DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND COGNITIVE SCIENCES

Master Course in

Public and Cultural Diplomacy

The New Era of Religious Diplomacy: Exploring University Students' Perceptions of an Islamic Facebook Page in Bologna

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Academic Year 2023 – 2024

ABSTRACT

According to Johnston, Religious Diplomacy is the practice of integrating religion as a part of a solution to identity-based conflicts and other practices of international politics (2009:3). In this dissertation, Islamic Diplomacy, a more specific form of Religious Diplomacy, is analyzed through the Muslim diaspora in Bologna, Italy, and how these non-state actors perform their agendas to promote Islam as a part of a solution to identity-based conflicts that may exist between the Islamic community and the non-Muslims. This research aims to understand the position of an Islamic organization in Bologna, Italy, called *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, as an actor of religious diplomacy. The research's scope is based on the students at the University of Bologna, as focusing on young adults and adults is incredibly prominent in the digital age. Analyzing the organization's Facebook page will help assess and analyze the perception of Islam among the University of Bologna students. The students at the University of Bologna are chosen as a sample to reflect the view of the public of Bologna, with the possibilities of various answers that would make this dissertation more varied and diverse. The research is meant to be a stepping stone for future research regarding the topic of Islam, Islamophobia, Islamic organizations, and religious diplomacy in today's Italy, and the West, where digital platforms are taking a whole different level.

Keywords: Islