to Islam by using empirical evidence instead of solely relying on interpretive analysis. The discussion includes an analysis of the way online and offline (street) protests complemented each other. The main research questions asked are: What did the online public think of the controversial issues surrounding Islam? What kind of sentiments did these encounters generate in online readers? The study combines different disciplines such as social media and mass communication studies, political sciences, international relations, and intercultural and interfaith communications. As will be discussed in the coming chapter, there is no coincidence that the case studies examined here and many of the above controversial incidents involve people who are affiliated with far-right groups based in Europe and North America as there have been systematic, coordinated, and well-planned networked campaigns running for many years that target Islam, immigration, and multiculturalism. Many far-right groups have been responsible for anti-Islamic inflammatory online and offline campaigns that mostly resulted in angry Muslim protests, which often end in violence. For example, research has shown that there are some Danish Facebook pages that are "disguised as radical Islamist pages" designed to provoke "racist and anti-Muslim reactions as well as negative sentiments towards refugees and immigrants in Denmark" (Farkas et.al. 2017). In general, the violence that occurs is a "response of groups who took offense, rather than those who gave it" (George 2014, p. 85).

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CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Abstract This chapter offers background accounts on the use of various social media outlets in the Arab world with emphasis on YouTube. It also provides full details on the methodology and theoretical accounts on online religion, flaming, social movements, online activism, extremism, online communities, and selective exposure because of their relevance to the scope of this study.

Keywords Social media · Social networking sites · Middle East Arabic

Social media is growing rapidly in the Arab world with more than 125 million individuals using the Internet in the Arab region, and more than 53 million actively using social networking technologies (Dubai School of Government 2013). Also, Arabic language has become one of the fastest growing languages on Twitter with more than 2 million tweets posted everyday, which marks a great shift from few previous years (Semiocast 2011). In the Arab world where Internet penetration is over 52.2% of the total population (Internet World Stat 2015), Facebook reached a 20.9% penetration among Internet users with over 49 million users as of November 15, 2015 (Internet World Stat 2015). In 2017, Internet penetration in the Middle East was higher than the average around the world with some countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain reaching usage levels that are found in North America and

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Western Europe (Internet World Stat 2017a, b). Other Arab countries—Iraq (36.2%), Syria (29.1%), Yemen (24.1%), Palestinian territories (44.7%), Algeria (36.8%), Egypt (36.5%), Libya (43.7%), Sudan (25.8%), and Somalia (5.8%)—have low Internet penetration rates in comparison to the other Arab countries (Internet World Stat 2017a, b). For this book, YouTube is chosen because it is the most popular online video platform, and it is ranked as the second and sometimes third most popular website on the Internet (Alexa 2017; SimilarWeb 2017). In fact, Facebook users are rapidly growing since it is the most popular social network site (SNS), followed by Google+ and then Twitter (Arab Social Media Report 2013, p. 4; Dubai School of Government 2013, p. 13). Indeed, YouTube is regarded as one very powerful social media outlet because it plays a major role in today's world. This is because it has become the most popular video platform online as it delivers two out of every five videos viewed around the world (Burgess and Green 2009). By October 2011, there were about 1.2 billion people age 15 and older [who] watched 201.4 billion videos online globally' (comScore 2011). Statistics published by YouTube reveal that more than 800 million unique users watch clips on YouTube every month, amounting to more than 3 billion hours of video clips. Almost every minute, 72 hours of video are uploaded online, and by 2011 YouTube had over 1 trillion views, making up 140 views for each person in the world (YouTube Statistics 2012). According to a study conducted by The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism in 2012, YouTube has become a news source for many people around the globe. The study, which lasted 15 months from January 2011 to March 2012, concluded the following:

> Citizens are creating their own videos about news and posting them. They are also actively sharing news videos produced by journalism professionals. And news organizations are taking advantage of citizen content and incorporating it into their journalism. Consumers, in turn, seem to be embracing the interplay in what they watch and share, creating a new kind of television news. (*Journalism.org* 2012)

Several news corporations and public service broadcasting channels have built online audience by making use of their YouTube channels even more than political entities that use the same platform during election times (May 2010; Van Dijck and Poell 2014). For example, the majority

of Saudi princes and officials consult their publics about important policy issues by using Twitter and other social media outlets, and their audiences get actively engaged like the case of Omar Hussein who responds via his popular YouTube channel that has over 1.5 followers (Reuters 2016). Further, following the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), many Arab governments realized the growing need to be more visible online in order to counter the extremists' narrative. For example, the Jordanian Grand Mufti's office established an electronic department that is staffed by young and social-media-literate scholars who are more engaged with different online audiences in order to delegitimize their opponent's ideology (Casciani 2015).

Based on statistics offered by Alexa, the percentage of YouTube global visitors from the Arab world in relation to worldwide viewership is: Saudi Arabia (1.5%), Egypt (1.0%), and Algeria (0.7%). In Saudi Arabia and Algeria, YouTube is ranked the second most visited website and is the highest ranking worldwide (Alexa 2012). In the Arab region, 285 million videos are viewed every day and more than two hours of video are uploaded every minute, putting it in second position for video views in the world. Saudi Arabia leads the region with the most playbacks followed by Egypt, Morocco, and the UAE. In Saudi Arabia, 50% of all views are from mobile devices, while 40% of all views in the UAE are from mobile devices (Arab Social Media Repot 2013, p. 4). Indeed, YouTube's role in enhancing the public sphere and political activism is very significant since it is a platform for disseminating messages due to the easy manner of uploading and editing video clips and comments (Christensen 2007; Jarrett 2010; Thorson et al. 2010). YouTube is regarded as a "communicative space for deliberation and dissent' which allows civic cultures to have 'antagonism and inclusive political debate" (Uldam and Askanius 2013, p. 1185). In other words, YouTube enhances deliberative democracy and sustains the public sphere because it offers a venue for the powerful and those who are powerless. Before discussing the controversial issues that are linked to Islam, it is important to provide a theoretical framework and elaborate on the methodology followed in this study. In this research, a few theoretical concepts including online religion, online flaming, and selective exposure. The first theoretical concept discussed is online religion, which is one field of Internet Research.

It is important note here that YouTube is not unique as other social media outlets have also become popular in the Middle East. According

to the figures provided by Alexa, Facebook is the premier site in eight Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia) and the second in five other Arab countries (Morocco, Palestinian territory, Qatar, Sudan, and Yemen) and in the position in three other countries (Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE). Bahrain is the only Arab country where Facebook is the fourth top website (Alexa 2014). According to a study conducted by Dubai School of Government, it was estimated that the "total number of Facebook users in the Arab world stands at 21,361,863 (Dec. 2010), up from 11,978,300 (Jan. 2010)" (2011, 4). Egypt comprises about 22% of the total number of Facebook users in the Arab world with around 4.7 million users. By the end of May 2013, the total number of Facebook users in the Arab world was about 54,552,875, which is higher than Facebook users in June 2012 that were estimated to be 45,194,452 with 68% of users being below 30 years old and females constituting around 33.4% (Arab Social Media Report 2013, p. 13). It is also worth noting that the highest age concentration remains between 15 and 29 years old, who constitute about 70 to 75% of users. On average, for every two male Facebook users there is one female user (Dubai School of Government 2011, 2012). As for the use of Arabic language on Facebook, it is regarded as one of the fastest growing languages (Dubai School of Government 2012, p. 7). The study by the Arab Thought Foundation revealed that among the top tend topics discussed on Facebook in the Arab world are arranged respectively as follows: social issues; literature, culture, and thought; education and learning; economy; media and free expression; sciences; political issues; security and crime; development; political organizations (2011, p. 29). In the following section, a discussion on online religion is presented and is linked to offline religious practices.

Online Religion

Media and religion are both closely linked and are still playing important roles in most of our lives. Almost 64% of North Americans have used the Internet for religious or faith activities (Hoover et al. 2004). However, the academic study of religion and the media is still under-researched (Stout and Buddenbaum 2002, p. 5). This fact applies to the study of almost all types of media and religion aspects along various formats, including online media (Campbell 2010) and the "analysis of religious

content in editorial cartoons" (Kaylor 2012, p. 247). In her survey of research conducted on religion online, Campbell found five main research areas: "social practices, online–offline connections, community, identity, and authority online" (2013). Some of these areas especially online–offline connections, community and identity will be the focus of this study.

Previous empirical studies on the link between media and Islam are also few especially when it comes to online media, and most of them were limited to Islamic blogs, forums, and websites (Bunt 2000, 2003, 2009; El-Nawawy and Khamis 2009). The focus of the previous studies was mostly on E-jihad and the role of YouTube was rarely mentioned despite its popularity and wide public reach. Bunt does make passing references to YouTube but with no elaborate discussion. For example, he refers to "Ummah Films," which offer entertainment outlets in an acceptable Islamic manner and mentioned that they "gave an outlet to a number of speakers on popular issues via YouTube and other film sites, which generated interest through populist and at times humours approach to contemporary issues" (Bunt 2009, pp. 50–51).

Also, there are few studies that deal with the Arabs' online response toward controversial issues related to Islam. For example, Douai and Nofal studied the Arab readers' online responses on Al Arabiya.net and Al Jazeera.net toward the banning of minaret building in Switzerland and the Ground Zero Mosque controversy in the USA (2012). The study investigated 4539 comments and categorized them as either "support," "opposition," or "neutral." The study revealed that 43% of Al Arabiya's online readers opposed the Swiss government's minaret ban, while 33% of them supported the decision. The remaining 24% of readers were neutral. As for the Al Jazeera online readers, 20% opposed the ban, while 56% supported it and the remaining 24% were neutral. In relation to Ground Zero Mosque controversy, 39% of Al Arabiya's online readers supported the construction of the Mosque, while 35% rejected its idea, and 26% of the online readers expressed neutral voices. Regarding Al-Jazeera readers, 59% supported the idea of building the Mosque, while 20% opposed it, and 21% had neutral views (Douai and Nofal 2012).

In terms of political issues, Rasha Abdulla studied 752 message boards, on three Arab portals: Masrawy, Islam Online, and Arabia, that dealt with the Arabs' reaction toward 9/11 attacks. Her study concluded that 43.1% of the respondents condemned the attacks, while 30.2% gave

a justification and somehow approved it (2007, p. 1072). The remaining responses (26.7%) contained various other reactions. Also, Conway and Mcinerney (2008) analyzed 50 jihadi videos on Iraq uploaded by 30 YouTube users. They also studied 1443 comments posted by 940 commenters and provided demographic details on the users for example, their age and geographic location as well as other relevant information like number of views, ratings, and number of comments. The study revealed that the majority of posters are under 35 years of age and mostly reside in the USA. The following section contains a discussion about the concept of social movements in relation to religious activism and the virtual Ummah.

Virtual Ummah and Online Activism

Among the important issues discussed in the above studies is the concept of Ummah ("Islamic" nation) (Saunders 2008) on the Internet, which is also termed "virtual Ummah" or "online Ummah" with a special focus on Muslim communities living in the diaspora (Mandaville 2001, 2003; Roy 2004; Al-Rawi 2015a, b, 2016, 2017). Indeed, the Internet has unified many Muslims from around the world in spreading their messages and consuming and producing Islamic materials. Most importantly, it has given some people a much needed collective identity that binds them together, especially in connection to issues of online religious activism and protests. In other words, the "[d]istributive and networked technologies are helping Muslims to forge and sustain distanciated links reminiscent of the umma concept" (Mandaville 2001, p. 190). Jon Anderson (2003) claims that the first Muslim bloggers were students who studied at Western universities who then created online communities for Muslim students' Associations and uploaded religious texts. Indeed, The virtual Ummah constitutes what Benkler (2006) calls the "networked public sphere" or what Castells terms the "global network society" or the "global public sphere" that is "built around the media communication system and Internet networks, particularly in the social spaces of the Web 2.0, as exemplified by YouTube, MySpace, Facebook, and the growing blogosphere" (Castells 1996–1998; Castells 2008, p. 90). In their study of Arabic blogosphere, Etling et al. (2010) found that Arab bloggers cluster around national political concerns, but the issue of Palestine unites the different clusters. Interestingly, bloggers mostly link to some SNSs especially YouTube followed by Al Jazeera (2010).

Al-Rawi (2016) discusses how social-media platforms like Facebook offer users some online venues to express religious thoughts. He studied the online reactions towards the "Innocence of Muslims" film on Facebook and theorized that this platform functions like a virtual mosque as Muslims periodically post virtual supplications and prayers similar to the way they practice their religion offline. Further, SNSs can be regarded as platforms for virtual collective prayers. For example, when some people are terminally sick, they post their videos or images on SNSs, hoping that they will receive collective prayers, encouragement, and love from their friends and families. A similar practice is manifested when an online announcement is made on the death of a friend or relative as the connected audiences are expected to react with compassion and sympathy that are often marked with religious sentiments. In other cases, some religious rituals and myths have become associated with SNS use. For instance, some people in the Middle East would post a message that is often associated with a sensational and religious image, commenting: "you will go to Hell" if you do not retweet, like, share, or comment (Abdallah 2016), prompting thousands of believers to react vigorously.

In the case of the Arab world as it is elsewhere, governments, major corporations, and some religious authorities own mainstream media channels and control the flow of news and messages, while the majority of people are left without a channel to voice their hopes, frustrations, and fears. Hence, social media networks function as an alternative media channel. Mandaville (2001) argues that the new Muslim intellectual often challenges the authority of his government and the mosque and situates himself in "spaces which institutionalised forms of politics cannot reach' and online media helped him to achieve" (p. 190). Akou studied the online discussion of the Islamic Hijab on online forums and found that the platform allows ordinary users to be involved in ijtihad or interpretation of religious texts, stating: "By transcending some of the boundaries of space, time and the body, the Internet has emerged as a place where Muslims from diverse backgrounds can meet to debate ideas and flesh them out through shared experiences" (2010, p. 331).

Further, as the Internet crosses borders and allows people from different places to be interconnected (Papacharissi 2002; Volkmer 2003), it started to make up the foundations of the global public sphere by enhancing and strengthening the link among people sharing the same political or religious convictions (Castells 2001; Dahlberg 2007); these alternative media channels like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube

provided the platform for collective and connective self-expression (Price and Cappella 2002; Segerberg and Bennett 2011; Bennett and Segerberg 2011; Al-Rawi 2014b), especially for the oppressed and others who are not represented in politics or the mainstream media (Neumayer 2012). Philip Howard refers to the increasing importance of the civil society`s role in the Islamic world in the sense that they "learned to use ICTs mostly to attract international media attention by sharing digital content that undermines local authority and strengthens civic ties to diasporas" (Howard 2011, p. 150). In this context, Douai and Nofal assert that "YouTube and social media have grown more popular, and gained more legitimacy because they are perceived to be autonomous from their authoritarian states, unlike the mass media landscape" (2012, p. 269). As a result, Arabs and Muslims from all over the world share views and opinions on different issues relevant to their region and religion including politics, fatwas, and basic guidance. In this study, I argue that the online users whose comments and videos are discussed here use YouTube as an alternative media channel because it provides a venue for free expression and is freely accessible and largely uncensored unlike mainstream media outlets. Those users can freely protest and express their views in relation to their religious activism, and thus create a collective and connective online social movement.

Many scholars regard social movements as "collective organized actions to bring about or resist change by means of various historically conditioned strategies" (West and Blumberg 1991, p. 4; Tilly 1978). These social movements seek to form what is called a collective identity as their members are "involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; are linked by dense informal networks; [and they] share a distinct collective identity" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, p. 20). They emerge as a reaction against some "repressive conditions" that are found in a given social system, and they aim at mobilizing the public around a goal to create a favorable change (Tilly 1978; Zald and McCarthy 1987). Snow et al. (2008) further clarify that "collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others engaging in various types of collective action, such as protesting in the streets, that dramatize those grievances and concerns and demand that something be done about them" (p. 3). According to the resource mobilization theory, which focuses on how social movements are organized and developed, social activists must make use of the available resources around them (Jenkins 1981). In this case, this is

done by relying on SNSs channels, like YouTube, and reducing the time and effort invested on resources that they cannot access such as mainstream media channels, state funding, or massive social support. By making use of information technologies, many groups are organized online due to the speed, relative freedom, and ease of doing it, creating what is called "pressure from below" that circumvent the traditional hierarchies of power (Juris 2005 p. 341). McAdam et al. (1996) confirm that social movements need three components in order to emerge and develop: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes. Mobilizing structures refer to the mechanisms that allow activists to organize themselves and be involved in social action (McAdam et al. 2001). Again, SNSs play a major role here. Second, opportunity structures denote the importance of the context or circumstances in creating a social movement. Based on this hypothesis, I argue that the emergence of the controversial issues discussed in this book provide the necessary context for online protests. Finally, the framing processes refer to the way social movement organizers use culturally shared values to present, discuss, and frame their cause in a way that creates a desirable impact (McAdam et al. 2001).

Online social activism is another relevant concept that needs to be elaborated. The Internet has been a very effective platform for activism (Chadwick and Howard 2009), and SNSs in particular have attracted more people worldwide to join in public debates on different political or societal issues. Further, Segerberg and Bennet (2011) argue that the role of social media channels in today's societies is growing so fast that they entered the phase of protest action in the sense that they have become part of the tools of social and political activism. As explained above, one of the reasons behind the popularity of social media channels stems from ordinary citizens' frustration with "social control and manipulation by powerful political, corporate and media forces" (Keren 2006, 149). Another reason a result of the exclusion of many groups from mainstream media channels, so they resort to SNSs to freely express their views and organize their movement (Kahn and Kellner 2004; Carroll and Hackett 2006; Bennett 2003). As a result, SNSs have become the preferred medium, functioning as alternative media channels (Chang 2005). In his explanation of Islamism in connection to social movements, Bayat mentions that Islamists feel there is an ongoing struggle against the "universalising secular modernity" in some Islamic societies, so they seek "difference, cultural autonomy, alternative polity and morality" (2005,

p. 894). Indeed, SNSs do constitute the very fabric of the public sphere by enhancing deliberative democracy and social contention though the bonds that link protestors and activists together do not last long (Burgess and Green 2009, p. 77; Calhoun 2004).

Further, several previous studies highlighted the link between online and offline religious practices among Christians, but there is very little empirically derived evidence on Muslims' online and offline religious practices. Campbell asserts that the two spheres are both important and they seem to complement each other as a seemingly "new form of religious culture emerge both online and offline that is best described as 'networked religion'" (2010, p. 193). Other scholars, for example, Young (2004) and Herring (2005) emphasize the link between online and offline religions especially with the rise of cyberchurches, which allow the faithful to worship and perform religious practices online (Campbell 2012, p. 69). Further, Kluver and Cheong (2007) found evidence that traditional religious preachers are finding SNSs very helpful tools to spread their messages and connect with online audiences. In this study, YouTube is seen as an online platform wherein the faithful and others interested in Islam can gather to discuss important issues related to their religion similar to the way Muslims gather offline in a mosque to pray and then debate various issues. According to Resnick's normalization theory, offline activists are moving online to spread their messages and organize, making the Internet a polarized platform. Boyd and Ellison (2007) assert in their literature review on SNS use that "online and offline experiences are deeply entwined" (2007, p. 223; see also Boase et al. 2006). However, there are few studies that examined the connection between the two settings. Though they focused on a different topic related to social capital and online relationships, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe affirmed the existence of this link, but confirmed that it is still not clear "how online and offline modes of communication replace, complement, and facilitate one another" (2011, p. 874). Further, and in relation to media and political attitudes, Wojcieszak mentioned that "although researchers recognize the connection between online and offline activities, not many analyses have addressed the interplay between both milieus" (2010, p. 638). Hence, this study can shed some further light onto this important aspect of media and computer-mediated communication research area as the researcher attempts to link the wider ideological context and the offline protests that erupted with online practices and sentiments expressed.

It is important and relevant to mention here that there is no single Islam around the world since it is not and has never been a "monolithic entity." Instead, there are many "Islams" (Al-Azmeh 2009) even when examining one specific doctrine in one country like Turkey (Gulalp 2003) or when studying any other religion. Borrowing from Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (1991), I argue that Islam itself is an imagined concept, similar to all other religions, since Muslims identify with Islam in various manners, shapes, and ways due to their varied cultural backgrounds and understanding of this religion. Anderson's concept refers to online and offline members who are loosely linked to each other and whose idea seems to exist in the minds of the community members alone. This is an imagined community because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991, 224). Similar to Islam, Muslims will never be able to know everyone else, yet many believe that they share some common values. Indeed, this "imagined community," which is a term applied to communities in general rather than online communities alone, has several positive functions that include offering a sense of unity, hope, and strength to its individuals, which will ultimately provide psychological and social empowerment. This is directly linked to the concept of online Ummah that is discussed above. In interviews with a range of Muslims, Vox news (2016) asked the following question: What does it mean to be Muslim? The answer was simply relevant to who is talking as there can be 1.7 billion different answers. This notion of imagined religion is valid when one examines the way some European politicians argue that they need a customized Islam in their own countries, especially after the increasing terrorist attacks by ISIS. For example, the former French President, Francois Hollande, stated the following: "What we need to succeed in together is the creation of an Islam of France" (Hume and Said-Moorhouse 2016). In Germany, one of Angela Merkel's close allies mentioned that the country needs to make a "German Islam" that is compatible with the values of "liberalism and tolerance" (Copley 2016). Many other EU countries are searching for common ground between Muslim immigrants and mainstream society in which mutual values can co-exist. Based on the empirical findings of this study, Muslims react differently to the issues explored here because they have different understandings of how and what they should say and possibly do when their religion is criticized. This is all

related to the sense of religious identity that they possess, which varies based on the differences in the cultural context.

Finally and in relation to the role of the diaspora, it is relevant to briefly discuss the impact Muslims living in the West have on strengthening the global public sphere that make up the basis of the virtual Ummah. Karim Karim argues that diasporic communities living in the West are among the most active members in producing cultural content. "There appears to be an attempt by diasporic participants in cyberspace to create a virtual community that eliminates the distances that separate them in the real world….Time and space are seemingly held in suspension in this effort to reconstitute the community and to exchange cultural knowledge held in the diaspora" (2007, p. 273). Indeed, Muslims living in the diaspora feel an urge to assert their identities and religious beliefs amid what some view as a threat to their core convictions. Olivier Roy argues that Islamic revival, or "re-Islamization," in Europe and North America results from the efforts of westernized Muslims to retain their faith and identity in a non-Muslim context (2004). In some cases, this results in global networking efforts or what Olesen calls "Transnational Activism" to counter what is believed to be Western attacks against Islam like the case of the Muhammed cartoons controversy (Olesen 2009). Yet, Bayat, building on Benedict Anderson's imagined-communities concept, rightly argues that some of these networks are built on what he called "imagined solidarities" because of the weak links and differences between the various clusters that form the basis of a social movement (2005). Alternatively, SNS and ICT use were employed by the civil society in many Islamic countries as tools "with which to respond to Islamic fundamentalism" (Howard 2011, p. 148). In general, social media networks are used by many Muslims in the diaspora for religious and faith-related issues that serve to keep them closely connected to other followers in their home countries and elsewhere. In the following section, a brief discussion is given on online flaming.

Online Flaming and Ideological Extremism

Flaming, which involves swearing and the use of obscene language, seems to be very common among YouTube and other social network users (Crystal 2001; O'Sullivan and Flanagin 2003; Alonzo and Aiken 2004). In one study on political expression, 32.7% of the YouTube online messages were found to be impolite in comparison 23% on

Facebook (Halpern and Gibbs 2013). In fact, YouTube comments are described as being "notorious dens of filth, racism, and misogyny" (Dunn 2013), and it was only recently that Google decided to run these comments through Google+ in order to decrease unruly comments, although it reversed its decision later. In his study on religion and YouTube, Theobald rightly observes:

> despite the dynamic nature of the medium, the quality of interfaith relations online, particularly on YouTube, is neither new nor revolutionary, but, instead, reflects the centuries of animosity that characterised dialogue among the pious in the years before the nineteenth century. Historically, contact between the advocates of different religions typically resulted in a battle for souls; conversion was the aim, ridicule or polemic the method, apologetics the defence (2009, p. 326).

Based on empirical study on YouTube comments, religion seems to be the most discussed topic (Thelwall et al. 2011). Further, Strangelove asserts that a "considerable number of video bloggers on YouTube engage in debates over religion. Some of the larger areas of debate are focused on evolution, abortion, atheism, Scientology, Mormonism, Christianity, and Islam" (2010, p. 148). Unfortunately, many of these debates can develop into heated discussions that often involve insults and curses, mostly due to the anonymity that YouTube offers. Burgess and Green call it the flame war or "YouTube drama," which occurs when a "flurry of video posts clusters around an internal 'controversy' or an antagonistic debate between one or more YouTubers" that "can sometimes be based around controversial debates (especially religion, atheism, or politics)" (2009, p. 97). Sometimes, online flaming is practiced due to other issues that concern the public. For example, Gully found in his study on "soccer nationalism" that YouTube contained a great deal of flaming videos and comments about the soccer competition between Algeria and Egypt (2012).

In this context, it is important to discuss the online disinhibition effect because it sheds light on some of the reasons behind online flaming. The disinhibition effect "releases deeper aspects of intrapsychic structure, that it unlocks the true needs, emotions, and self attributes that dwell beneath surface personality presentations" (Suler 2004, p. 324). Here, Lange's ethnographic study reveals that YouTube manifests two types of relationships among the youth in relation to social

network behavior. The first one is the "publicly private" behavior in which video posters identities are disclosed but content access is limited to the public. On the other hand, the "privately public" behavior indicates that YouTube content is widely shared and accessible; however, personal details of the posters are often limited (2007). Since the identities of the posters are mostly hidden or are "privately public," they seem to be dissociative in expressing their views. According to the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDEs) some people may experience what is called deindividuation or an enhanced sense of in-group when interacting online. "Deinvidualization theory proposes that behavior becomes socially deregulated under conditions of anonymity and group immersion, as a result of reduced self-awareness" (Spears et al. 2002, p. 94). Further, Suler (2004) identities six factors that lead to the disinhibition effect: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimization of authority. Two of the above factors are of relevance here: dissociative anonymity and solipsistic introjection. The former refers to the kind of behavior manifested when "people have the opportunity to separate their actions online from their in-person lifestyle and identity, they feel less vulnerable about self-disclosing and acting out" (Suler 2004, p. 322). Additionally, solipsistic introjection is another psychological condition in which "People may feel that their mind has merged with the mind of the online companion. Reading another person's message might be experienced as a voice within one's head, as if that person's psychological presence and influence have been assimilated or introjected into one's psyche" (ibid., p. 323). Many comments analyzed in this study seem to fall within these two concepts. In relation to the dissociative anonymity factor, some YouTube commenters who regularly insult Muhammed and Islam seem to act based on the fact that they remain anonymous; otherwise, they would be attacked online or even offline in many Muslim societies that prohibit insulting the prophet of Islam and/or his family members (Associated Press 2012). For instance, a Saudi journalist, Hamza Kashgari, was once accused of insulting Muhammed in one of his public tweets; as a result, he was forced to flee Saudi Arabia to Malaysia where he was later deported to his home country. Kashgari's tweet generated over 30,000 angry responses and many death threats (BBC 2012). The journalist later apologized and asked for forgiveness. Others who were less restricted in revealing their identities got threats. For example, over 100 Arab-Christian Canadians who are mostly Egyptian Coptics

living in the diaspora got threats from Al-Qaeda group who called them "dogs in diaspora" for their attempts to convert Muslims and for being "vocal about their opposition to Islam" in different online platforms (CBC News 2010). In other words, flaming often occurs when Islam's extreme opponents and supporters interact online as these two groups share a binary vision of the world that is only black and white. Edward Said's notion of the clash of ignorance is relevant here as each group practices one kind of othering viewing either Islam or Christianity as static and monolithic religions; each group believes that the other is inferior to them and their religious ideology is fundamentally flawed (Said 2001; Al-Rawi 2014d).

In connection to the above discussion, a report issued by the University of California Berkeley and the Council on American-Islamic Relations mentioned the names of 74 groups that contribute to Islamophobia in the USA. The majority of these groups is known for their far-right affiliations. From 2008 and 2013, about $206 million was spent to promote Islamophobia including launching ongoing media campaigns and supporting other inflammatory efforts since the primary purpose of 33 of these groups "is to promote prejudice against, or hatred of, Islam and Muslims" (Kazem 2016). Some of these groups include: Abstraction Fund, Clarion Project, David Horowitz Freedom Center, Middle East Forum, American Freedom Law Center, Center for Security Policy, Investigative Project on Terrorism, Jihad Watch and Act! for America (Ibid.). Incidentally, many of the above groups are closely connected to conservative US politicians, especially those who are actively involved in the current Trump administration. During the 2016 US elections and the Brexit event in the UK, the link between various far-right groups has become clearer as they have shown strong connections between them, especially that they share similar goals and values. For example, the UK non-governmental organization (NGO), Hope not Hate, stated that "White nationalists and UK conspiracy theorists have helped spread fake news across the world," citing the examples of 28 far-right groups that are active in the UK (Townsend 2017). For example, Paul Watson, who is the editor of the InfoWars conspiracy news website, is based in London, having more than 480,000 followers on Twitter and 760,000 YouTube subscribers. He is believed to be responsible for creating and disseminating news such as "Is Hillary Dying?" hoax (ibid.) as well as many fake news stories on Muslim immigrants. Other far-right groups that are known for their anti-Islamic stances include the English

Defence League and the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA), which has several branches in Western countries including Canada. For the former, the group's Facebook page administrator was interviewed by BBC with regard to his online and offline activities. The article stated:

> Being an admin was possibly the most meaningful position [he] had ever held. People listened to him. He had some respect, power, affirmation. He loved it and spent most of the day there. He devoured articles that others in his group had posted, or that he found himself, about the danger Islam posed to the UK. He started attacking Muslims on other Facebook pages, and they attacked him back. Each side polarising and radicalising the other. Paul was living in an exciting Manichean world of friends and enemies, right and wrong – in which he was the chief protagonist. (BBC Magazine 2015)

This connection between different far-right and anti-Muslim groups can be further manifested in their joint efforts to protest and organize rallies such as the case of the Ground Zero Mosque controversy in New York, which garnered the attention of Daniel Pipes, Pamela Geller, and Robert Spencer who are known for their avid support for the far-right Dutch MP, Geert Wilders. In the Netherlands, the 2017 elections showed how some far-right members expressed sympathy and support for Wilders; for example, Pipes and the foundation he runs, the Middle East Forum, donated money in "six figures" to assist Wilders with the legal fees following the "Fitna" trial. He described Wilders as "the most important European alive today" (Hakim and Schuetze 2017). Further, David Horowitz, a US rightwing activist who opposes Muslim immigration, donated about $150,000 to Mr. Wilders's Party for Freedom to support his Wilders in the 2017 Dutch election (Fang 2017), stating: "I think he's the Paul Revere of Europe. Geert Wilders is a hero, and I think he's a hero of the most important battle of our times, the battle to defend free speech" (Hakim and Schuetze 2017). Indeed, whenever a new controversial issue surrounding Islam emerges, the same groups and figures cited above appear in partisan and mainstream media to further promote their ideological stances and discuss the issue of free speech. There is no doubt that many racist, Islamophobic, white supremacist, and hateful comments can assist some right-wing politicians in their efforts in gaining more support from voters. For example, a US diplomatic cable

revealed before Wilders' release of his "Fitna" film in 2008 that he "himself appears to be using the commotion around the anticipated release of the film to attack his domestic political adversaries on the right and the left, as well as to focus extensive attention on his anti-Muslim message, which resonates with his own domestic constituency" (Wikileaks 2008a). In the following section, a discussion of the concept of selective exposure is presented because this theoretical framework can be helpful in explaining the way online communities gather on YouTube.

Selective Exposure and Online Communities

In order to explain why online users search for particular YouTube videos that either support or oppose their values and beliefs, it is important to discuss the concept of selective exposure, which is rooted in Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance; the latter states that human beings seek consistency when confronted with contradictory views (Zillmann and Bryant 2013). In other words, when there is some kind of inconsistency or dissonance, people tend to become intellectually and/or psychologically distressed or unstable, hence, they seek information that corresponds with their existing beliefs and values (Cooper 2007). This is because people are "seldom passive absorbers of data; rather, we selectively seek, choose, and screen information we use" (Cotton 2013, p. 11).

There seems to be a close correlation between selective exposure and partisan preferences, which largely affect the kind of media messages one searches for (Chaffee et al. 2001; Meffert et al. 2006). Over time analyses indicate that partisan selective exposure leads to polarization and people's political beliefs motivate their media use (Stroud 2010). In this context, Tsfati et al. (2013) found that opinion-climate perceptions have an influence on the selective exposure to some ideological media channels, and several other scholars found evidence that supports the above claim by investigating various media outlets (Donsbach 1991; Sunstein 2001; Mutz and Martin 2001; Galston 2003; Graf and Aday 2008). Further, Brundidge and Rice (2009) emphasize that selective exposure to similar media messages might lead to a "narrowed domain of political discourse" as the different parties engaged in discussions are more likely to exhibit rigid views. Indeed, this might automatically lead to creating audience enclaves (Sunstein 2009) who sometimes resort to flaming or

venting negative sentiments when encountered by opposing views as explained above.

It is important to mention here that the Internet plays a significant role due to the fact that it offers an "amplification in selectivity" (Brundidge and Rice 2009, p. 150). Johnson et al. (2009) found that blog users practice selective exposure when seeking political information especially among active users, who are highly educated, partisan, and politically active online and offline. Further, Johnson et al. (2011) studied how their respondents practiced selective exposure in viewing political websites, but there was no evidence of selective avoidance practiced. In the case of Facebook, An et al. (2013) investigated news articles shared on Facebook and found evidence that selective exposure does exist on social media since "users predominantly share like-minded news articles and avoid conflicting ones, and partisans are more likely to do that."

On the other hand, there are other media studies that challenge the above theory. For example, Webster and Ksiazek used network analysis metrics and Nielsen data on television and Internet use and found overlapping patterns of public attention rather than enclaves of audiences who have distinct media preferences (Webster and Ksiazek 2012). In relation to social media use, Lee et al. (2014) found that "political discussion moderates the relationship between network heterogeneity and the level of partisan and ideological polarizations." Further, Brundidge and Rice (2009) discuss how heterogeneous Internet users practice selective exposure to political disagreements since it is useful in enhancing democracy, the public sphere, and the whole political process (p. 145). The authors admit that studies examining "heterogeneous political discussion networks" are still under-researched (p. 149). Knoblach-Westerwick and Meng (2008), for example, studied how people who are politically active and engaged are more likely to seek views that oppose their beliefs since they are more certain that they can counter them. Johnson et al. (2011) basically agree with the previous study as they found that politically active respondents were significantly less likely to avoid information that opposed their beliefs. In this context, Kushin and Kitchener (2009) conducted a study on a Facebook group and found that there are two main online communities. The first one constitutes the majority of the group (73%) that expresses support for the stated position, whereas the minority (17%) expresses opposition to

the group's position. The authors did find evidence of flaming as 25% of online discussions were inflammatory.

As will be explained below, the theory of selective exposure in its two-fold arguments—the homogenous and heterogeneous views—seems to offer answers to the way SNS communities are formed and engaged in online discussions. Similar to traditional media viewership wherein audience fragmentation and ideological selectivity are well documented (Iyengar and Hahn 2009; Feldman et al. 2012), SNS also function in a similar manner as there are multiple public spheres. Van Dijk (1998), for example, stressed that ideologies can distinguish between the different groups in a given society, and they mostly determine how "groups and their members view a specific issue or domain of society" (p. 65). Here, Turow's concept of "gated communities" (1997) or Gitlin's theory of public sphericules are linked to the selective exposure theory especially in explaining the existence of heterogeneous views on online platforms. In other words, the theory of selective exposure can be applied to the context of this study, which is related to online religious communities. However, the empirical findings of this study reveal that there is also a neutral online community rather than a polarized one, which often makes neutral comments. In the following section, the study's methodology is presented.

Methodology

For this book, both quantitative and qualitative content analysis is conducted on YouTube comments and video clips followed by a critical assessment of the overall results. First, the study employed inductive framing analysis to detect the most dominant issues used by online users and afterward determining how often and why these issues were highlighted. The rationale behind using an inductive approach is related to the fact that new frames can be detected and used, which might not be possible if a deductive approach had been followed. In other words, the deductive approach might be limiting because other studies might explore areas that are not relevant to the focus of this study. Frames are defined as the "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over times, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese 2001, p. 11). Since they are shared, frames are used by audiences as "interpretive schema" to make sense of and discuss an issue and by journalists to present interesting news reports (Nisbet

2010). Van Gorp whose research falls within the cultural approach in framing identifies two main elements in analyzing frames: framing and reasoning devices (Van Gorp 2010). This constructionist and inductive framing method is employed in order to design the framing packages instead of relying on the deductive approach. If there are any changes in the frames used the researcher attempts to link them to political or social events that occurred offline, which is investigated by examining news stories, poll surveys, and expert reports by (non)-governmental organizations. Indeed, in today's world, many online and offline events are inseparable as both complement each other.

In general, the framing process is basically focused on many areas such as the kind of frames transmitted by politicians and/or their parties, journalists and/or their news organizations, and the way audiences understand these frames (Carragee and Roefs 2004, p. 215; see also Gamson 1992). Reese affirms that one of the basic ways of understanding the overall process of framing is through the way audiences organize and make sense of events and issues (2001), and D'Angelo suggests in his multiparadigmatic model for news-framing process that audience frames that "generate opinions of ordinary people in mundane conversations" influence news making (D'Angelo 2002, p. 882). Further, Entman (1993) suggests that audiences are sometimes involved in "counterframing" of what is presented in the news by journalists and media organizations. In other words, it is very important to carefully study the way audiences frame events and issues and reproduce them because it is part of the framing process as a whole. In this context, Carragee and Roefs assert the importance of studying audience frames as they "can enrich scholarship on hegemony" (2004, p. 223).

Other scholars highlighted the importance of studying audience frames. For example, Scheufele mentions in his framing typology that audience frames that are regarded as dependent variables are like "feedback loop[s] from audiences to journalists" (Scheufele 1999). In his cascading framing model, Entman explains the power of audience frames, which is basically weaker that those used by the elites as these frames are located in the final level on the cascade. Though they constitute the "true mix of public sentiments moving from the bottom back up to policymakers," these frames still exert certain kinds of influence on journalists and policy makers (2003, p. 421). Entman claims that audience frames have bi-directional power in "spreading ideas from the public up to where they affect thinking of elites and the president, the main

road is through the media" (2003, p. 420). Cherribi applied Entman's cascading network activation model to analyze the Al-Jazeera channel and found that there are many powerful sides involved like the Emir of Qatar, political elites, Al-Jazeera journalists, and Al-Qaradawi. On the other hand, the Arab publics, polls, and other indicators are thought to have the weakest influence factors (2006, p. 135). Still, (online) audiences have an impact, even if is a slight one, on the way this news organization frames events.

In this study, the focus is on online audiences as many previous studies relied on audience surveys and interviews with news readers to understand the way they frame events and issues, for example, risks from science (Hornig 1992) and the welfare state (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Sotirovic 2000). Matthew Nisbet mentions the importance of studying framing in social media, which marks a shift from traditional studies that are limited to the "transmission model of traditional news framing effects to a more interactive, social constructivist, and 'bottom up' model of framing." In this way, ordinary citizens become "active contributors, creators, commentators, sorters, and archivers of digital news content" (2010, p. 75). Constantinescu and Tedesco recommend including "the Internet as a resource for quantitative research on audience frames" (2007, p. 444) as the frames transmitted by the online public are usually done through social media. Further, Matthew Nisbet mentions the importance of studying framing in social media which marks a shift from traditional studies that are limited to the "transmission model of traditional news framing effects to a more interactive, social constructivist, and 'bottom up' model of framing." In this way, ordinary citizens become "active contributors, creators, commentators, sorters, and archivers of digital news content" (2010, p. 75). Further and in relation to Entman's assumption of audiences' counter-framing, Cooper refers to frames used by some news bloggers who sometimes talk "back to power" with the way they often oppose and criticize the dominant news frames. As indicated above, despite the fact that the influence of these frames might be weak, it is important to highlight their meanings, intentions, and types by which "an ordinary citizen question the veracity of factual assertions in the news products, [and] …he or she could problematize the interpretations of facts routinely packaged with straight news reporting" (Cooper 2010, p. 136). Groshek and Al-Rawi call audience frames used on SNS "user generated framing" (2013), while I call it "computer-mediated framing" (Al-Rawi 2014c) and Meraz and Papacharissi call

it "networked framing," which basically "aggregates the actions of the crowd in an organic, ad hoc manner" (2013) in order to sustain and amplify certain messages in the online information flows. In this study, I argue that computer mediated framing in relation to issues dealing with Islam functions as a bottom-up flow of information, which mostly attempts to provide alternative messages that counter the stronger information flows coming from some Western mainstream media outlets and/or some authoritative political powers in the region. This is done because YouTube offers a venue for those who are voiceless or under-represented in politics and/or mainstream media, as explained above.

In order to determine the most recurrent frames discussed, this study followed the inductive framing approach to investigate YouTube comments, as mentioned above. The first stage of the study involved conducting a pilot study on comments related to the Muhammed cartoons incident. This preliminary study examined over 700 comments and 50 video clips to find the most appropriate coding measures to be followed such as the classification of video clips' tones as well as the main issues discussed in comments. A thorough examination of the most recurrent themes covered in the comments was conducted by focusing on any patterns or recurrent frames that were later linked to the overreaching ideas. This was done by first identifying the framing and reasoning devices after which the main issues were determined following Van Gorp's (2010) research approach.

In his analysis of framing, Entman mentioned that frames can be identified by examining certain words (Entman 1991, p. 7). Also, Tankard pointed out in his study on inductive framing the importance of finding "keywords, catchphrases and symbols to help detect each frame" in the text (Tankard 2003, p. 102). Other scholars like Gamson and Lasch (1983), and Pan and Kosicki (1993) emphasized that frames can be found by investigating the framing and reasoning devices in the texts such as looking for certain words or lexical choices, metaphors, and descriptions or specific statements used to explain or portray an event. In this context, Entman confirms: "The *text* contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (Entman 1993, p. 52).

Further, Gamson and Modigliani discussed the media package in which they emphasized the identification of metaphors, visual images,

historical exemplars, catch-phrases, and depictions in order to locate the frames (1989). Van Gorp asserts the importance of identifying the frame package, which refers to every "reconstructed structure of framing devices and a logical chain of reasoning devices that demonstrates how the frame functions to represent a certain issue" (2010, p. 91). Among the other framing devices that Van Gorp recommends examining are "themes and subthemes, types of actors, actions and settings, lines of reasoning and causal connections, contrasts, lexical choices, sources, quantifications and statistics, charts and graphs, appeals" (ibid.). Finally, Tankard listed 11 framing mechanisms that guide identification of the dominant frames in texts that include: headlines, subheadings, photographs, photo captions, leads, source selections, quotes selections, pull quotes, logos (graphic identification), statistics, and concluding statements (2003, p. 101).

In this study, the reasoning and framing devices and framing mechanisms that are cited above were mostly taken into account in constructing the framing package that included identifying six main frames: (1) Pro-Islam, (2) neutral toward Islam, (3) threats and calls for jihad, (4) curses and insults, (5) boycotting Danish products, and (6) anti-Islam. Similar dominant frames were found by the researcher in another study on the Facebook page of "The global campaign to counter the hurtful film against the Prophet Muhammed" that was created to protest against the "Innocence of Muslims" film (Al-Rawi 2016). Two coders including the author of this book worked independently using the designed codebook to examine 700 comments. The second coder received training on coding the YouTube comments and videos, and the overall agreement was 0.756 (Cohen Kappa's), which was "substantial" (Landis and Koch 1977). In relation to the Muhammed cartoons' chapter, another coder, as well as the author of this book, independently analyzed 30 video clips and 450 comments. The Cohen Kappa's test produced a score of 0.689 for YouTube comments and 0.750 for the videos, indicating a substantial agreement.

As for the analysis of the video clips, the same procedure cited above was followed but more emphasis was put on the visual aspects, which include the "video footage of the person, place, or event being covered" (Coleman 2010, p. 236). In visual communication analysis, one of the most important features of moving images is identifying the theme or idea that is being highlighted in a scene (Choi and Lee 2006). Messaris and Abrahams assert that journalists and media producers visually frame

events and people by "the simple act of selection – choosing one view instead of another when making the photograph, cropping or editing the resulting image one way instead of another, or simply choosing to show viewers one image out of the many others that may have been produced at the same place and time" (2001, 217). In this study, the videos were coded for valence by categorizing them as positive, neutral, or negative toward Islam or its prophet in relation to the Muhammed cartoon incident. By making use of the framing analysis techniques cited, the videos were mainly analyzed by observing the selection of visual cues, themes, verbal language, and written text (lexical choices) if available.

Afterward, the validation of the inductively reconstructed frames was made by soliciting the help of a second coder who is a native speaker of Arabic. The second coder independently analyzed 30 video clips and 450 comments from the Muhammed cartoons' incident which constitute over 10% of the data investigated (Wimmer and Dominick 1994, p. 173). Cohen's Kappa, which accounts for "chance agreement," was employed since the data coded was nominal (Lombard et al. 2002), and the test which was conducted by SPSS 11.5 for Windows produced a score of 0.689 for YouTube comments and 0.750 for the videos which both indicate a "substantial" agreement (Landis and Koch 1977, p. 165).

The choice of using Arabic is related to the fact that it is widely used not only in the Arab world but elsewhere in the world with over 250 million speakers. Further, the majority of Arabic speakers are Muslims and the Quran, which is the Muslims' holy book, is in Arabic. It is assumed that more reactions toward the Muhammed cartoons will be found among Arabic speakers. Also, the study is focused on Arabs' reactions in particular because the search terms used in the webometric tool are all in Arabic to guarantee that the video posters and commentators are Arabs. If an Arabic speaker searches on YouTube for a particular incident such as "Fitna" film [فتنة فيلم] the search term will show video clips that are either entitled or tagged with this term in Arabic. For English speakers, getting the same Arabic video clips is difficult if the search term is in English. As indicted, Arabs in general are among the majority groups in the Islamic world and Islam originated in Arabia. Many other Muslim nations like Iran, Indonesia, and Turkey do not speak Arabic as their mother tongue and may react similarly toward the same issues. However, since I am not familiar with the languages spoken in these countries, I limited myself to Arabic.

In general, the comments investigated in this study included those written in Arabic, Latinized Arabic, and English. Arabic language is the dominant language used here as explained above though other languages, especially English, is also popular in Arab Gulf countries, which contain large expatriate populations, and where citizens often use both Arabic and English media. For example, English websites are accessed more than Arabic websites in Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, and the UAE (*Northwestern University in Qatar* 2013, p. 11).

In order to mine the comments and information on the video clips, a webometric tool was used (Thelwall 2009) in different months of 2012 and 2013; there are very few studies that used this tool to harvest Arabic comments (Al-Rawi 2014a, b, 2015a, b). Further, detailed information on the video posters and the commenters was collected to help understand the demographic variations. This webometric tool has limitations in retrieving video clips, so different keyword searches were used and any duplicated clips were removed. Another limitation is that the webometric tool can only retrieve about 1000 comments per video. It is important to mention here that an updated YouTube API (application programming interface) limitations prevented the researcher from getting basic demographic information on YouTube users that was originally available in the beginning such as age and sex thus creating more limitations in the data gathered.

Also, all the videos collected from the four case studies ($n = 887$) were further mined using another webometric tool called YouTube Data Tools (YTDT). The data collection is meant to explore the "network of relations between videos via YouTube's 'related videos' feature, starting from a search or a list of video ids" (Rieder 2015). The crawl depth "which specifies how far from the seeds the script should go" was set to 0 in order to find the social network connections between the above YouTube videos only. Afterwards, the results of this data mining were visually presented by using Gephi (https://gephi.org/): an open-source visualization software (Bastian et al. 2009). The graph is found in the conclusion and offers an insight into the clustering of different YouTube videos in relation to the four case studies examined here.

Finally, all the comments collected from the four case studies ($n = 10{,}054$) were analyzed in the conclusion using a computer-assisted approach called QDA Miner Wordstat software. The goal is to conduct a sentiment analysis of the overall comments. In sentiment analysis, it is relevant to investigate how the dominant words and phrases are

associated with other expressions because they assist in the overall generation of meaning (Pang and Lee 2008; Taboada et al. 2011). The manual classification of words and terms is done to examine sentiments in different contexts (Diakopoulos and Shamma 2010; O'Connor et al. 2010; Das and Chen 2001; Tong 2001) since it is assumed that "there are certain words people tend to use to express strong sentiments" (Pang et al. 2002, 2). This includes identifying the most recurrent words and phrases used in the comments as well as their associated terms (Xenos 2008; Groshek and Al-Rawi 2013; Al-Rawi 2015a, b).

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CHAPTER 3

The Muhammed Cartoons

Abstract The publication of 12 cartoons depicting Muhammed by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005 created a great deal of controversy over self-censorship, freedom of speech, and accusations of religious incitement. Numerous protests were organized by Muslim activists around the world, and later tens of people were killed and hundreds injured due to the violent reactions. Following a framing analysis approach, this chapter focuses on the YouTube reaction toward these cartoons by analyzing 261 video clips and 4153 comments. Results show that the majority of the video clips and comments were moderate and positive toward Islam and Muhammed; however, a small percentage either called for jihad against the West or involved lethal threats against the artist. Other comments carried curses or insults against Denmark, whereas few others were anti-Islamic. Online reactions are varied in tone but might lead to a certain kind of activism that unites many Muslims under what is known as the Islamic Ummah or nation.

Keywords Muhammed cartoons · Denmark · *Jyllands-Posten* Boycott · Lars vilks

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Introduction[1]

The publication of 12 cartoons depicting Muhammed by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005 created a great deal of controversy over self-censorship, freedom of speech, and accusations of religious incitement. Numerous protests were organized by Muslim activists around the world, and later tens of people were killed and hundreds injured due to the violent reactions. Following a framing analysis approach, this chapter focuses on the YouTube reactions toward these cartoons by analyzing 261 video clips and 4153 comments. Results show that the majority of the video clips and comments were moderate and positive toward Islam and Muhammed; however, a small percentage either called for jihad against the West or involved lethal threats against the artist. Other comments carried curses or insults against Denmark, whereas few others were anti-Islamic. Online reactions are varied in tone but might lead to a certain kind of activism that unites many Muslims under what is known as the Islamic Ummah or nation.

Indeed, the controversial decision that was taken by the editors of *Jyllands-Posten* to publish Muhammed cartoons has been extensively debated. According to one editorial published by the newspaper, a discussion among the editors focused on two main topics. Some believed that publishing the cartoons can be a good starting point to challenge the self-censorship allegations, while others felt that it might offend the Muslims' religious beliefs (Hundevadt 2008). The newspaper's cultural editor, Flemming Rose, approved the idea and wrote messages to about 40 members of the Danish Illustrators' Trade Association (ITA), stating: "Daily newspaper Jyllands-Posten takes the side of freedom of expression. For that reason, we would like to invite you to draw Mohammed as you see him" (ibid.). ITA had 25 active members, amongst them three cartoonists who worked for *Jyllands-Posten* itself. In the end, 12 artists accepted the task and produced 12 different illustrations. One of these cartoons, which depicted Muhammed with a bomb in his turban, was drawn by Kurt Westergaard who received a great deal of popularity afterward (Lykkegaard 2012) especially after receiving a prestigious media award for his contribution to freedom of opinion.

[1]Part of this chapter appeared in Al-Rawi, A. (2015a, b). Online Reactions to the Muhammad Cartoons: YouTube and the Virtual Ummah. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *54*(2), 261–276.

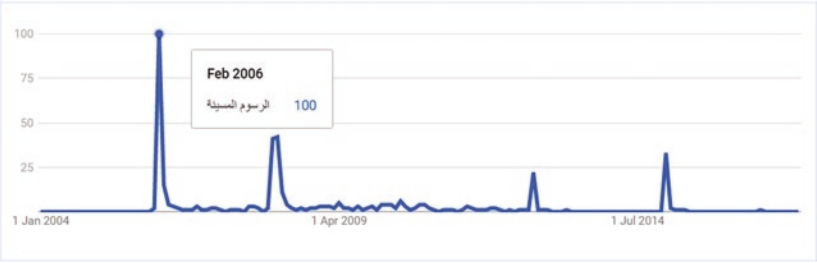

Chart 3.1 Google searches for the term "Hurtful drawings" in Arabic

After the publication of the cartoons, several protests were organized by Muslims in many countries, yet the newspaper defended its decision to publish the cartoons, saying: "All Danes, including political and religious authorities, must be able to tolerate appearing in caricature. This is not an expression of a lack of respect. Just the opposite. It is an expression of respect in line with Danish tradition. Moreover, the drawings are not in conflict with either Danish law or the ethics of the Danish press" (Jyllands-Posten 2006).

Shortly after the few protests organized, a group of Danish Muslim Imams toured the Middle East to gather support for their cause by carrying with them the "Akkari–Laban dossier" that contained the cartoons and other satirical drawings of Muhammed. During that time, there was a feeling that "the general Muslim population in Denmark is subject to insult and discrimination" (Jyllands-Posten 2006). After this move, the crisis became international with Muslims all around the world protesting online and offline. In terms of online searches, Chart 3.1 shows how the Google search term "Hurtful Drawings" [الرسوم المسيئة] witnessed a spike in February 2006.

In terms of offline reactions, many embassies were attacked, and at least 200 people were killed and hundreds were injured because of these cartoons (Ruthven 2011). It was assumed that the media as well as the actions of some governments like that of Saudi Arabia and Egypt triggered the angry reactions of many Muslims (Olesen 2007). Lindholm and Olsson point out that in mid-2006, the Danish Foreign Ministry got thousands of protest letters and spam mails, while calls for boycotting Danish products in the Muslim world spread (2011: 262). In fact, the attacks against Denmark and its interests extended to the Internet as over

600 Danish websites including 'Girl Guide troops, school districts, private companies, and nursery schools' and the newspaper that published the cartoons as well as Vilks' personal website (Ruthven 2011). Indeed, the publication of the cartoons was 'used as the initiating event to rally Muslim and other sympathetic hackers to the cause of attacking Danish websites. [The]… defacement and denial of service attacks were coordinated through a network of jihadist websites. Defaced sites included propaganda designed in part to promote further attacks against Danish websites' (Carr 2010: 187). In an online protest by Muslim activists, a famous website was launched that was called *No4denmark.com*. It got over 67,280,389 visitors by February 2009 and carried numerous banners such as 'Boycott their Products', 'No Denmark', 'Except the Prophet of God', and 'Together to Support the Prophet of Islam'…. etc.[2] As a result of the boycott calls, it is believed that one Danish company, Arla Foods, lost about $223 million (Ruthven 2011). In Kuwait, the country's cooperatives removed about "275 Danish food and consumables products" from their shelves, accounting "for the sale of 85% of Danish products in Kuwait, valued at roughly $175 million per year" (Wikileaks 2006b). Even a mobile company in Oman, Nawras, was negatively affected by the Danish cartoons because one of its partners is a Danish telecommunication consortium (Wikileaks 2006a). Due to some confusion with Norway, some protesters in the Middle East burnt Norwegian flags in 2005 because they thought that Denmark and Norway were either similar or both responsible for the cartoons (Wikileaks 2009). In Iran, the cartoons controversy prompted the government there to organize a competition to discredit and ridicule the Holocaust (Müller et al. 2009) in order to test the Western tolerance of free speech. The former Iranian Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, attacked Denmark, stating: "The Government of Denmark should apologize for the pain it has caused the Muslim people, and our European friends should punish the perpetrators for creating an atmosphere of religious intolerance" (Wikileaks 2006c).

Many Muslim governments and other Islamic NGOs looked at the cartoons controversy from a different perspective, stressing that the root of the controversy lies in the prevalence of anti-Muslim feelings

[2]The website *No4denmark.com* is no longer functional but its archives can be accessed through www.archive.org.

in Denmark (Shehata 2007, p. 139). In their edited work on the cartoons crisis, Kunelius et al. (2007) gathered evidence from 14 countries and concluded that Muslim states accused Western powers of having double standards because they sanctioned the publication of the cartoons while prohibiting the publication of other controversial issues. Looking at the matter from the social contract philosophical stance, Muslims refrain from criticizing or attacking prophets of other monotheistic religions, so they expect from believers of other religions that they show respect for their doctrine and prophet. However, when this "contract" was hypothetically breached, devout Muslims became agitated and few of them reacted violently.

Interestingly, it was not a coincidence that many editors of *Jyllands-Posten* are well known for their radical far-right and anti-Muslim immigration stances. Some of the newspaper's editors who supported the publication of the cartoons including Rose have direct connection with some US writers who strongly support the "Clash of Civilizations" hypothesis like Daniel Pipes and Robert Spencer (Yılmaz 2011, p. 9). Ali Hussain even argues that the cartoons controversy has historical roots that date back to the conflict between the Crusaders and Muslims. Hussain cites the example of the Christian televangelist Pat Robertson's call in August 2005 to assassinate Venezuela's president, Hugo Chavez, and the numerous cases of Christian pedophile priests. These cases were never linked by the cartoonists to Christianity or to Jesus's figure unlike the case of Muhammed cartoons (2007, p. 125).

It is important to note that this study also includes an analysis of the Arabs' YouTube response to Lars Vilks's satiric drawings of Muhammed. Vilks, a Swedish artist, drew Muhammed as a roundabout dog in 2007 and his other works became highly controversial. He was assaulted by a group of Muslim activists during a presentation he made at Uppsala University in Sweden on May 11, 2010. Vilks was not injured during the attack, but his glasses were broken (BBC 2010). The video, which depicted the assault, became very popular on YouTube.

To conduct this study, four different keyword searches in Arabic were used to ensure that the video clips were posted by Arabic speakers. Out of over 600 video clips that were found, a total of 261 videos were analyzed as the remaining ones were either irrelevant or repetitions. Four main types of video clip genres were identified following van Zoonen, Vis, and Mihelj's study (2010): (1) copy and paste/edit from television and other sources including television news reports, (2) public speech,

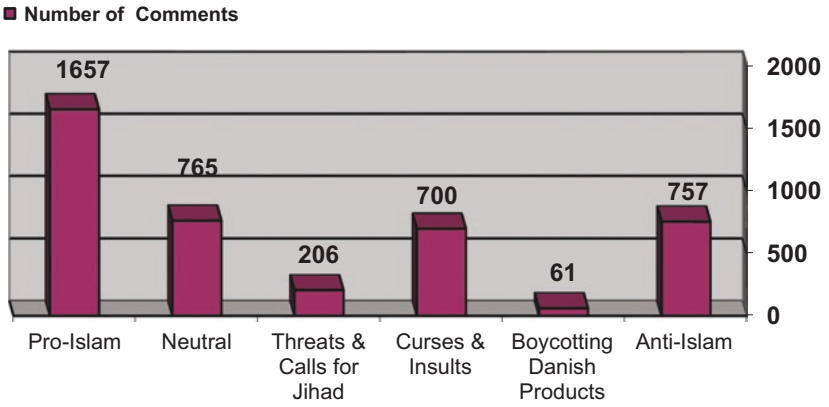

Chart 3.2 Comments tendencies

sermon, or street protest, (3) chants, songs, and poems made specifically because of the cartoons, and (4) testimonials. In total, there were 6843 comments, amongst them 2689 that were either personal debates, unclear conversations, or unrelated to the main topic. The remaining 4153 comments were investigated including those written in Latinized Arabic and English.

Results

Out of the 4153 comments analyzed, the study revealed that the majority of the comments ($n = 1657$) 39.89% were moderate as they carried positive messages about Islam and its prophet; however, other comments ($n = 206$) 4.9% called for jihad against the West or involved lethal threats against the artist; 16.85% ($N = 700$) of the comments carried curses or insults against Denmark, the artist, or the West, whereas 18.22% ($N = 757$) of the reactions were anti-Islamic. Finally, the lowest number of comments 1.46% ($N = 61$) called for boycotting Danish products, while neutral comments constituted 18.42% ($N = 765$) of the responses (see Chart 3.2). Most neutral views were either silenced or criticized as their opponents expressed surprise over these "calm" and "reasonable" responses, expecting some kind of agitation and anger, instead.

Regarding the geographic location of the posters, the study showed that the largest percentage of posts came from Saudi Arabia ($n = 2232$)

Table 3.1 Top 20 Geographic locations of comments' posters

Geographic location	*No. of comments*
1. Saudi Arabia	2232
2. Egypt	654
3. USA	573
4. Kuwait	318
5. Morocco	267
6. UAE	216
7. Sweden	148
8. Algeria	134
9. Netherlands	122
10. Qatar	119
11. Canada	119
12. UK	118
13. Iraq	102
14. Germany	87
15.Israel/Palestine	84
16. France	75
17. Yemen	62
18. Pakistan	62
19. Australia	53
20. Belgium	44

53.74% followed by Egypt ($n = 654$) 15.75%, USA ($n = 573$) 13.79%, Kuwait ($n = 318$) 7.65%, and Morocco ($n = 267$) 6.43% (see Table 3.1). As for gender differences, males dominated the number of posts uploaded with 71.15%, while females posted 18.80%. The remaining users have not identified their gender. Regarding age distribution, the highest percentage of comments was posted by age group 25–29 years old with ($n = 1433$) 34.50%, then age group 20–24 years old with ($n = 1421$) 34.21% followed by age group 30–34 years old with ($n = 1050$) 25.28% (see Chart 3.3). The highest number of comments was posted by 27-year-old posters with 390 comments followed by 24-year-old posters with 383 posts. In relation to the time of posting these comments and videos, there seems to be a steady ongoing flow since 2007. The first comment was posted in July 28, 2007 and the last one was mined on July 19, 2012 the period this study was conducted. As for the videos, the first relevant video was posted on February 4, 2007 and the last on July 8, 2012. Comments on video clips are posted at different periods of time, and they mostly generate varied religious and even political discussions.

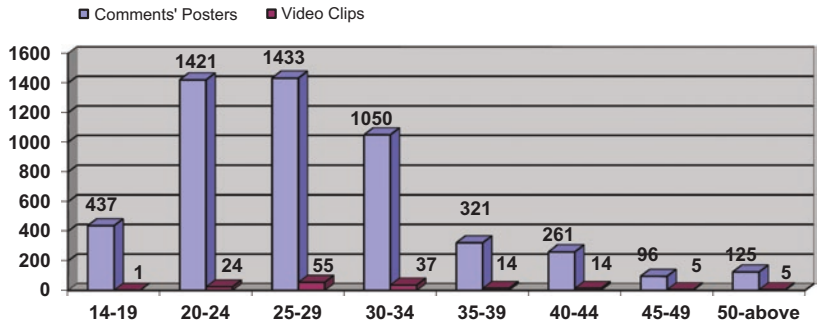

Chart 3.3 Age distribution of comments' and video clips posters

Finally, the highest number of anti-Islamic posters based on age was the groups aged between 29 and 33 with males constituting ($n = 615$) 91.11%, while females made up ($n = 60$) 8.89%.

As for the video clips, the results show that the majority of the video clips uploaded were Pro-Islamic ($n = 207$) 79.21% defending Mohamed. Based on the demographic distribution of these video clips whose posters revealed information about themselves, the majority of posters are males ($n = 142$) 89.9% while a few were posted by females ($n = 16$) 10.1%. The highest number of videos were uploaded from Egypt ($n = 54$), Saudi Arabia ($n = 30$), and the USA ($n = 20$). As for the age group, posters who were between 25–29 years uploaded the highest number of videos ($n = 54$) followed by 30–34 years ($n = 34$), and 20–24 years ($n = 22$).

Other video clips that were neutral made up 17.24% ($n = 45$) in which a calm and reasonable way of discussing the cartoon crisis was presented (see Chart 3.4). In relation to the demographic distribution, most posters were males ($n = 29$) 87.9% and very few females ($n = 4$) 12.1%. The majority of posters were once again from Egypt ($n = 11$) followed by Qatar ($n = 8$), and Saudi Arabia ($n = 6$). The highest number of posters were from age groups 25–29 years ($n = 8$) and 35–39 years ($n = 7$).

Finally, the anti-Islamic and other video clips that were against Islam and Muhammed constituted 3.44% ($n = 9$) only (see Chart 3.4). As for the geographic location of the anti-Islamic posters, the highest percentage came from the USA 20.47%, Saudi Arabia 19.81%, Netherlands 5.94%, Sweden 5.15%, and Canada 3.96%. There were only nine anti-Islamic video clips uploaded. Based on the available demographic

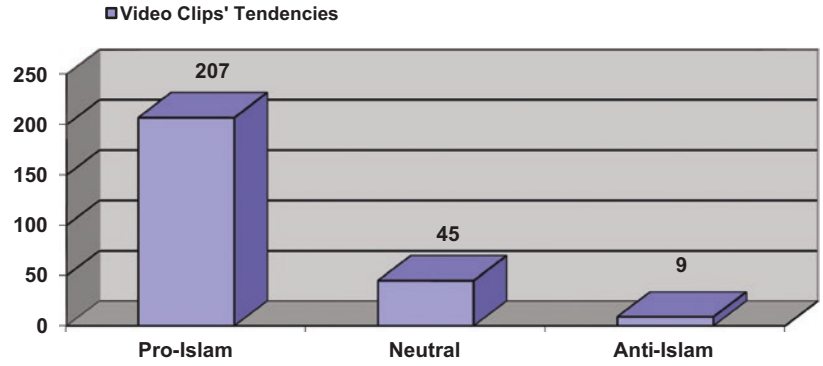

Chart 3.4 Video clips' tendencies

information, all were male posters. Two videos were uploaded from the USA and two others from Egypt with a slight concentration on age group 20–24 years.

Regarding the overall gender differences, the majority of the video clips were uploaded by males ($n = 204$) 78.16%, while females uploaded less videos $n = 21$ (8.04%). As for the age distribution, the highest percentage of video clips were uploaded by age group 25–29 years 21.07% ($n = 55$) followed by age group 30–34 years ($n = 37$) 14.17%, and 20–24 years ($n = 24$) 9.19% (see Chart 3.3).

Finally, and in relation to the demographic distribution of the videos, they were mostly posted by males 89.88%, ($n = 80$) while females were limited in numbers 10.11% ($n = 9$). Most videos were uploaded from Egypt ($n = 34$), Saudi Arabia ($n = 18$), Qatar ($n = 10$), and the USA ($n = 8$). The highest concentration in the age group was between 25 and 29 years old ($n = 33$), 20 and 24 years ($n = 14$), and 30 and 34 years ($n = 13$).

Second, video clips that contained a public speech, sermon, or protest constituted 28.35%. The classification of videos was done following previous relevant studies (Coleman 2010; Choi and Lee 2006). The demographic distribution shows that the majority of posters were male ($n = 49$) 90.7% and females were very few in number ($n = 5$) 9.3%. The highest number of videos were uploaded from Saudi Arabia ($n = 40$), the USA ($n = 13$), Egypt ($n = 11$), and Algeria ($n = 9$). The most active

age group was the 25–29 years old ($n = 18$) followed by the 30–34 years old ($n = 11$).

As for videos showing a religious chant/song/poem made specifically for the cartoons, they constituted 18.77% of the overall formats. Again, males were more dominant in uploading such videos with ($n = 42$) 87.5% and females were very few in number ($n = 6$) 12.5%. Egypt posted the highest number of videos ($n = 19$) posted followed by Saudi Arabia ($n = 8$). Again, the highest number of posters was concentrated in the age groups 25–29 ($n = 15$) and 30–34 ($n = 11$).

Finally, video testimonials, in which people discuss the cartoons, made up 4.21% of the total number of clips. All were male posters and almost half of them originated in Egypt. The results above largely correspond with the outcomes of a study conducted on Internet use in the Arab world by *Northwestern University in Qatar*. The latter study found that the "generation gap in internet use is wide. 82% of people under the age of 25 use the internet, compared to "only 37% of those over 45". Indeed, "the gender gap is significant" but far less pronounced than age, as 71% of men use the internet versus 60% of women" (Northwestern University in Qatar 2013, p. 11).

Discussion and Conclusion

As stated earlier, the publication of Muhammed cartoons created a great deal of controversy in the Islamic world. Many Muslims felt that their respective governments did not take decisive and adequate steps to "make" Denmark and/or the artists apologize for publishing the cartoons; hence, they resorted to online media to voice their feelings. In this sense, YouTube functioned as a platform for the global public sphere that constitutes what is known as the virtual Ummah.

The majority of posts were positive in the sense that they praised Muhammed and Islam, which was to be expected as Arab Muslims were trying to defend their religion and prophet. What is interesting is that curses and insults constituted the fourth highest number of comments against Denmark and/or the artist and they mostly lead to similar posts by other YouTubers. This is part of the solipsistic introjection effect, wherein one type of posts encourages or generates similar ones. The same applies to the other types of posts such as those that called for jihad or carried threats against the artist and others that were anti-Islamic. Commenters calling for jihad against Denmark and the West

or posted threatening messages against the artists whether it was Kurt Westergaard or Lars Vilks were also mostly males $N = 158$ (85.86%), while females constituted 14.13% ($n = 26$). The highest number of threats and calls for jihad posts based on age originated from people aged between 23 and 27 years. This finding is similar to the results of Conway and Mcinerney's study (2008). As for the geographic location, the majority of these messages came from Saudi Arabia 36.40%, followed by Egypt 12.62%, Kuwait 6.79%, and Canada 5.33%. As mentioned earlier, YouTube offers the posters what is known as the dissociative anonymity that enables them to express their views freely without restrictions. To give a couple of examples, one YouTuber said: "I wish you can conduct some explosive operations in the countries that insult the prophet. Let them learn a bit … so that those pigs would not do it again." Another YouTube user mentions: "I wish I can be honored to kill this infidel Danish pig." Indeed, without anonymity, such responses cannot be voiced without having the fear of being a suspected militant.

As expected, the majority of video clips were pro-Islam constituting 79.21% ($n = 207$) of the videos that defended Mohamed from different accusations. Interestingly, many video clips expressed some kind of wishful thinking by discussing and/or showing unrelated scenes to suggest that the artist (Westergaard or Vilks) died by either accidentally being burnt for example, (l_pcSL4P_Sw)[3] and (OWXEQfs6n_U), or by committing suicide due to sudden depression (0YQWsD0m0LQ), or by falling due to landslide while driving his car (l_pcSL4P_Sw). In one of the clips, he was transformed into a pig-like figure (vH_Bnzzm5L8). Though most of the comments discredited these videos, there were few who did believe what was uploaded. Some of the other myths disseminated on YouTube was about seeing the prophet Muhammed in a dream crying for the fate of Muslims who cannot take serious action against the publication of the cartoons. Two of these video clips generated over 1.5 million views (8ditvqwwFjc) (653 likes/319 dislikes) and (u2FyQyqPw3 k) (558 likes /22 dislikes).

Further, a couple of video clips contained Osama Bin Laden's threatening audio tape in which he called for Denmark to punish the artist who published the "hurtful drawings of prophet Muhammed" for

[3]This is the YouTube video ID that can be used to find the clip. I used it instead of the long hyperlink for brevity.

Table 3.2 Top 10 Geographic locations of video clips' posters

Geographic location	*No. of video clips*
1. Egypt	76
2. Saudi Arabia	41
3. USA	24
4. Algeria	12
5. Qatar	10
6. UK	8
7. Morocco	8
8. Syria	6
9. Tunisia	6
10. France	5

example, (Sv6vO8rEHt0) or (ygNBc7Bbeqg), otherwise Al-Qaeda would take action. The video clips did have some approval by the commenters. Other video clips showed an Al-Qaeda banner carried during a protest organized in Germany against Muhammed cartoons for example, (s7bW8dJHJb8) and (Ot6gHwUcSCk). Indeed, the most popular video clip was the one that showed the assault against Vilks during his presentation at a Swedish university. Tens of clips with different subtitles and background audio were produced in order to praise the Muslim attendants who attacked the artist for example, (0yhvvN9P5PQ) and (m2rqgzLg2-E). The most popular (JezujGUWFW0) generated over 800,000 views (2192 likes/122 dislikes). Another video clip allegedly mentions that the Muslim attackers broke the artist's bones and got over 750,000 views (1087 likes/87 dislikes) (en66Jbt8gJU). Finally, there were several video clips that showed the public sermon of Khalid Al-Rashid, a famous Saudi cleric, crying and calling on Muslims to avenge the prophet for example, (1BJ0ql-PFa8) and (m46Ucvzv9DQ). He was later imprisoned by Saudi authorities for his allegedly controversial sermons.

With regard to neutral videos, they include a popular video that was posted by an Egyptian cartoonist that got over 2.8 million views (2-ISTfXvEo0).

As for demographic distribution of the YouTube commentators and those who posted video clips, the video clip and comment posters came from countries across the globe with obvious concentration in the Middle East, North America, and Western Europe (see Tables 3.1, 3.2). This finding is supported by previous research done on the controversial anti-Islamic "Fitna" film, which was produced by a Dutch politician, as

most the videos came from the Netherlands, USA, and UK (van Zoonen et al. 2010: 254). Further, the Saudi-run program, Assakina Campaign for Dialogue, supervised by the Saudi Ministry of Religious Affairs, conducted its own study on Al-Qaeda affiliated websites and revealed that the organization is trying to recruit Muslims in the diaspora. Of those who got involved with Al-Qaeda's ideas online 38% are Muslims living in Europe and Northern America while 9% are from the Arab Gulf region. The study revealed that about 90% of those who interacted tended to use insults, curses, and accusations during their dialogues instead of relying on religious texts (Assakina 2012).

Besides, the cartoon controversy seems to attract the attention of various cyber communities that share the same beliefs and sentiments. In this context, the sectarian dimension was very evident in the discussions that were generated. This is linked to the concept of selective exposure that is explained above. For example, many Shiites accuse Sunni Wahhabis and Salafis of distorting the image of Islam for their ultra-conservative views, claiming that Muslims should feel sorry for the death of some of Muhammed's family members by the Umayyad dynasty, which occurred over 1000 years ago instead of feeling sorry for some cartoons that depicted the Prophet. On the other hand, Sunnis accuse Shiites of being engaged in religious practices that are alien to Islam, which only divided the Muslim Ummah and created schism. At the same time, many Arab Christians especially those living in the diaspora and/or Egypt found the topic of the cartoons a good chance to attack Muhammed and Islam.

In general, flaming has been used by the majority of the posters cited above especially when it is related to a sectarian issue, which includes the use of curses and insults. This finding is similar to the results reached by Assakina's study (2012). For instance, the terms "dog" and "pig"' have been employed in over 400 times, terms that have a very pejorative meaning in the Arab world. Further, there were over 200 negative references to Jews who are connected directly or indirectly to the cartoons. Indeed, the highly obscene language is observed in other contexts and topics in YouTube (see for example Lindgren 2011).

On the other hand, it seems that many anti-Islamic posts came from self-proclaimed Arab Christians or atheists. It is important to note here that empirical research on Arab atheists is very rare since this is a community that is "largely an Internet phenomenon; it exists online and is informed by digital discourse" (Noman 2015, p. 2). The self-proclaimed identities of these anti-Islamic comments are evident from their

content as well as the YouTube usernames they chose; for example, there are: "AtheistMohammed" (Male/located in the UK/41 years old); "DisgustingIslam" (Male/located in Guyana); "MuhammadScandals" (no info posted); "fuckXmuhammad" (no info); "Fuckislamable" (no info); "ProphetOfDoomAndSex" (Male/located in Australia/27 years old); "FindingIslam" (Male/located in the USA); "ArabJarab10"[4] (Male/located in Hungary/27 years old); "islamdontknow" (no info); "Coptic261" (Male/located in Egypt/24 years old); and "Fuckreligions20" (no info). Most of the anti-Islamic posts were directed against Muhammed by accusing him of being a pedophile for marrying Aisha, one of his wives, while she was still young or for carrying arms against the polytheists at his time. Again, the anonymity offered by YouTube empowered this type of cyber-community. Muslims surveyed in 39 countries who use the Internet are much more likely than other Muslims to have a favorable opinion of Western movies, music and television and are somewhat more likely to see similarities between Islam and Christianity (Pew Research 2013).

To sum up, the Muhammed cartoons controversy led to violent reactions on the streets that were also reflected online. Despite the fact that the incident occurred several years ago, it is still generating interest, which shows that such sensitive issues are difficult to ignore or forget. Further, these topics normally function as a melting pot where various cyber-communities within the global public sphere meet to discuss issues that are directly related to their core beliefs. Due to its visual and textual features, YouTube attracts more online users than many other SNSs, which makes it an ideal venue for the virtual Islamic Ummah.

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[4] Arab Jarab (literally means Arabs with scabies or dirty) is a derogatory term that is used by some to insult fellow Arabs from other countries.

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CHAPTER 4

Burning the Quran

Abstract In July 2010, an Evangelical Christian pastor preaching at a small church in Florida attracted the world's attention when he announced his plan on social media to burn 200 copies of the Quran. Riots, protests, and angry statements from Muslim leaders followed. This book chapter investigates the way Arabic speaking YouTubers reacted toward the Quran-burning incidents that occurred in the West including the one involving US soldiers in Afghanistan in February 2012. The results of the study show that the majority of video clips' comments were unrelated to the incidents (32.77%), while curses and insults against the USA, Terry Jones, or US soldiers constituted the second highest number of responses (21.56%) followed by neutral (17.09%), pro-Islam (13.09%) and anti-Islam comments (12.76%). Calls for a holy war against the USA made up 2.49% of the total number of comments. The study concludes that offline incidents cannot be easily forgotten online as commentators have never stopped posting views, mostly expressing anger and other negative sentiments.

Keywords Quran burning · Riots · USA · Terry Jones · Far right Terrorism

A. Al-Rawi, *Islam on YouTube*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-39826-0_4

Introduction[1]

In July 2010, an Evangelical Christian pastor preaching at a small church in Florida attracted the world's attention when he announced his plan on social media to burn 200 copies of the Quran. Riots, protests, and angry statements from Muslim leaders followed. This chapter investigates the way Arabic speaking YouTubers reacted toward the Quran-burning incidents that occurred in the West including the one involving US soldiers in Afghanistan in February 2012. The results of the study show that the majority of video clips' comments were unrelated to the incidents (32.77%), while curses and insults against the USA, Terry Jones, or US soldiers constituted the second highest number of responses (21.56%) followed by neutral (17.09%), pro-Islam (13.09%) and anti-Islam comments (12.76%). Calls for a holy war against the USA made up 2.49% of the total number of comments. The study concludes that offline incidents cannot be easily forgotten online as commentators have never stopped posting views, mostly expressing anger and other negative sentiments.

The different controversies surrounding the Quran-burning incidents began on social media. Terry Jones's proposal to burn 200 copies of the Quran was first sent on Twitter but turned within a couple of months into an international crisis. Jones suggested burning the Muslims' holy book on the anniversary of 9/11 attacks in 2010 calling it "International Burn a Koran Day," then he rallied support in order to "bring to awareness to the dangers of Islam and that the Koran is leading people to hell," as he claimed. In July 2010, Jones bragged in one of his tweets that his Facebook followers reached 500 (Gerhart and Ernesto 2010). On July 25, 2010 Jones used YouTube to attract more followers. In the video clip, he held the Quran and stated: "This book is responsible for 9/11" (Weaver 2010). By September 2010, Jones had more than 16,000 followers on Facebook (Hill 2010). Also, Jones wrote a book entitled *Islam Is of the Devil* in which he wished that "all Muslims would convert to Christianity" (Silman 2015). Far-right groups in North America and Europe found in Jones's rhetoric the perfect match with their ideology, so he used to get periodic invitations from them to

[1]Part of this chapter appeared as a chapter in Mellor, N., and Rinnawi, K. (Eds.). (2016). *Political Islam and Global Media: The Boundaries of Religious Identity*. London: Routledge.

Chart 4.1 Google searches for the term "Quran burning" in Arabic

join their rallies in the UK, Germany, and Canada (Batty 2011; Spiegel Online 2012; Keung and Izri 2012).

Based on a Google Trends search for the term "Quran burning" [حرق القرآن] in Arabic, the peak in interest happened in September 2010 (see Chart 4.1). It seems that international media attention gave Jones a great deal of publicity as over 150 media outlets from all around the world interviewed him (Alvarez 2011). Several world leaders including Barak Obama and the US Foreign Secretary, Hillary Clinton, denounced the attempt and called for its cancellation. For example, President Obama mentioned that the act would be a "recruitment bonanza for al-Qaida." Jones did cancel the idea, but he changed his mind later when he conducted a trial of the Quran after which he burnt a copy on March 20, 2011. Jones burnt the Quran once more on April 29, 2012 as a protest against arresting the arrest of a Christian pastor by the Iranian government.

The burning of the Quran incidents led to numerous street protests mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The former country witnessed intense violence as tens of people were killed and hundreds injured as a result. On Facebook, there were hundreds of thousands of oppositional groups that rejected Jones's proposal (Hill 2010). There are still numerous active Arabic Facebook pages such as "Millions of Muslims against Burning the Quran" (over 22,000 followers, created in 2011) and "Together Against Burning the Quran" (over 20,000 followers, created September 14, 2010). Due to the high degree of controversy he generated, Terry Jones received "300 death threats, mostly via e-mail and telephone, and had been told by the F.B.I. that there was a $2.4 million contract on his life" (Alvarez 2011).

Another important incident that was highlighted on YouTube was burning the Quran by a group of US soldiers stationed at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan in February 2012. The incident occurred after a group of US soldiers wanted to dispose of copies of the Quran that were either torn or desecrated by some prisoners. The action prompted the US President to apologize. Again, protests erupted and people were killed as a result.

Social media helped Jones achieve international fame (Lidsky 2011, p. 5) as other Quran-burning incidents did not receive the same kind of worldwide attention. Some of these incidents include the US soldiers' desecration of the Quran at Guantanamo Bay in 2005 whose details were published in *Newsweek* in May 2005 (CBC news 2005) or when members of a Baptist Church in Kansas burnt the Quran in Washington in 2008 (Weaver 2010).

This study employed two different keyword searches in Arabic only to ensure that the video clips were posted by Arabic speakers. The search terms used yielded a total of 972 video clips with over 14,600 comments. However, the actual number of video clips analyzed was 328 and 4293 comments because the remaining ones were unrelated to this study. For example, there are hundreds of video clips on burning the Quran due to accidents that occurred in Iraq, Bahrain, and elsewhere in the Arab world. Tens of video clips were uploaded on burning the Quran in Bahrain by government forces where the Shiite opposition accused the Sunni-led security forces of being behind the incidents. Besides, tens of other videos were uploaded on protests organized by the followers of an Iraqi Shiite leader, Mahmood Al-Sarkhi, who accused the Ayatollahs in Najaf of being behind the burning of copies of the Quran during the assaults against his office in Southern Iraq.

Results

Out of the 4293 comments analyzed, the study revealed that the majority $n = 1407$ (32.77%) were unrelated or irrelevant. The second highest percentage of comments $n = 926$ (21.56%) were either curses and/or insults against Terry Jones, the US soldiers from Bagram Air Base, or the USA. Neutral or moderate comments consisted 17.09% ($n = 734$), while positive responses in which the commenters praised Islam and its holy book made up 13.09% ($n = 562$). As for lethal threats and calls for jihad against the USA and the West as a reaction toward the Quran-burning

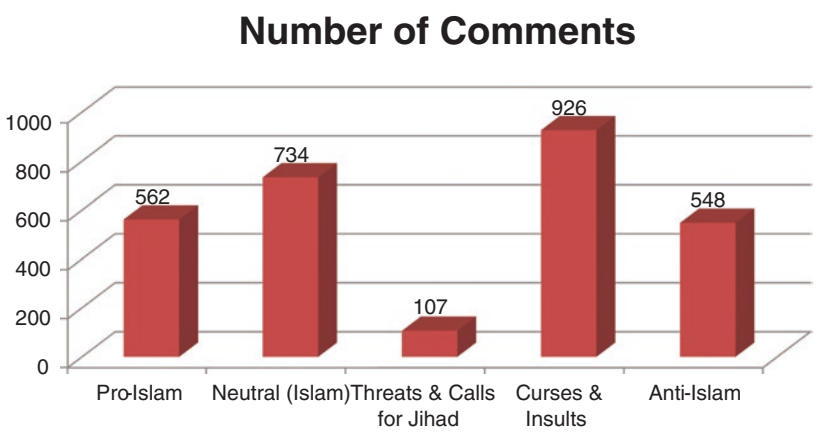

Chart 4.2 Comments' tendencies

incidents, there were not as many as expected with 107 constituting 2.49% of the responses. Finally, anti-Islam comments made up 12.76% of the response ($n = 548$) (see Chart 4.2). It was expected that many commenters would call for economically boycotting the USA as had been the case in the Danish cartoon controversy, but there were only four references to this in all the comments analyzed.

In relation to the tendencies of the video clips, the analysis is not only based on the visual and textual content of the clips themselves but also on their description and title following a framing analysis approach (Tankard 2003). Out of the 328 videos studied, the majority were pro-Islam $n = 236$ (71.95%) which received, in total, 13,411 likes and 942 dislikes from YouTubers. As for neutral or moderate videos, they constituted 21.95% ($n = 72$) receiving 296 dislikes and 467 likes, while anti-Islam clips were few in number at 20 (6.09%) collectively receiving 3554 dislikes and 209 likes (see Charts 4.2, 4.3). Since there were several Quran-burning incidents, the study revealed that the topic of Terry Jones got the highest amount of attention with 62.80% of the clips ($n = 206$), while the issue of the US soldiers at Bagram Air Base who burnt the Quran received 23.47% ($n = 77$) of the attention. Finally, other minor incidents that happened in the West by unknown people constituted 13.71% of the clips ($n = 45$) including a proposed one which erroneously happened in Denmark and was linked to Muhammed

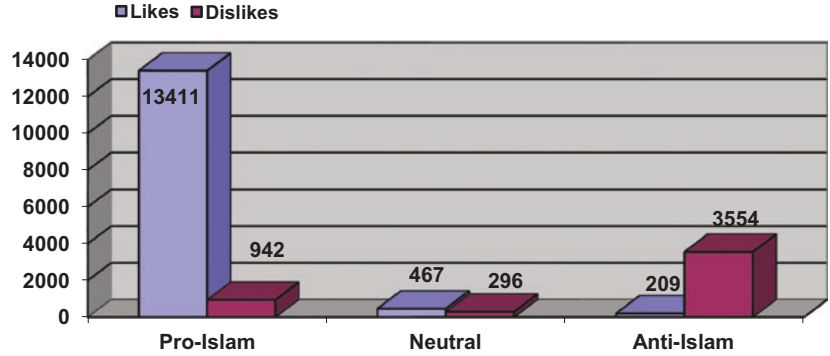

Chart 4.3 YouTubers' reaction to the videos

cartoon controversy. As for the video types, there were several religious sermons, public speeches, or personal demonstrations of burning the Quran (or Bible or cross in a couple of cases), street protests, and testimonials.

In relation to the gender differences of the posters, the majority were males in both the video clips and comments. The latter category had 67.29% ($n = 2889$), while females made up 13.58% ($n = 583$). As for the video posters, males constituted 84.45% ($n = 277$), while females were only 6.70% ($n = 22$). There are some remaining users who have not identified their gender. Regarding the geographic location of the posters, the study showed that the largest percentage of comments came from Saudi Arabia 28.62% ($n = 1229$) followed by USA 11.50% ($n = 494$) and Egypt 10.99% ($n = 472$) (Table 5.1). As for video clips posters, the highest percentage came from Egypt 26.52% ($n = 87$), followed by Saudi Arabia 8.84% ($n = 29$), and USA 8.84% ($n = 29$) (see Tables 4.1, 4.2). Finally and in relation to age distribution, the highest percentage of comments and video clips was posted by the age groups 19–24 and 25–29 years. As for the highest concentration of posters based on their age, the highest percentage of video clip uploads was among 27 years old ($n = 13$), 23 years old ($n = 12$), and 28 years old ($n = 11$). As for the commenters, the highest number of posts were made by people 22 year olds ($n = 191$), 32 year olds ($n = 175$), and 28 year olds ($n = 156$).

Table 4.1 Top 15 geographic locations of comments' posters

Geographic location	*No. of comments*
1. Saudi Arabia	1229
2. USA	494
3. Egypt	472
4. Kuwait	141
5. UAE	122
6. Morocco	119
7. Algeria	87
8. UK	81
9. Germany	79
10. Iraq	78
11. Canada	64
12. France	55
13. Yemen	50
14. Afghanistan	38
15. Israel/Palestine	32

Table 4.2 Top ten geographic locations of video clips' posters

Geographic location	*No. of video clips*
1. Egypt	87
2. Saudi Arabia	29
3. USA	29
4. Morocco	26
5. UK	17
6. Algeria	13
7. Germany	9
8. Canada	8
9. Qatar	7
10. France	4

Results and Discussion

As stated earlier, burning the Quran created a great deal of controversy in the Islamic world. Many Muslims felt that their respective governments did not take decisive and adequate steps to "make" the USA and/or Terry Jones refrain from burning their holy book; thus, they resorted to online media to voice their feelings. In this sense, YouTube functioned as a platform for the global public sphere that constitutes what is known as the virtual Ummah. Based on the findings of this study, the video clip and comment posters come from countries across the globe

with obvious concentration in the Middle East, North America, and Western Europe (see Tables 4.1, 4.2). This finding is similar to that of a previous study done on the anti-Islamic "Fitna" film as most the videos were posted from the Netherlands, USA, and UK (Zoonen et al. 2010: 254). The study revealed that about 90% of those who interacted tended to use insults, curses, and accusations during their dialogues instead of relying on sound religious texts (Assakina 2012).

The majority of comments carried angry tones especially curses and insults against the USA, Jones, or US soldiers (21.56%) followed by neutral (17.09%), pro-Islam (13.09%), and anti-Islam comments (12.76%) (Chart 4.2). In relation to curses, online flaming has been widely used by the majority of the posters cited above mostly due to the nature of the issue and anonymity YouTube provides. The discussion on the solipsistic introjection effect is relevant here since there has been a trend wherein one type of posts encourages or generates similar responses, for example, curses and insults or calls for jihad against the USA. Reading the kind of insults and curses that many Arab YouTubers posted, one user commented on the CNN interview with Jones, saying: "If the interviewer [Sanchez] reads the Muslims' comments on YouTube, he would immediately change his stance [on Islam]." Further, many highly pejorative terms and expressions were used such as the word "pig" and "dog," which were found in over 90 and 200 contexts respectively. These negative expressions were mostly directed at Jones, the US soldiers, and others whose views opposed other posters. For instance, one YouTuber, who seemed reasonable in discussing the Quran issue, expressed his surprise with the kind of angry responses posted, stating: "Why some are upset with burning of the Quran? Don't we sometimes burn an old torn paper … This is what this pig has done thinking that he would demean the Quran or enrage us. Instead, we felt pleased because we didn't want the Quran to remain in his filthy hands." Another YouTuber described his anger, saying: "Let Allah curse them and shake the ground beneath them and dry the blood in their veins." Finally, most of the insults found in this study contained highly obscene language, which was observed in other contexts and topics on YouTube (see for example Lindgren 2011).

Further, the videos received 14,087 likes and dislikes 4792 as most of the likes were given to pro-Islam videos ($n = 13{,}411$) in comparison to ($n = 942$) dislikes, while anti-Islam videos received far more dislikes ($n = 3554$) than likes ($n = 209$) (Chart 4.3). The majority of video clips were pro-Islam (71.95%) followed by neutral or moderate

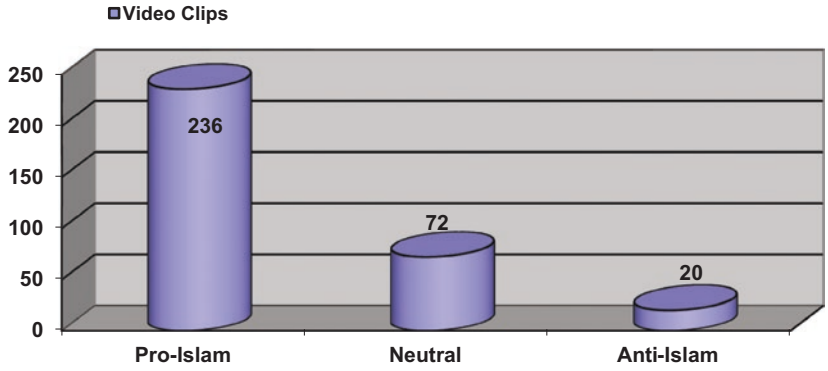

Chart 4.4 Video clips' tendencies

videos (21.95%) and finally anti-Islam clips (6.09%) (Chart 4.4). This was expected as most of the video clips and comments were posted by Arab Muslims who mostly wanted to defend their religion. One of the most popular pro-Islam videos was an edited CNN interview with Terry Jones that was conducted by Rick Sanchez. The footage was translated into Arabic and edited with a subtitle that read: "This film [sic] shows the interview with the cursed man who wants to burn our holy Quran" (CNN). There were many version of this interview, but one in particular (MWHW2yi4dhM) got over 3,360,068 views (10,878 likes/462 dislikes).

As part of the imagined conflict, some pro-Islam videos included claims that the fires that spread in California in 2010, which coincided with the Quran burning controversy, were caused by God as a punishment against the USA for its attempt to burn the Quran for example, (4EHgeMIIe50), (3bpEiXT-Ia8), and (a8OFqOQuT3w). These three clips alone were so popular that they generated over 700,000 views. However, most of the comments that accompanied the clips were critical of the videos as they discarded them and strongly discredited the claim made.

Also, there were some violent reactions on YouTube that seemed to be supported by Al-Qaeda. For instance, there were over ten video clips that showed Osama Bin Laden's aid, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, calling for Jihad and threatening the USA as a reaction against the US soldiers' burning of the Quran in Afghanistan. The Al-Qaeda

group posted several messages inciting for violence against US forces (e.g., P4GZSWE5hfA). President Obama's prediction that the Quran burning incidents would empower Al-Qaeda was somehow true as many posts praised the militant organization and/or Al-Zawahiri's speech and showed great respect for this man which is evident from the titles they gave him for example, Sheikh, Mujahid, hero. Other reactions included sending implicit threats to burn Christian symbols (gvKvCFRCbqg) or urinating on Bibles (MUzmw3Q_l0o), and/or burning the cross (WsM8MLqXbEw).

Some YouTubers resorted to other methods to protest to the burning of the Quran. Several hackers posted clips bragging about their achievements; for instance, one person claimed that he hacked into a US server (3lYlbwHS1o4), while another hacker mentioned that a virus was sent to the US which infected several computers (IkMifFGqt78). Finally, a group of Syrian hackers calling themselves "Angel Hackers" took pride in hacking into six US servers (I2I25iXUtR8). It seems that this kind of behavior is an expected reaction toward controversial issues as this is similar to what happened during the Muhammed cartoon controversy when over 600 Danish websites were defaced (Carr 2010, p. 187).

In relation to geographic details, most of the comments and video clips were posted from Saudi Arabia (28.62% for comments; 8.84% for video clips) and Egypt (10.99% for comments; 26.52% for video clips); however, diasporic communities living in the West were also important especially those residing in the USA (11.50% for comments; 8.84% for video clips) (Tables 4.1, 4.2). Moreover, the Quran burning incidents seem to attract the attention of various cyber communities that share the same beliefs and sentiments. The kind of hate speech, insults, and prejudice is so widespread that one finds such references in many YouTube clips even if the topic is irrelevant. One YouTuber expressed his astonishment at the type of hate speech he found in the comments he was reading, saying: "The funny thing is that this man [Jones] insulted Islam, while the comments here are only about [insults] between Sunnis and Shiites."

At the same time, many self-proclaimed Arab Christians and atheists especially those living in the diaspora found the topic of burning the Quran a good chance to attack Islam and its holy book. As indicated earlier, many diasporic communities that live in the West are very active online in their attempt to keep the link with their homelands. However, the feedback sent by such communities was sometimes very critical.

For example, an Egyptian man posted a video in which he publicly insulted Islam, its prophet, and the Quran. As a result, one video clip was uploaded under the title "Wanted: Dead or Alive because of burning the Quran" (wZU89etd6OE). Further, a couple of video clips were posted by a self-proclaimed Egyptian Coptic who allegedly wanted to burn the Quran (1G33yrEsc-s); the man is part of the so-called Coptic CPR Government in Exile in Frankfurt, Germany.

To sum up, the Quran burning incidents, which mostly started on social media sites, led to violent reactions on the streets but were also reflected online. The video clips and comments posted on YouTube revealed the popular sentiments toward this important issue, which attracted a great deal of attention by various cyber-communities within the global public sphere that meet to discuss a vital topic related to their core beliefs. The anonymity offered by YouTube gives some posters a liberating feeling which empowers them to discuss many taboos that are banned by mainstream media for example, jihad and blasphemy. Due to its visual and textual features, YouTube attracts more online users than many other social network sites, making it an ideal venue for the virtual Islamic Ummah but it also enhances its division along sectarian lines.

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CHAPTER 5

"Fitna"

Abstract The Dutch film, "Fitna," which is a 17-minute commentary produced by Geert Wilders, the Dutch MP, in 2008 about Islam as a response against what he saw as the Islamization of the Netherlands and Europe. As explained in Chap. 2, Wilders is closely connected with far right organizations in North America and Europe, some of which financially supported him in the legal case that was filed against him in the Netherlands over hate speech. Wilders was more recently found guilty of incitement after leading an anti-Moroccan chant at a rally, though he avoided a fine (Hakim and Schuetze in *The New York Times*, 2017). This chapter investigates the audience engagement with "Fitna" on YouTube. In relation to the YouTube videos, 66% of them were pro-Islam, 18% anti-Islam, and 16% neutral, whereas the comments were made up of pro-Islam 43%, neutral 31.8%, curses/insults 11.1%, anti-Islam 13.2%, and calls for Jihad ($n = 6$).

Keywords Fitna · Geert Wilders · The Netherlands · Far right Europe

Introduction

The Dutch film, "Fitna," is a 17-minute commentary produced by Geert Wilders, the Dutch MP, in 2008 about Islam as a response against what he saw as the Islamization of the Netherlands and Europe. As explained

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in Chap. 2, Wilders is closely connected with far-right organizations in North America and Europe, some of which financially supported him in the legal case that was filed against him in the Netherlands over hate speech. Wilders was more recently found guilty of incitement after leading an anti-Moroccan chant at a rally, though he avoided a fine (Hakim and Schuetze 2017). This chapter investigates the audience engagement with "Fitna" on YouTube. In relation to the YouTube videos, 66% were pro-Islam, 18% anti-Islam, and 16% neutral, whereas the comments were made up of pro-Islam 43%, neutral 31.8%, curses/insults 11.1%, anti-Islam 13.2%, and calls for Jihad ($n = 6$).

As stated above, Geert Wilders is one of the well-known leaders of the far-right parties in Europe as he has been a vocal critic of the European Union, immigration from Muslim countries, Islam, and multiculturalism (Kirk and Scott 2017). His populist views have garnered the attention of the alt-right movement in the USA and Canada that find in his often racist rhetoric many commonalities. This is the reason why Wilders has been invited by many far-right groups in North America in order to give fiery speeches against Islam and immigration. For example, Wilders gave a speech in 2011 at the conservative Canada Christian College in Ontario in which he claimed that moderate Islam does not exist, and that Muslims intend to take over Europe and North America (*National Post* 2011). In the USA, Wilders is frequently invited to attend different events that are characterized by their anti-Islamic stances, making him "America's Favorite Islamophobe" (Vuijst 2017). For example, on the anniversary of 9/11 in New York, Wilders was invited by Stop Islamization of America group, which is headed by right-wing members, Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, to protest the Ground Zero mosque controversy (Aslan 2010). In May 2015, Geert Wilders was invited as a keynote speaker in Garland, Texas by the same group that organized an event and a $10,000 prize for the best pejorative drawing of Muhammed. The event attracted about 200 people. However, two Muslim terrorists attacked the gathering by opening fire and injuring one police officer. The attackers, who seemed to be lone wolves, were later killed by police (Conlon and Sgueglia 2015; Stack 2015).

In relation to the influence of Wilders' militant ideas, Anders Breivik, a Norwegian far-right terrorist, killed 77 people in July 2011 as a reaction against multiculturalism and what he saw as the Islamization of Europe. In his manifesto, which was posted online before the attacks, Breivik used "extensive citations … from the Dutch politician Geert Wilders and Steven Yaxley-Lennon's English Defence League" (Feldman 2012).

In fact, Breivik was inspired and "impressed" by Wilders' ideology (Townsend and Traynor 2011) to the extent that he travelled to the UK in March 2010 in order to attend one of Wilders' speeches in an event organized by the English Defence League another far-right group. Ironically, upon receiving a prize for free speech in Germany, Wilders and his close friend Ayaan Hirsi Ali claimed that Breivik's motive behind his terrorist act should be attributed to censoring his free speech in Norway (Bangstad and Chapple 2014). In his defense, Wilders claimed that "in no possible way have I contributed to a climate in which murderers such as Anders Breivik feel called upon to the urge to use violence" (Spaaij 2012, p. 59). Incidentally in this statement, Wilders does not even call Breivik a terrorist since he uses this term exclusively when describing Islam. Indeed, there is no doubt that far-right ideology inspires some terrorists to act Muslims, especially when the frequent attacks against mosques in North America, refugee shelters in Europe, and the murder of some Muslims like the case of the 2017 Quebec mosque shooting (Dougherty 2017) are taken into account. The attacker, Alexandre Bissonnette, killed six Muslims and injured 19 others; he was interested in Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump's right-wing ideologies. Also, there were on average ten attacks per day against migrants in Germany in 2016 conducted by far-right groups (BBC News 2017).

In relation to "Fitna," the film received major publicity in the West as it allegedly attempted to show the reality of Islam and the Quran, according to its producer; however, the film generated many discussions over freedom of speech and religious incitement. "Fitna" was originally released on Liveleak but was removed twice for copyright and security reasons. As a further reaction to the attempts to block the film online, Wilders created a website in 2008 (www.fitnathemovie.com) in order to host his video; however, the US Internet company, Network Solutions, which provided the platform decided to shut the website down because of copyright and security concerns (The Associated Press 2008). Later on, Wilders was acquitted from all charges related to inciting hatred and discrimination in 2011 over the "Fitna" film (Conlon and Sgueglia 2015).

In general, the film created diplomatic tension and sometimes embarrassment for the Dutch government, which tried to highlight the real intentions of the film and its maker. Before the film's release, the Dutch government was "concerned about reactions to the film, especially in the Middle East, and has prepared a communications strategy distancing itself from the film while affirming its commitment to freedom of expression" (Wikileaks 2008a). As a result, the government

raised "the national terrorist threat level from limited to substantial" in anticipation of any violence, according to Tjibbe Joustra, the Dutch National Counterterrorism Coordinator at that time (Wikileaks 2008b). According to US diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks, in anticipation of violent reactions shortly before the release of the film, the Dutch government expected some levels of violence to be seen in "Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia and Syria" though these reactions were expected to be less violent than those that accompanied the publication of the Danish cartoons (ibid.). In Pakistan, the authorities "stepped up security for the Dutch Embassy and some other European embassies in Islamabad as a precautionary measure … Security has … been increased for some high visibility Dutch firms, such as Phillips and ABN AMRO Bank in Islamabad" (Wikileaks 2008a). In Jordan, an Islamic group calling itself "The Messenger of Allah Unites Us" called for boycotting Dutch products in 2008 and asked for "an international arrest warrant against Wilders accusing him of racism, inciting hatred and insulting Islam and Muslims" (DutchNews.nl. 2008). Further, the Indonesian government temporarily blocked YouTube and MySpace in 2008 because of the film (Putra 2008; Wikileaks 2008f), which had been produced in different languages including Arabic. The Indonesian government later sent a letter to YouTube requesting that the platform remove about 3000 videos on "Fitna" though a search conducted by the US Embassy in Jakarta showed "3070 hits, the vast majority of which are commentary and not video or excerpts of video" (Wikileaks 2008f). It is not clear how many of these videos were defending or attacking Islam. On April 2, Indonesia witnessed "some small rallies in Jakarta, but the situation" remained "peaceful" in Jakarta. "The demonstrators demanded that the Dutch Ambassador be recalled to the Netherlands and intimated that they might harass Dutch citizens living in Indonesia. The protesters also threw a few eggs and bottled water at the Dutch Embassy, but no arrests or injuries were reported" (Wikileaks 2008c). On the same day, however, a more violent protest was organized by 50 students who belonged to North Sumatra Islamic students' organization in Medan. They "vandalized the Dutch consulate … Police failed to react quickly enough to control the students, who broke down the consulate gate, burned the Dutch flag, torched the building entrance, and broke several windows with rocks" (Wikileaks 2008d). Other countries also witnessed some rallies; for example, about 1500 Malian Muslims organized a peaceful protest on April 5 against the film in Bamako (Wikileaks 2008e).

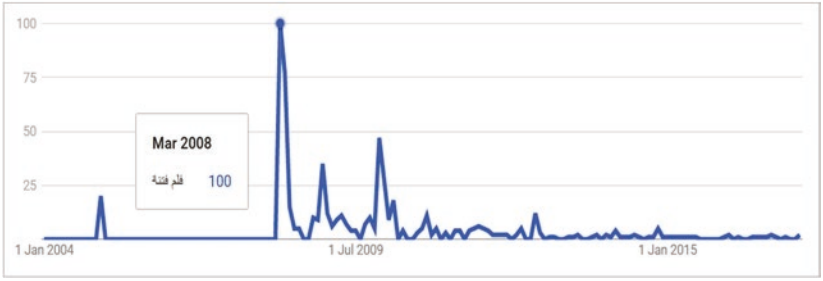

Chart 5.1 Google searches for "Fitna film" in Arabic

A Google Trends search for the term "Fitna film" in Arabic revealed that the highest degree of online attention was seen in March 2008 (Chart 5.1). In relation to the film itself, there is no doubt that it is very immature and superficial in terms of its production and content; it mostly relies on stereotypes and generalizations to attack Islam and the Quran. Similar to far-right groups rhetoric, a few violent incidents and encounters that are instigated and conducted by radical Muslims are used as examples to suggest that the whole religion of Islam is dangerous and unpredictable.

Results and Discussion

A webometric tool, as cited in Chap. 2, collected 426 videos that had 5438 comments. The search term used was "Fitna film" in Arabic [فلم فتنة]. These videos were viewed 7,457,164 times, and they received 10,474 likes and 3587 dislikes. However, the number of relevant videos is only 50, generating 1742 comments. The other videos were mostly irrelevant because "Fitna," which means schism in Arabic, is a popular word used on YouTube, especially in relation to anti-Christ videos. Though the incident happened a few months after collecting the data, there are many other videos on Arnoud Van Doorn, a Dutch politician, who assisted in distributing "Fitna" but later converted to Islam (Huffington Post, UK 2012). Van Doorn was a member of Geert Wilder's anti-Islamic Party for Freedom (PVV), but he ended up regretting making the video and performed pilgrimage to Mecca in 2013. Interestingly, the majority of Arab YouTubers regarded Van Doorn's

conversion as a victory for Islam because it allegedly shows the fallacy of Wilders' stances. On the other hand, Van Doorn thinks that for many others, he is regarded as a "traitor" for abandoning Wilders' party and its ideology (*The Guardian* 2013).

With regard to the types of comments, there are hundreds of personal exchanges between self-proclaimed Arab Muslims and Christians, mostly Egyptian Copts. There are also hundreds of comments exchanged between English speakers debating Islam and Christianity, yet the majority of these exchanges are predominately characterized by flaming and abusive language. There are hundreds of anti-Islam and pro-Islam activists, virtual preachers, and missionaries who are fluent in Arabic, trying to convince others of their core beliefs and agenda. For example, the examination of the top 500 words used in the YouTubers' comments showed the following related references in Arabic and English: "Jesus" [المسيح] ($n = 681$); "Jesus" ($n = 232$); "The Cross" [الصليب] ($n = 188$); "Christian" [مسيحي] ($n = 176$); "Christians" [النصارى] ($n = 176$); "Christians" ($n = 164$); "Bible" ($n = 131$); Mary [مريم] ($n = 131$); "Christian" ($n = 124$); The Christians" [المسيحيين] ($n = 122$); and "The Christian" [المسيحية] ($n = 122$). It seems that some self-proclaimed Muslim and Christian YouTubers feel that they have a duty to "educate" others on their faiths. For anti-Muslim groups, they mostly troll Muslims on YouTube either for fun, or possibly to convert some to allegedly become atheists or Christians, or for other purposes. As a reaction, one often finds angry responses filled with insults and curses as explained below. As mentioned in Chap. 2, YouTube provides an alternative media platform for people to speak their thoughts without any fear of persecution, especially in relation to issues related to their religions. Mainstream media does not usually provide such a venue because it is largely limited to the elite. As an online public sphere, YouTube assists in making its users feel connected to other community members who confirm and share their ideas in relation to Islam, though the disputes are mostly characterized by obscenity and harsh language.

Unlike the videos and comments on the Danish cartoons, there is only one video (VE4l2Mu3vqs) on boycotting Dutch products posted on September 12, 2012, generating three comments only, one of which is by the video poster himself. Hence, this category was not included in the classification of videos. The two most commented on videos are (Isvj6Rb49L8) ($n = 333$) and (pgCGeyLlfJY) ($n = 191$). The first video was removed for copyright issues, whereas comments from the second

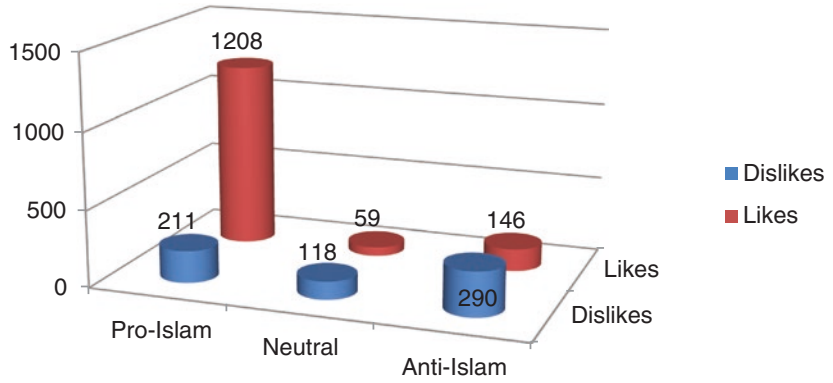

Chart 5.2 YouTubers' reactions to the videos

video seemed to be removed by the poster at a later stage, possibly for containing anti-Islamic sentiments. Further, the videos received 1413 likes and 619 dislikes in total; the majority of pro-Islam clips received a large number of likes ($n = 1208$) rather than dislikes ($n = 211$), whereas the anti-Islam videos mostly received dislikes ($n = 290$) rather than likes ($n = 146$) (see Chart 5.2). This provides an indication that the online community that gathers around the "Fitna" film is mostly made up of Muslims who want to defend or react positively towards their faith. On the other hand, the anti-Islam community is smaller in number, yet they are also effective, as will be shown below. Chart 5.3 shows the tendencies of the different videos. Again, pro-Islam clips that defend Muslims constituted the majority 66% ($n = 33$), followed by anti-Islam 18% ($n = 9$), and neutral ones 16% ($n = 8$). In relation to the self-proclaimed geographic locations of the video posters, Egypt comes first ($n = 41$) followed by Saudi Arabia ($n = 35$), the USA ($n = 35$), Syria ($n = 20$), and Algeria ($n = 14$). As discussed in Chap. 2, many Arab YouTube users seem to live in the diaspora, which explains the reason behind listing France, Canada, and Germany as part of the top ten countries from which the videos were posted (see Table 5.1).

With regard to the videos, many Muslim activists felt the need to dispute the "Fitna" film by posting their own responses like (-GXx4XhogLs) and (vG8OFIkyFMQ). Those activists rely on the collective and connective action of other Muslim YouTubers to spread

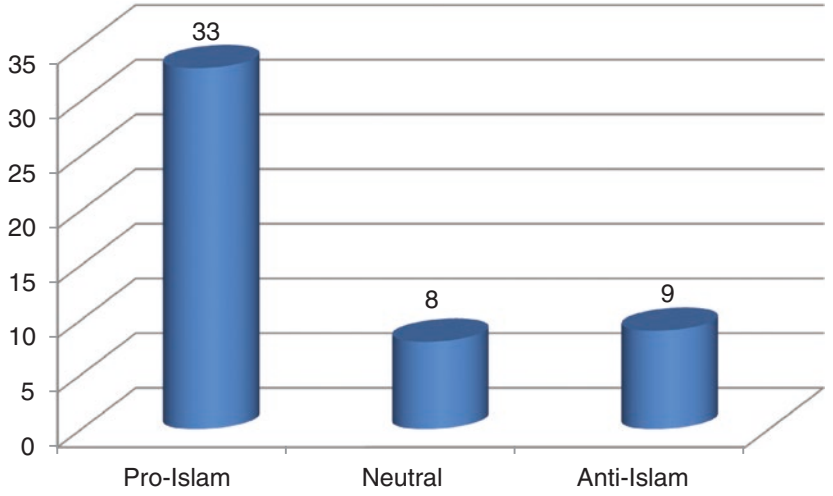

Chart 5.3 Video clips' tendencies

Table 5.1 Top 10 geographic locations of videos' posters

Geographic location	*No. of videos*
1. Egypt	41
2. Saudi Arabia	35
3. USA	35
4. Syria	20
5. Algeria	14
6. France	10
7. Iraq	7
8. Kuwait	7
9. Canada	6
10. Germany	6

their own version of Islam and its prophet. Some users posted several responses in the form of episodes such as the ones entitled "ANTI FITNA episode 9" (fOfK1w1cfu4) or "Schism Vs Fitna" (xxh3fJKQ_Z4) or "Fitna the Movie (Arabic)" (h7UJ77BHo-g). The latter is similar to other ones like that "FITNA (Bible version) 1" (Aa9rlC3n3UQ) that uses excerpts from the Bible to attack Christianity in order to illustrate that Islam is not different from other religions. One YouTuber used the title "Re: Fitna The Movie" in English followed by "in response to the Crusader Wilders and his Fitna film" in Arabic (6aKzNXXCDD4).

Table 5.2 Top 20 geographic locations of comments' posters

Geographic location	*No. of comments*
1. Saudi Arabia	900
2. USA	415
3. Egypt	269
4. Syria	244
5. Morocco	196
6. Algeria	100
7. Kuwait	95
8. UAE	82
9. UK	81
10. Netherlands	72
11. Iraq	65
12. France	54
13. Jordan	54
14. Germany	46
15. Canada	41
16. Sweden	35
17. Israel	32
18. Australia	24
19. Oman	24
20. Bahrain	23

This shows that some YouTubers felt the need to personally attack Wilders similar to the way he attacked Muhammed and the Quran. Finally, one YouTuber even created a channel called TruthAboutFitna in which he posted two responses to the film "RE: Fitna (English) Part 1/2 (Full 16 min version)" (DmhmO8vWTB0).

As for the YouTube comments, there were 1742 comments generated from the videos analyzed. All the irrelevant comments, especially those related to personal attacks or exchanges, were removed from coding. Similar to the posted videos, the YouTube commenters also come from different parts of the globe though the majority are located in the Arab world (see Table 5.2). For example, the USA comes second ($n = 415$) followed by the UK in ninth position ($n = 81$), the Netherlands in tenth ($n = 72$), and France in twelfth ($n = 54$). In relation to the tendencies of the comments, they were categorized into five types: pro-Islam 43% ($n = 379$), neutral 31.8% ($n = 280$), curses/insults 11.1% ($n = 98$), anti-Islam 13.2% ($n = 117$), and calls for Jihad ($n = 6$) (see Chart 5.4). Similar to the videos posted, there was only one comment that called for boycotting Dutch products in the Arab world, so this category was removed from the analysis.

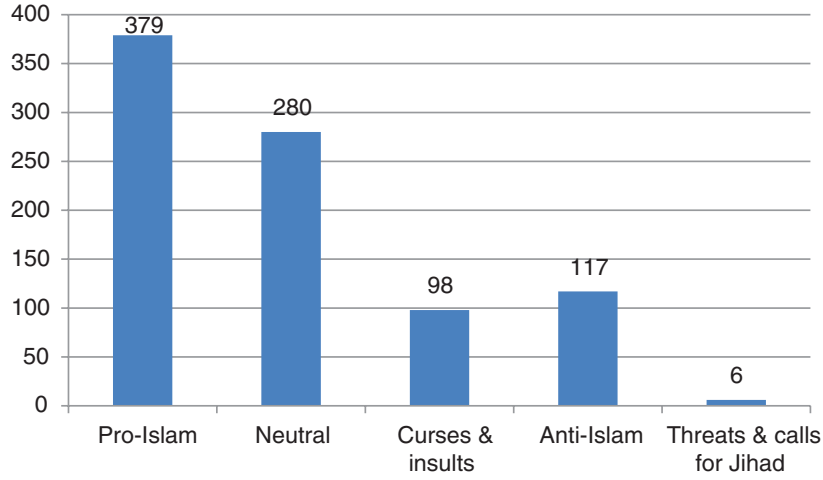

Chart 5.4 YouTube's comments tendencies

In relation to the pro-Islam posts, they constituted the majority of comments with 43%, which is expected as the videos of "Fitna" film attract the attention of devout Muslims who are eager to defend their religion. In fact, the pro-Islam group forms an online community that seems to be united by their sense of religious identity despite the geographical distances that separate them. For example, a YouTube user called, soad abdel-kader, posted a request for YouTube to take down the "dirty film" because of its attack against Islam. The user implores the Muslim community to take action. Further, BRAHISTORIQUE urges other users to "disseminate the [Anti-Fitna] series to refute the allegations and lies directed against Islam and Muslims." Other users insistently ask their fellows and friends to distribute the pro-Islamic videos on YouTube, which resembles the goals of religious activists who have a sense of duty towards their religion. For example, Abo Albraa, functions like a virtual preacher as he provides advice, guidance, and interacts with others who attack Islam in Arabic and English. Interestingly, the user believes that YouTube has some limitations, possibly because other people who have deeper knowledge of Islam might not be present on this platform, so he repeatedly asks other YouTubers who insult or express doubt about Islam to visit an

Islamic forum called Fursan Al-Sunna (The Sunni knights) http://www.forsanhaq.com/. Finally, amiham1986 warns other YouTubers about certain trolls like Avempace017 and zaitoon64 asking others to let them "bark until they get tired and silenced." Other users, like galant baldeh, provide detailed instructions on how to flag anti-Islam videos and report them for allegedly violating YouTube's community rules such as "Hateful or abusive content" or "Speeches calling for hatred and terrorism."

Often, the two online communities vigorously interact. The most recurrent topic is the circulation of fake news or false information on Islam. For example, Saudi7Girl reacted to a false story on Muhammed, stating: "i think some1 told you this a fake story before you start sleeping LOL Seeking the truth isn't so Hard .don't be brainwashed". Further, thetubewave states in English: "People, you need to know what islam is about… from unbiased sources. Please do not insult yourself by watching this damn thing. YOU OWE IT TO YOURSELF. DO NOT LET YOURSELF BE MISLED."

In relation to insults/curses at 11.1% they are not high in number but are mostly directed against Wilders rather than the West or the Netherlands. FdytkG, for example, says: "I hope that Allah's revenge will fall on him, and we hear the news on the death of the film's maker and those who participated in it." Another user, amor2010, says the following: "Can this pig make a film on the Holocaust? Let him show us democracy that allows him freedom of expression." Finally, silver7ven mentions that "whenever you hear a dog barking on our great Prophet and peaceful religion, silence the poster by praying for Muhammed."

Some neutral comments and voices exist as they constitute the second largest number of comments with 31.8%. For example, issam biar states the following: "The movements that call themselves Jihadis are the ones that negatively affected Islam … There are extremist groups in the West that stand against Islam and seized the chance to attack it. The director of this film and others are victims of the intensive media campaigns against our rightful religion." Further, some YouTubers insist on allowing multiple voices to interact on the online platform. For example, bassim999, says the following: "All people have the right to freely express their religious belief, and Muslims have no right to object. We live in an age of freedom. In the past, the censor used to remove everything but we live now in the age of the Internet, for any person can reach the piece of information that he wants." Another user, Alkazardt,

urges Muslim YouTubers to understand the motive behind making the film in the first place instead of reacting violently:

> Whatever you said. Dutch ppl didn't do this. One man Named GEERT WILDERS. Don't blaim US for his goddamn mistakes… You gave him what he wanted. ATTENTION. Al those death treaths can he use as prove that the Islam is bad. Who's not at all. It's freedom of speech he abused for that. He's a son of a bitch … But don't blaim us DUTCH ppl for the fact that he;s such a retard. If you bever payed attention to him. Nothing happend. He now has his prove that the Islam is bad. He wins. I'm against him.

Interestingly, some users believe that Wilders' film created a positive outcome for Islam and Muslims. For instance, nmn196853 mentioned that Wilders' action "will increase the number of Muslims," while alsaffar1986 says that the film's producer made people "pay more attention to the Quran despite Wilders' grudge and hatred against Islam." A few other users like Raafje84 thinks that there is still room for interfaith understanding, stating in English: "I still believe in peace. I respect my muslim friends. And they respect me being a Christian. Dont give in to the facist propoganda. Respect and understanding are the key, Salam." It seems that despite the polarization that occurs between pro-Islam and anti-Islam communities, there are still users who actively try to find some common ground for mutual understanding. Other YouTubers ask rhetorical questions directed at Wilders' actions in order to highlight the weaknesses in his stances. For example, anamasri1975 questions Wilders' claim of freedom of speech and action, which seems to apply to what serves his agenda, saying: "why to stop people from going to Islam … is that the claimed freedom of religions in the west… it is none of his business to stop people from going to islam, why done't he try to promote and advertise his religion instead of detroying others, it doesn't make sense man …". Finally, m23li questions Wilders' accusation against Islam by drawing some comparisons with the West, saying: "Aren't the actions of George Bush and his … aides represented in killing children, destroying whole nations, and murdering people create such reactions? We do not regard them as Christians or Jews since in each religion there are extremists who distort the image of their faith."

On the other hand, anti-Islamic comments constituted 13.2% of the posts. There are some active users who possibly regard themselves as activists to troll Muslims such as ProphetMoooo who posts highly insulting comments against Islam and Muslims. Another user, Damris7777, acts like a Christian missionary who provides advice to other Muslims in Arabic: "Wake up Muslims and know the truth! The matter is not a game as this is the everlasting life. Jesus has died and is now in Heaven to give you eternal life. Do not be fooled by the liars who want to take you astray [Muhammed] … I ask the Lord to show you the truth." Finally, the YouTube user, sesshy34 seems to challenge other Muslims by making comparisons and insulting them in English: "Poor you muslims, Allah deserted you and chose the west Coz all the shit holes of the world today are muslim nations and world's most powerful nations are the nations of Jews and Chrisitians. Bring it on Muslims, give it your best shot! USA is gonna chew up and spit you out all you dirty Jihadis that you can send." These comments show the degree of flaming that often occurs on YouTube.

As for calls for Jihad, there are very few comments that actually called for waging Jihad ($n = 6$). This was not expected as there was some offline anger towards the "Fitna" film in some Muslim countries as explained above. One YouTuber, whsh100, says that since countries like the USA and some EU nations allowed the film to be viewed, then (s)he concludes that "Osama Bin Laden's path is the correct and rightful one; we have to call for Jihad." Another user, magela008 declares: "Your end has neared by the hands of Islam's lions, Wilders!"

Based on the above findings, I can conclude that there are three main online communities: Pro-Islam, neutral, and anti-Islam. These communities shape the online public sphere as they flourish on YouTube, especially due to the platform's anonymous feature that provides protection from persecution. Indeed, the three communities shape the online disputes and debates that are often characterized by racist and fiery rhetoric. The two sides in this spectrum, the pro and anti-Islam communities, often show signs of rigidity in their ideological stances that can be linked to the selective exposure theory. In particular, the overwhelming majority of the anti-Islam community, especially those writing in Arabic, seem to intentionally troll Muslim believers by insulting and cursing Islam and its prophet. As a result, this repeated action creates a vicious cycle of insult exchanges. Despite their low numbers, the anti-Islam community seems to exert a great deal of influence on YouTube.

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CHAPTER 6

"Innocence of Muslims"

Abstract When the short anti-Islam film the "Innocence of Muslims" was first posted on YouTube in English, no tangible reactions were seen in the Arab world. However, when the same producer dubbed it into Arabic and posted it on YouTube, street protests started around some parts of the Arab world. Terry Jones supported the efforts of making this film which "attracted a kooky band of ultraconservative Christian supporters who seem to have regarded the film … as the perfect vehicle to stir the flames of holy war" (Nestel in *The Daily Beast*, 2016). Also, one far-right group in Germany, The Pro Deutschland Citizens' Movement, uploaded the film's trailer on its website and attempted to screen it for audiences in Berlin (Dowling in *The Guardian*, 2012).

Keywords Nakoula Basseley · Innocence of Muslims · USA Far-right · Egypt

Introduction

This final chapter deals with the online reception of the "Innocence of Muslims," which created a great deal of controversy in the Islamic world because it attacked the prophet of Islam. The case study as a whole is worth exploring for not only its reach and severity but also as an exemplar of the capacity of user-generated media to shape both religious and political debates in the contemporary media sphere.

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When the short anti-Islam film the "Innocence of Muslims" was first posted on YouTube in English, no tangible reactions were seen in the Arab world. However, when the same producer dubbed it into Arabic and posted it on YouTube, street protests started around some parts of the Arab world. Terry Jones supported the efforts of making this film which "attracted a kooky band of ultraconservative Christian supporters who seem to have regarded the film … as the perfect vehicle to stir the flames of holy war" (Nestel 2016). Also, one far-right group in Germany, The Pro Deutschland Citizens' Movement, uploaded the film's trailer on its website and attempted to screen it in Berlin (Dowling 2012). An Egyptian Christian Copt identified as Nakoula Basseley Nakoula[1] also produced an anti-Islam film titled the "Innocence of Muslims" (Lowrey 2012). Nakoula himself was active in the Egyptian diaspora, especially in the USA, in sharing information on the issues facing the Christian minority in Egypt, a predominantly Muslim country. On YouTube, he used the username "Sam Bacile"[2] to upload his film in English on July 2, 2012 and then in Arabic on September 4, 2012. On the following day a friend of Nakoula began promoting the film on a blog and on Twitter for approximately five days, which also coincided with the "International Judge Muhammed Day" that was scheduled for September 11, 2012 (Wagstaff 2012). The Arabic version of the film was removed from YouTube around September 12, 2012 (YouTube 2012a), but the English version that was tagged in Arabic as "Islam's Major Scandal" remained online. Through November 6, 2012 it had gathered over 5 million views and 104,000 comments (YouTube 2012b).

In a radio interview, Nakoula stated that he is a researcher of Islamic studies and that he wrote a book in 1994 about Islam after analyzing the treatment of Jews in the Islamic republic of Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini's famous fatwa against Salman Rushdie (RadioSawa 2012). According to one of Nakoula's spokespersons, the aim of the "Innocence of Muslims" film was to convince devout Muslims to convert to Christianity. In an attempt to attract Muslims living in California to view his film Nakoula distributed flyers near mosques in his geographical proximity, however, few people came to view the film in the cinema (Flaccus 2012).

[1] His legal name is Mark Basseley Youssef.

[2] Reportedly one of tens of other fake names he is known to have used.

Following this limited outreach, Nakoula shifted his attention to posting the film on YouTube. When the film's Arabic version was uploaded there, the Egyptian TV channel Al-Nas (People) aired parts of it on September 8, 2012 during Sheikh Khalid Abdallah's popular talk show. Another Egyptian channel, Al-Nahar (Day) hosted the former head of the Islamic Al-Hikma TV channel the next day to discuss the film. Following this sort of increasing media coverage, as well as the accessibility of the film online, Muslim Arabs became more aware of it (Malik 2012). Eventually, displeasure over the film grew into street protests and culminated with the death of more than 30 people in over seven countries (McCartney 2012). Hillary Clinton once falsely attributed the Benghazi attack to the release of the film. She told the father of one of the US victims, "We are going to have the filmmaker arrested who was responsible for the death of [your] son" (Nestel 2016).

Further, Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri praised the Libyan protesters responsible for killing the US Ambassador and called for waging a holy war against the USA and Israel to avenge Prophet Muhammed (Associated Press 2012). Of course, Al-Qaeda is well-known for exploiting such controversial incidents to gather popular support and build momentum for its cause. In Egypt, a legal court sentenced several people to prison on September 18, 2012 for inciting religious hatred and mocking the religion of Islam including Nakoula and a number of his aides (BBC Arabic 2012). In Pakistan, the minister of railways, Ghulam Ahmed Bilour offered a $100,000 bounty for anyone who killed the film's director, stating: "Whomsoever can kill the blasphemer will be covered in dollar bills by me" (Hussain 2012).

In brief, Nakoula succeeded in creating a highly provocative film, but his overall goal of conversion seems to have been misplaced. Indeed, his film angered thousands if not millions of Muslims around the world and precipitated widespread and violent reactions, including the death of civilians.

Results and Discussion

By using a Google Trends search, I found that the highest peak in interest was in September 2012 which shortly followed the release of the film in Arabic on YouTube (see Chart 6.1). For this chapter, one Arabic term was used: "Innocence of Muslims" [براءة المسلمين] that yielded 474 videos and 5545 comments. All the irrelevant videos were removed and only 239 remained, which generated 5002 likes, 3348 dislikes, and 4883

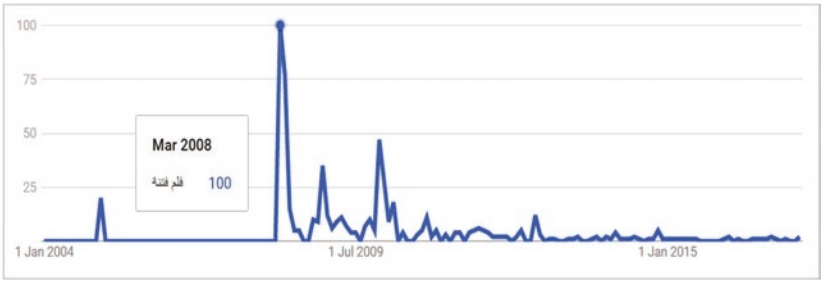

Chart 6.1 Google searches for the term "Innocence of Muslims" in Arabic

comments. However, the actual number of comments that have been captured by the webometric tool were 4471. It is important to note here that another search term was used which is "hurtful film" [الفلم المسيء]. This term resulted in 398 videos that generated 6290 comments. This search term was later discarded because the videos found were mostly duplicates of the first search, while many others dealt with a variety of other minor films or irrelevant incidents.

In relation to the analysis of videos, the majority of pro-Islam clips got likes ($n = 2042$) rather than dislikes ($n = 693$) as expected, while anti-Islam clips got more dislikes ($n = 1751$) than likes ($n = 1200$) (see Chart 6.2). Similar to the approach followed in the previous chapters, the videos were coded based on the following criteria: pro-Islam, neutral, and anti-Islam. Like the Quran-burning videos, there are main types that can be identified such posting religious sermons, public speeches, news reports, demonstrations and street protests, and testimonials. The results show that the majority of videos were neutral ($n = 130$) simply because there were many TV news reports that covered the events that followed the release of the film, especially the protests in some Arab countries, and there were no clear stances by the posters (Chart 6.3). There are, however, some neutral videos that are not news reports (e.g., fn-DxkPeP5E) in which the following English statement is found: "Innocence of Muslims—A message to Muslims from America, in the hope of increasing understanding."

The second popular type of video is pro-Islam ($n = 67$) followed by anti-Islam clips ($n = 18$). As for the geographical location of the video posters, Lebanon comes first ($n = 28$) followed by Egypt ($n = 24$), the UK ($n = 12$), Russia ($n = 12$), and Algeria ($n = 8$) (see Table 6.1).

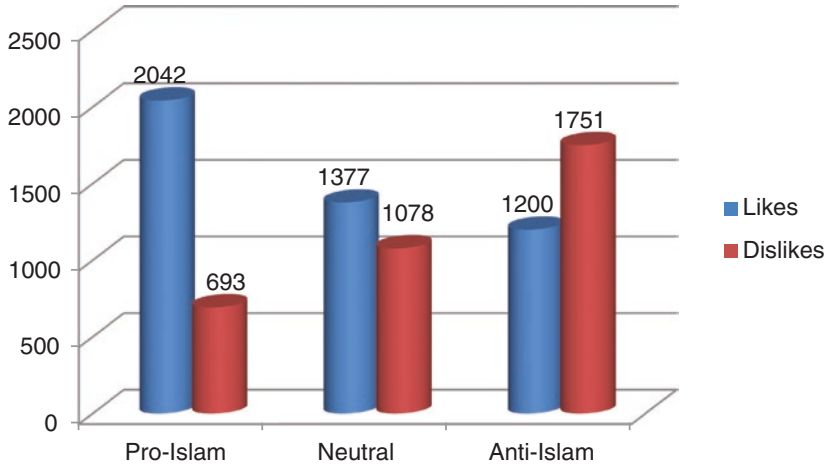

Chart 6.2 Audiences' reactions to YouTube videos

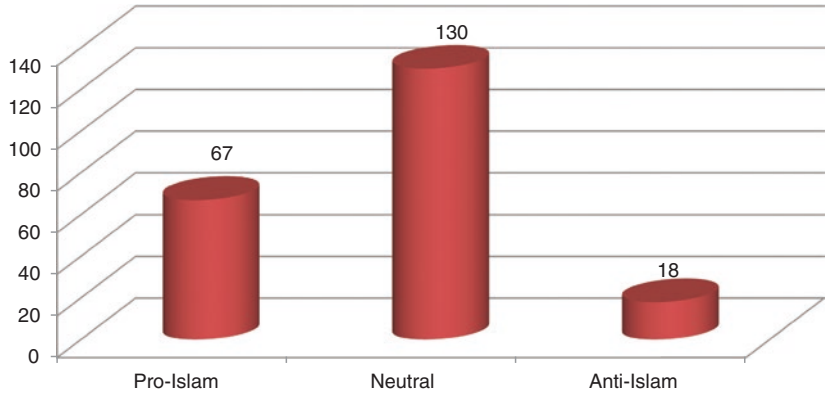

Chart 6.3 YouTube videos' tendencies

Again, there seems to be people living in the diaspora who are involved in disseminating and reacting to news on the "Innocence of Muslims" film.

As explained in Chap. 2, many controversial incidents linked to Islam seem to create collective and connective type of action, especially in relation to the pro- and anti-Islam videos and comments.

Table 6.1 The top 10 geographical locations of YouTube video posters

Location	*Number of videos*
1. Lebanon	28
2. Egypt	24
3. UK	12
4. Russia	12
5. Algeria	8
6. USA	8
7. Sudan	7
8. Morocco	6
9. Australia	5
10. Israel	5

For example, some videos provide advice for other YouTubers on how to flag anti-Islam clips in order to remove them from the platform such as (POShTh963nA), (uWTqI69HJJU), and (SxGWYsbN-N4) some of which are entitled "Reporting Innocence of Muslims," while others like (2jxToFi1hnw) offer detailed instructions in Arabic and English on the same issue. Incidentally, almost all the videos that have an Arabic subtitle of "Innocence of Muslims" alone have been removed from YouTube such as (Vh1G0nV4 h-w), (Nu9OvFh3AJ0), (YSwi94xfNFE), (z6m4cES18S0), (a5SPDTkaof0), and (GdP7Cl8OnV4). These videos were regarded as anti-Islamic because they intended to show the film without editing it, sometimes mentioning the phrase "the truth about Islam" or "truth about Muhammed" in their descriptions.[3] This shows that pro-Islam activists are actively flagging these videos for allegedly violating YouTube's terms and conditions including copyright reasons.

Other YouTubers have clear anti-Islamic stances like the user who runs the channel "isIamophobe"; (S)he posted the video (Vh1G0nV4 h-w) with the title "Innocence of Muslims" in three languages: Arabic, English, and French presumably to increase its reach. The video got 143 dislikes and 34 likes although it was also removed.

As for pro-Islam videos, they seem to respond to the inflammatory film by featuring chants that praise Muhammed and Islam as well as editing documentaries that highlight the scientific and cultural achievements of Muslims. Other videos attempt to highlight strong pro-Islam stances

[3] Any film that has been removed was not coded because it is not possible to understand its general tendency.

in various ways. For example, one video (GXYj0yj2X50) contained an excerpt clip from a Friday prayer sermon in which a Muslim preacher cites some Islamic rulings on the need to kill those who insult Allah or his prophet. It is not clear who the preacher was or where the sermon took place. Another video (ZdrFIEEpQjw) is posted by a Saudi hacker calling himself ZEePO1. The title of the video is "My third hack – Porn Addict" and is supposed to be a punishment for commenting favorably on the "Innocence of Muslims" film as well as for viewing porn. The hacker controlled the webcam of the user's laptop while watching a pornographic film and posted the whole hacking attempt online. The video claims that the operating system of the user's computer will be erased after the incident. This video was well received by many people who urged the hacker to teach them the hacking techniques.

In general, the "Innocence of Muslims" film created anger and mistrust among many people. One YouTuber, for instance, gave the following title to the clip (s)he posted "The film is a Zionist-American production" (CyQl07RnaZo), which is reminiscent of conspiracy theorists, while another video (1jEXhqvWX0A) mocked Jesus and insulted Christians as a reaction to the film. Yet, the most discussed videos are those that made a link between the film and the killing of the US ambassador to Libya such as (EC9w7O33Z0w) and (bE3gLGYJyUU), while news on the attempt to burn the US embassy in Cairo (rVcXV9pVTtI) as well as (0X5VonSThfQ) and the other protests in Sudan, especially the storming of the German Embassy in Khartoum (Fb8Ju2Fva2A) garnered ample attention by YouTubers. However, some videos attempted to criticize the protesters like (Zr5a1mNj6W0), which is entitled "Protests about a film that has not yet been watched." The video poster believes that the majority of protesters have not watched the film despite the fact that some have reacted violently towards its content. This video also got removed.

As for the comments analysis, the highest number of comments are related to neutral voices ($n = 607$) similar to the video clips analysis. This is followed by curses/insults against the film maker or the USA ($n = 511$), anti-Islam ($n = 426$), pro-Islam ($n = 404$), calls for jihad or for killing of the film maker ($n = 182$), and boycotting US products or closing Western embassies ($n = 21$) (see Chart 6.4). With regard to the geographical locations of the commentators, Saudi Arabia comes first ($n = 440$), followed by the USA ($n = 397$), UK ($n = 118$), Australia ($n = 109$), and Egypt ($n = 94$) (see Table 6.2). Aside from the relevance of the Muslim

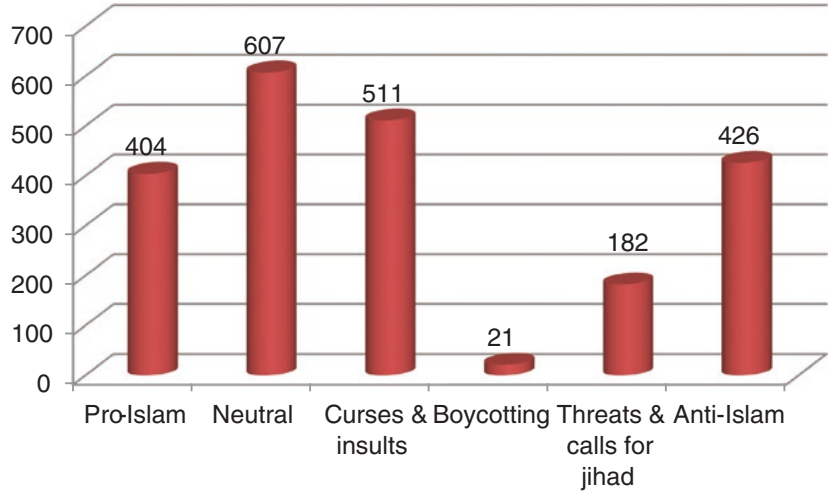

Chart 6.4 YouTube comments' tendencies

Table 6.2 The top 20 geographic locations for the most active commenters on YouTube

Geographic location	*No. of comments*
1. Saudi Arabia	440
2. USA	397
3. UK	118
4. Australia	109
5. Egypt	94
6. Morocco	63
7. Algeria	61
8. Canada	60
9. Kuwait	60
10. Germany	46
11. France	38
12. Iraq	35
13. Sweden	35
14. Netherlands	34
15. Malaysia	29
16. UAE	26
17. Pakistan	24
18. Israel	21
19. Italy	21
20. India	18

diaspora, many anti-Islam voices reside in the West who mostly reacted in English rather than Arabic, especially from Australia as there are a few videos on an angry Muslim protest against the film in Sydney.

In relation to the neutral comments, such voices include civilized debates about Islam and Christianity as YouTube provides this educational platform, while others do not express a clear ideological stance except for praying for peace or understanding. For example, the YouTuber, nerissa miranda, provides a piece of advice for other Muslim users who expressed some anger towards the film by stating the following in English: "we must have to be in cool and get it in a nice way talks coz even the prophet muhhamad will not like the violence action from anyone hope the hearts of the muslim will be open and make the good acts just like their prophet Humble and forgiver." Another user, Lacey Charbonneau, simply asks: "Why cant we all just live in peace?," while mm aa condemns those who assaulted Western embassies in the Middle East, stating: "The ones who wronged Islam more than what the trivial film are those who killed the US ambassador in Libya and burnt the US embassies in Yemen and Egypt." Other neutral voices include prayers and supplications for Allah.

As for pro-Islam comments, they are meant to defend Islam and its Prophet against any attacks. For example, sasadada90 says that the film is useful because it made him "love Islam more," while jaber massaddek mentions that the "Innocence of Muslims" film should include other types of images like the ongoing US rockets falling on Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, and Afghanistan in order to have a "balanced" production, stating: "Leave our lands! You killed Muslims and destroyed Arab countries and their people!" In relation to the online discussion of YouTube, some users blame the platform of negligence for not taking down the video. For example, Samar Ismael says: "Why doesn't YouTube remove this video though it received strong rejection????," while ehabraad2 calls for boycotting YouTube for not deleting the film. One YouTuber, jjjuhar555, accused YouTube for being "the worst company for its disgrace and meanness … If this video was insulting for anyone aside from Islam, it would have been removed instantly." Finally, other users like DADA200200 blame the West for offering YouTube to ignorant Muslims like the ones who support killing the US Ambassador in Libya. As can be seen here, there are many voices that seemed quite agitated due to YouTube's inaction towards removing the film although many other users tried to explain YouTube's policy in such cases.

In terms of insults and curses, there are plenty of comments mostly targeting the film's maker and the USA. Though they are not related to the study, many comments include insults exchanged between Sunnis and Shiites YouTubers as each side accuses the other to be responsible for the deteriorating situation of Muslims in many countries. Many other insults were personally directed at anti-Islamic commentators who are also active in cursing Islam. salam biribi, for example, says: "For this who find it amusing to insult our great Prophet, I wish God will send you to Hell," while "gaadgaad91" and "Ahmed Haies" both prayed that the makers of the film would burn "and transform them into monkeys." As for ibrahim abdel hamid, he believes that Hurricane Sandy that hit the USA in October 2012 and killed over 200 people is "the heavenly reaction towards the hurtful film."

On the other hand, insults were directed at Muslims and Muhammed, mostly accusing the latter of being a fraudster, liar, killer, and child molester. As mentioned above, the issues discussed here seem to attract people from different backgrounds, especially far-right groups and white supremacists, some of whom express very racist views. For example, Mike Miller reacts in English to a video entitled "Innocence of Muslims," which seems to have been used as a click bait since the clip praises Islam and its cultural achievements: "I can live without tigers, lions, monkeys, apes, niggers, elephants, Egyptians, Lybia, Tunisia, niggers with aids, Somalia, niggers. And don't forget Muslims! Our number one Enemy! Just think how great the world would be if all of Africa is blown up? All those starving children put out of their misery!" Interestingly, the same video QmHFV6y4grU was praised by pro-Islam commentators for showing the other side of Islam. In this regard, yahane33, reacts in English: "I love this movie, very informative. Good job You Tube for defending freedom of speech." Other anti-Islam users like SlavicWarrior5zx often discuss immigration and the alleged Muslims threat in the West, saying: "Demand all White countries and only White countries be flooded with millions of people that are not their race, until White people become a vanishing minority … They want White genocide". As discussed in Chap. 2, YouTube offers the creation of distinct online communities that are formed based on different ideological affiliations. Many anti-Muslim and racist groups feel empowered by the affordances YouTube provides, and they also organize themselves to create stronger connections. For example, Sydney Rally discusses ways of organizing the efforts of far-right groups in Australia in order to confront Muslims who are planning to protest once more against the film, saying:

> ATTETION EVERYONE, MUSLIMS ARE PLANNING ANOTHER PROTEST THIS WEEKEND, JOIN TOGETHER AGAINST THEM, MEET AT TOWN HALL TRAIN STATION AT 11:30 ON SATURDAY AND THEN MARCH TO HYDE PARK TO PROTEST AGAINST MUSLIMS, THEY ARE RUNING COUNTRIES AND TAKING LIVES, THEY HAVE HURT POLICE AND TAKEN INNOCENT LIVES, IF YOU ARE NOT AUSTRALIAN TAKE A STAND IN YOUR OWN COUNTRY, REPOST THIS EVERYWHERE GET THE MESSAGE OUT! DONT LET MUSLIMS WALK ALL OVER US, THEY WANT A FIGHT THATS WHAT THEY'LL GET! THUMBS UP!

The above comment is linked to a video (blkYf_ngFSk) on a Muslim protest in Sydney that was posted on the "mohammadmovie1" channel; this happens to be a very inflammatory platform for spreading hate against Islam. The channel is regarded as a magnet for anti-Islamic content, which draws like-minded people to it. Muslims, for example, are often called "sand nigger[s]" (Miguel Moncada) or "sandmonkeys" (Tyberias1337), while calls for killing them are abundant such as "KILL ALL THE MUSLIMS KILL 'EM ALL AS PIGS. MUSLIMS ARE PIGS" by foxcarlton19. There are plenty of similar inflammatory comments like "Stop Islam before it's too late!" (kreuzritt) or "I currently use pages of the quran to wipe the brown muslim paste from my ass daily" (clstans69). As explained above, flaming leads to more trolling on the platform as these hateful comments create more tension between users with opposing ideological backgrounds who often react aggressively.

As for threat and calls for Jihad, there are many comments praising the killing of the US Ambassador to Libya as well as the attacks against Western embassies in Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen. Kholihadi, for example, says that "if insulting the prophet and the Islamic religion is regarded as freedom, then we, Arabs, kill those who wrong our Islam and regard it as the ultimate freedom." Similarly, MsSoma89 echoes one of Osama Bin Laden's statements, saying: "Since you accept freedom of speech, you'll need to endure our freedom of action," while Jabber Al-Aisseri mentions that "our Prophet is a red line, so well done for our brothers in Egypt and Libya" for attacking US embassies. Further, "Lolo Shaker" threatens to kill the film maker similar to nkhaledsaad12 who says that the "producer and director of the film must be executed." In terms of Jihad and terrorism, farees2 says that "Muhammed's army has to be restored" as a reaction to the film and in a reference to the Muslims' army that was first formed during the prophet's life, whereas 250ashraf seems to direct his

threats against Egyptian Copts, stating: "We'll show you what happens in the New Year's Eve similar to every year. If your freedom of expressions has no limits, then open your hearts to our reactions." More alarmingly, ali almalky posted the postal address of one of the actresses who participated in the film, indirectly suggesting to attack her. Indeed, there are tens of other examples of such threatening comments that provide an indication into how the controversial issues discussed here can make the extremist's job easier in radicalizing others.

As discussed above, YouTube provides the means to create collective and connective action, and this is evident in the efforts of the anti-Islam groups cited above. In relation to the pro-Islam communities, a rap video praising Muhammed N1DSdqMycEQ received a great deal of attention from other users who wanted to post it on their own channels in order to further spread it. Other users like "Qwasmiat" called for joining his 1 million online signature campaign to remove the video from YouTube. The user provides detailed information on how to join the online protest. Further, "Ahmed AL Badani" tried to promote one video on the film in which an Islamic preacher defends the prophet and Islam, saying: "brothers, if you want to support the Prophet Muhammed …, then we need to become one hand in our online response. Participate in disseminating this video by liking it … which will assist in defeating the other hurtful film." It is believed that such collective efforts help build an online community that is shaped and motivated by an imagined sense of religious duty.

Other users called for the boycotting of US products like lizette2002, while some YouTubers even called for boycotting Coptic products like ameralex6 who listed an array of different brands that are allegedly marketed by Egyptian Copts. Similar to previous case studies, other YouTubers believe in conspiracy theories, thinking that the film was made intentionally to harm the Arab Spring movements such as user nassiba younoussi or to create division among different Arab countries that can only "serve the interests of America, Britain and Israel," according to lilya- laure and manar almanar. Finally, one user, Mouad Felloun, even claimed that the "Innocence of Muslims" film was produced by the public diplomacy office for the Middle East at the US State Department called the Digital Outreach Team in order to create schism in the region.

In brief, the online reactions towards the "Innocence of Muslims" film are varied as this film has created different online communities that discuss it from various angles. Due to the affordances YouTube provides

its users, neutral voices discuss the film as well as religion in a civilized and calm manner, while many pro-Islam and anti-Islam users and activists are able to enhance the connection between different members of their online communities and gather support for their causes via the platform. However, there is a great deal of flaming and extremism that take place on YouTube, which often creates aggressive reactions and more tension.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

Abstract In this final chapter, the four case studies are compared in terms of the audience's overall engagement with the controversial issues. The chapter offers an overall sentiment analysis of all the comments included in this study ($n = 20{,}635$) as well as a social network analysis of all the 854 videos and comments in order to have a better idea of the four cases examined in this study. Also, a final discussion on the concept of free speech is provided and contrasted with hate speech.

Keywords Free speech · Hate speech · Far right · Islam online Extremism

In this final chapter, the four case studies are compared in terms of the audience's overall engagement with the controversial issues. Also, a final discussion on the concept of free speech is provided and contrasted with hate speech.

Since there are stark differences in the number of videos and comments analyzed, the percentages will be considered in the comparison between the different case studies in order to avoid bias. In total, there were 854 videos and 10,054 comments though the actual numbers of videos and comments were much higher ($n = 20{,}635$) because there were many irrelevant ones. For the first case study, the video analysis of the Muhammed cartoon focused on 261 clips, and the tone of the videos was as follows: pro-Islam 79.3%, neutral 17.2%, and anti-Islam 3.4%.

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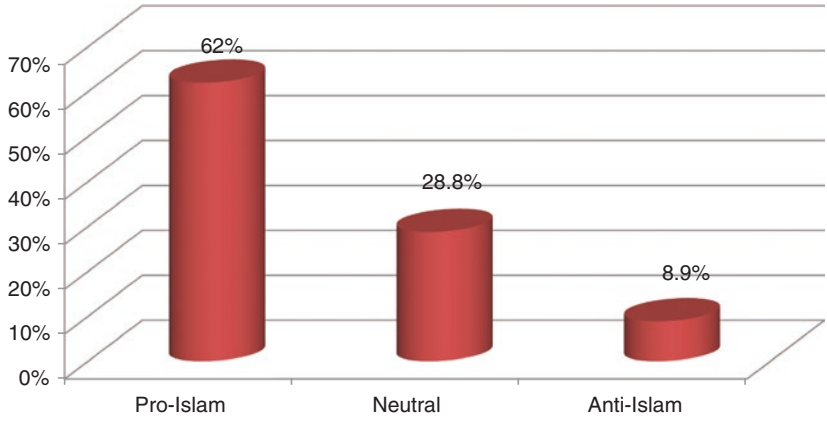

Chart 7.1 Average percentage of all videos' tendencies

In relation to the Quran-burning incidents, 328 videos were examined as follows: pro-Islam 71.9%, neutral 21.9%, and anti-Islam 6%. As for the "Fitna" film, 50 videos were analyzed as follows: pro-Islam 66%, neutral 16%, and anti-Islam 18%. Finally, the analysis "Innocence of Muslims" film was focused on 215 videos as follows: pro-Islam 31.1%, neutral 60.4%, and anti-Islam 8.3%. The average percentage for all the case studies is as follows: pro-Islam 62%, neutral 28.8%, and anti-Islam 8.9% (see Chart 7.1). The Muhammed cartoons got the highest percentage of pro-Islam videos 79.3%, while the "Fitna" film received the highest percentage of anti-Islam clips 18%. Hence, the overwhelming number of videos was pro-Islamic except for the case of the "Innocence of Muslims" film as neutral videos were more prevalent.

In relation to the comments, a similar pattern in relation to the pro-Islam type of comments is found as the highest percentage of comments was pro-Islam for all the case studies (30.2%) (see Chart 7.2). The highest percentage of pro-Islam comments was related to the "Fitna" film (43%), while the "Innocence of Muslims" film received the highest percentage of anti-Islam comments at 19.8%. The second highest percentage was related to neutral comments (25.9%) followed by curses and insults (20.9%), anti-Islam (17.5%), threats and calls for Jihad (4.9%), and calls for boycotting products (1.1%) (see Chart 7.2). In order to see which issue created the highest degree of anger, I will compare

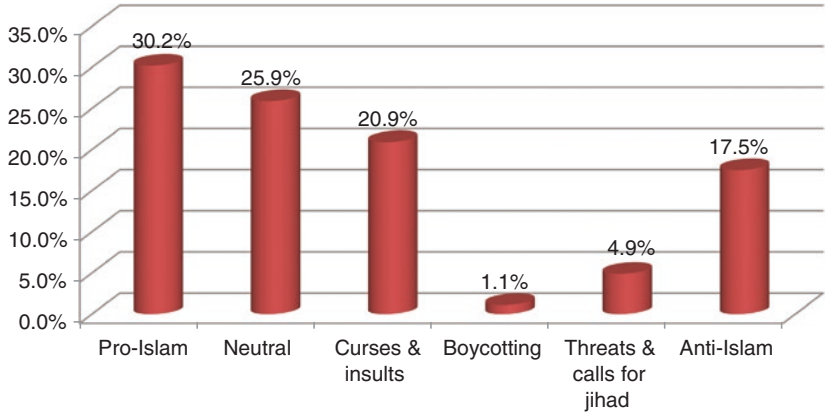

Chart 7.2 Average percentage of all comments' tendencies

the percentage of "threats and calls for Jihad" as well as "curses and insults." In relation to the first category, the Quran-burning incident created the highest percentage (32.1%) followed by the "Innocence of Muslims" film (23.7%), the Muhammed cartoons (16.8%), and the "Fitna" film (11.1%). As for the highest percentage of threats and calls for Jihad, the "Innocence of Muslims" film received the highest percentage (8.4%) followed by the Quran-burning incidents (5.9%), the Muhammed cartoons (4.9%), and the "Fitna film" (0.6%) (see Chart 7.3). In order to provide another level of analysis, I ran a computer program called QDA Miner—Word Stat to analyze the sentiment of all the comments, as explained in Chap. 2. Based on the analysis of the most recurrent terms that are made up of 4–5 words, all of the top terms and their associated statements include prayers to Allah and Prophet Muhammed, which explains the prevalence of pro-Islam and neutral comments in the text corpus (see Chart 7.4).

As explained above, many pro-Muslim activists and users feel a sense of duty towards their religion, so they spread "good news" about their faith. They seem to actively flag anti-Islamic content in order to remove it from YouTube, providing a context for collective and connective action. Further, the prevalence of curses and insults as well as threats are not produced exclusively due to the controversial issues discussed here as many anti-Islam voices seem to intentionally troll and flame others.

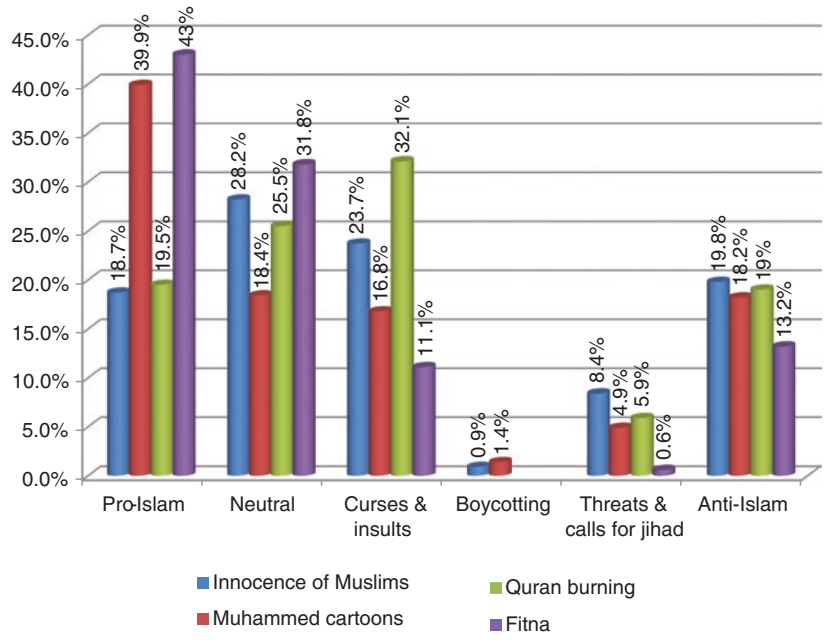

Chart 7.3 Average of all the comments' tendencies along the four issues

Hence, a vicious cycle erupts wherein the two sides begin to insult each other. Other neutral voices routinely try to intervene, but they are usually outnumbered because of the extremists from the two sides. As discussed above, YouTube is an online public sphere though it is divided into different online communities. In order to view how this platform appears, I used a social network analysis tool that examines the connection between all the YouTube users studied here. Charts 7.5, 7.6, and 7.7 offer insight into the way the network looks based on the ranking of users' influence as well as the likes and dislikes their videos get. There are clearly three online communities that are closely tied together (in-group connection) in terms of their influence though they are weakly connected to each other (out-group connection). In order to further examine these videos, Table 7.1 provides details of the top ten most commented on, viewed, liked, and disliked clips. Though the videos contain different tendencies like pro-, neutral, and anti-Islam clips, the list provides an insight into the different ways audiences react to videos that are linked to the four issues discussed here. In general, the most popular

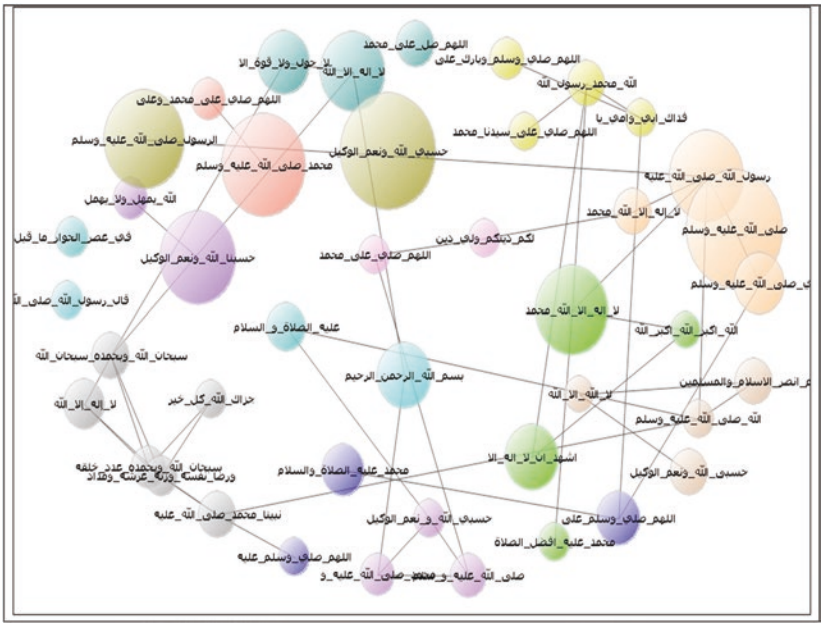

Chart 7.4 The top recurrent terms used by all users. The terms contain different prayers and supplications for Allah and Prophet Muhammed in various formats. The overall sentiment is positive and neutral

video is a pro-Islam one (MWHW2yi4dhM) posted on September 9, 2010 by tamerabusitta1. It is entitled "They want to burn the Quran, see how the anchorman responds to him," and it is taken from a CNN interview with Terry Jones. The video ends with some prayers for the Prophet Muhammed and a plea to unite Muslims against alleged injustice. To sum up, the overwhelming majority of videos and comments are pro-Islamic because the controversial issues discussed here create some kind of collective action that unites some people and motivates them to post content that expresses their ideological stances though this means that extremist views do sometimes appear.

It is important to mention here that the sectarian dimension is very evident in the discussions that are generated on YouTube. For example, many Shiites regularly accuse Sunni Wahhabis and Salafis of distorting the image of Islam for their ultra-conservative views. On the other hand,

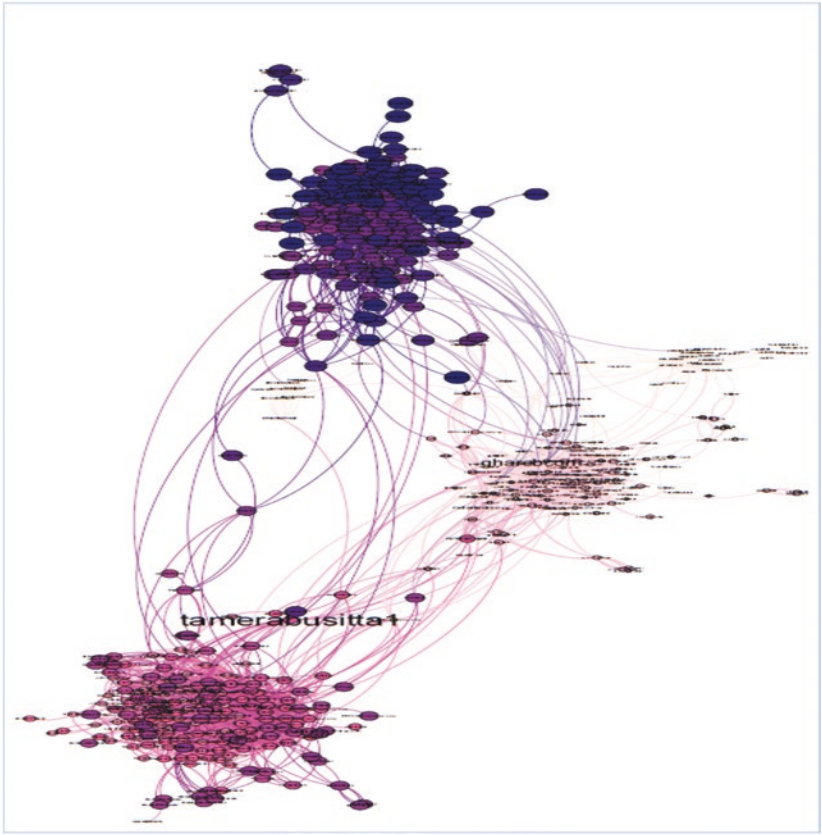

Chart 7.5 YouTube users clustering based on the users' seeds ranking

many Sunnis accuse Shiites of being engaged in religious practices that are alien to Islam, which divides the Muslim Ummah and creates schism. For example, there are hundreds of comments with references to this kind of sectarian strife that can be seen in the most used words in the comments such as: "The Shiites" [الشيعة] ($n = 154$); "Shiite" [شيعي] ($n = 84$); "Wahabi" [وهابي] ($n = 112$); "Rawafidh" [روافض] ($n = 55$); "Rafidhi" [رافضي] ($n = 67$); "Nawasib" [نواصب] ($n = 15$); and "Nassibi" [نصابي] ($n = 8$). The last four terms are regarded as highly pejorative against Shiites and Sunnis (Al-Rawi 2015a, b); however, these

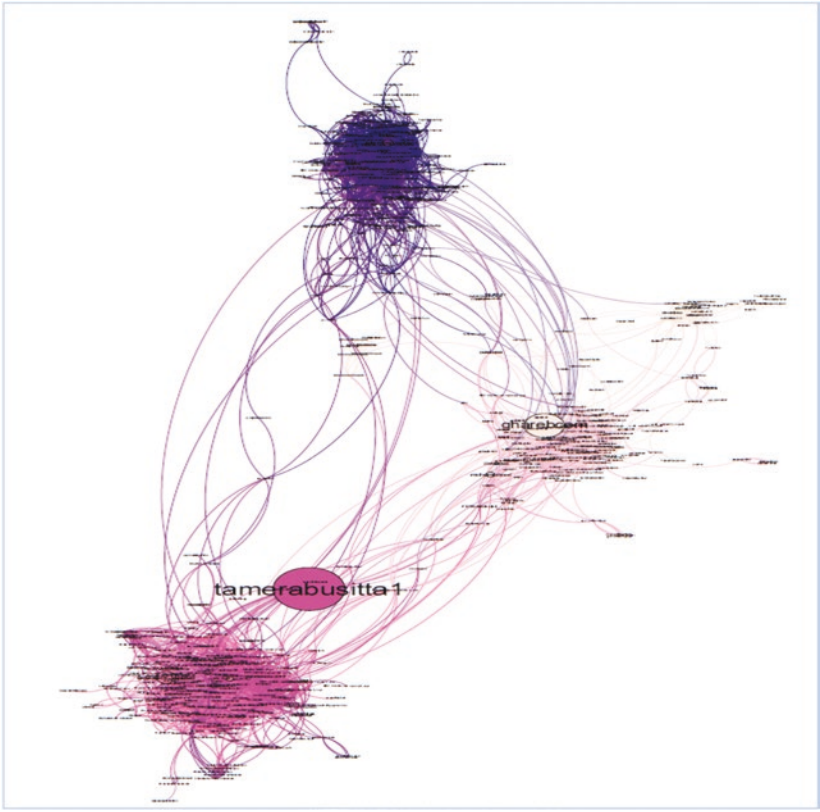

Chart 7.6 YouTube users clustering based on the dislikes' ranking

types of comments are regarded as irrelevant because they deal with another topic. In fact, YouTube has become a venue for what I call "The Arabs' virtual civil war" between Sunnis and Shiites.

Finally, and in relation to freedom of speech, there is no doubt that free expression must be protected at all costs as there are many sides, especially religious fanatics, extremists, and terrorists who find freedom of speech as a threat to their authority and power. However, it is important to note here that there needs to be an agreement on the difference between hate speech and freedom of expression since these two

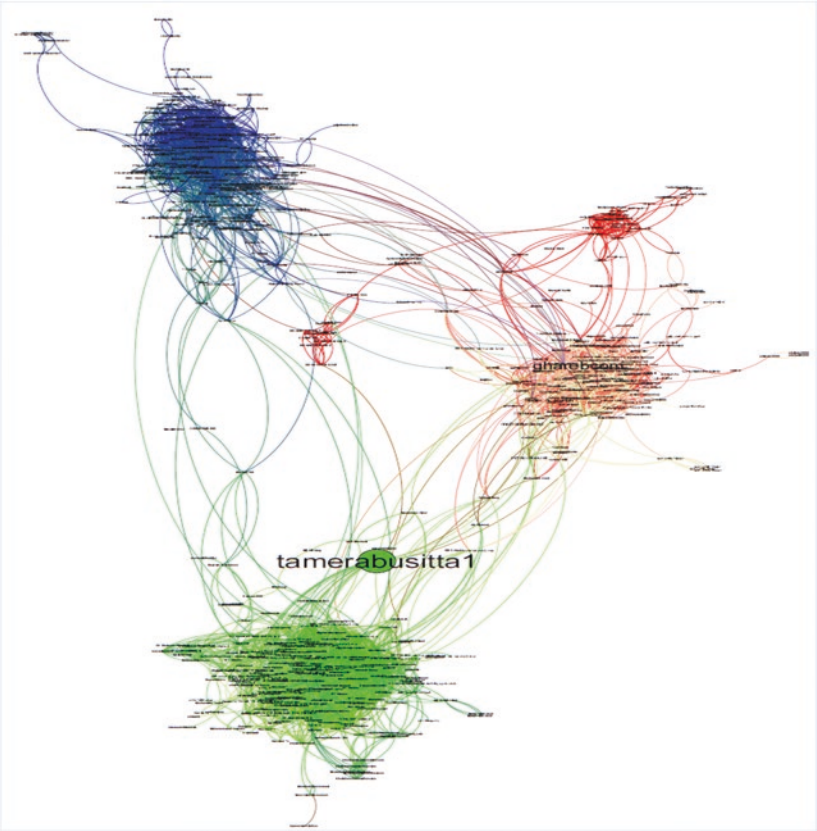

Chart 7.7 YouTube users clustering based on the likes' ranking

terms are relative as they are interpreted differently in various contexts. As mentioned above, there are many groups that intentionally seek to incite divisions between Muslims and other communities, especially by agitating both sides. In this regard, journalists have an important role to play, for they "need to assert freedom of expression, but they should also understand how hate speech can be used to repress targeted groups, and not turn into unwitting facilitators of such campaigns. They should also appreciate that the taking of offense, and not just the giving of it, can be engineered by leaders of religious communities to secure a political

Table 7.1 The top 10 most liked, disliked, commented on, and viewed YouTube videos

Video id	*Channel title*	*Comments*	*Video id*	*Channel title*	*Dislikes*
MWHW2yi4dhM	tamera-busitta1	11,103	MWHW2yi4dhM	tamera-busitta1	3510
blkYf_ngFSk	moham-madmovie1	717	Fl-x4NOgOc0	gharebcom	1944
3bpEiXT-Ia8	bsheer10ete	496	3bpEiXT-Ia8	bsheer10ete	936
uDj4XYR1Tbw	nore re	480	QmHFV6y4grU	islamservants	489
Fl-x4NOgOc0	gharebcom	463	BCVzT7k0Tr4	mohama-daed	384
J9ic_p1uaAM	Nadim AL-Mallah	331	J9ic_p1uaAM	Nadim AL-Mallah	344
N1DSdqMycEQ	meb	301	n_iRAocYOoo	dawatalhak	340
VcTn60laRaA	Prince AHmed	272	XRPKYJ02zks	قناة الملكة لاتسيريكا	324
QmHFV6y4grU	islam-servants	225	sMKceJ_CMGY	CNNArabic	281
yA-tf2WA5bQ	22shuoshuo	224	606SHVhEymg	euronews (عربي)	197
Video id	*Channel title*	*Views*	*Video id*	*Channel title*	*Likes*
MWHW2yi4dhM	tamera-busitta1	10,220,673	MWHW2yi4dhM	tamera-busitta1	37,786
2-ISTfXvEo0	Yasser Hussein	2,895,224	3bpEiXT-Ia8	bsheer10ete	2852
3bpEiXT-Ia8	bsheer10ete	2,072,454	N1DSdqMycEQ	meb	2080
yA-tf2WA5bQ	22shuoshuo	952,815	yA-tf2WA5bQ	22shuoshuo	1218
J9ic_p1uaAM	Nadim AL-Mallah	894,150	uDj4XYR1Tbw	nore re	1101
uDj4XYR1Tbw	nore re	756,089	W2FhqNs6QIo	IslamGlory	807
u2FyQyqPw3k	hilal0123	586,063	nps4ptiOv0M	mforislam	737
VcTn60laRaA	Prince A?me?	518,287	4EHgeMIIe50	you2boch-al3sal	690
BCVzT7k0Tr4	mohama-daed	483,631	HEWDtBAzfIY	azazi911	604
1jEXhqvWX0A	Pope Shenouda III	373,632	u2FyQyqPw3k	hilal0123	585

Source Data was collected by Gephi software, Data Laboratory May 18, 2017

advantage" (George 2014, p. 80). Second, there needs to be clear legislative ruling and agreement about what constitutes Islamophobia as this is still a largely obscure area. For example, there are clear laws about anti-Semitism, which is regarded as a form of hate speech in most Western countries, but there are almost no laws banning Islamophobia. This lack of clarity on this aspect of free speech is the reason why many news organizations struggle when questioned about the reasons they allow anti-Islamic articles or comments to be published on their platforms. For example, *Charlie Hebdo* magazine once fired one of its journalists in 2008 for publishing anti-Semitic material (Burke 2008). The journalist was accused of "inciting racial hatred" for suggesting that "Jean Sarkozy, the son of the French president, was converting to Judaism for financial reasons" (Samuel 2009). Yet the very same magazine champions the publication of anti-Islamic materials and even once mocked a dead Syrian child immigrant (Meade 2016). Also, Internet companies like Google, Twitter, and Facebook are experiencing similar criticism for allowing a large number of anti-Islamic posting to flourish on their online platforms. Many of these messages "accuse Muslims of being rapists, paedophiles and comparable to cancer, has increased significantly in recent months in the aftermath of the Rotherham sex-abuse scandal and the murder of British hostages held by Isis" (Wright 2015). Facebook, however, refuses to take down such inflammatory materials stating that it has to "strike the right balance" between freedom of expression and maintaining "a safe and trusted environment" (ibid.). For example, when Donald Trump posted his plans to ban Muslims from entering the USA on Facebook, it was regarded as a violation of the site's rules on hate speech, yet the social media company kept the post, leading to a heated discussion among some of its staff (Seetharaman 2016). All of this confusion occurs because "hateful, nasty, vitriolic speech, even when it's bigoted or homophobic, is often protected" in US laws (McLaughlin 2017). During the "Innocence of Muslims" controversy, Google also refused to take down the short film from YouTube, claiming that it "did not violate its terms of service regarding hate speech. In this case, the video stays up because it is against the Islam religion but not Muslim people" (Miller 2012). This justification is similar to the one used by Geert Wilders in his defense of the "Fitna" film since he claimed that he does not hate Muslims, but he is against their religion (Traynor 2008).

This argument is not convincing because the two are inseparable similar to the way anti-Semitism is linked to hatred against Jewish people. I argue that this lack of legislative clarity sends the wrong message to Muslims in general and extremists in particular because the latter find these incidents as good examples of Western double standards allegedly used to attack Islam. In the end, Islamic terrorist groups use these incidents to support their efforts in radicalizing young Muslims around the world. This is also supported with empirical evidence found in this study as some users' comments call for Jihad against the West. Finally, freedom of expression is an ideal when one lives in a utopia where everyone has similar rights and responsibilities, yet this is far from reality, especially upon examining the contexts of colonial and post-colonial nations, the consequences of the War on Terror on Muslim countries, as well as the general conditions of Muslims living in and outside the West (Ismael and Measor 2003; Bahdi 2003; Khalema and Wannas-Jones 2003; Roach 2003; Poynting and Perry 2007; Razack 2008; Jiwani 2012; Eid and Karim 2014). As Saladin Ahmed remarks on the publication of *Charlie Hebdo*'s satirical cartoons: "In an unequal world, satire that mocks everyone equally ends up serving the powerful. And in the context of brutal inequality, it is worth at least asking what preexisting injuries we are adding our insults to" (Ahmed 2015). In other words, it is easy to offend the weak, especially if they are mostly voiceless and unrepresented, but it is much harder to attack those who have real power and authority. Also, the controversial case studies examined here are focused on some practices of the radical version of Islam, yet many far-right groups intentionally generalize the terrorist actions of Muslim extremists in order to stereotype a whole religion and its adherents. At the same time, Muslim extremists make use of such incidents to enhance the calls for Jihad and ultimately use violence such as the case of the Muhammed cartoons (Wikileaks 2006), while many moderate Muslims who form the basis of mainstream Islam around the globe get offended because they feel that their sacred religious symbols and figures as well as their own version of Islam are attacked. There is no doubt that critiquing Islam is a right and correct critical practice, yet Islam, similar to all other religions, should not only be linked to violence as it can also offer its followers a peaceful and fulfilling way of life.

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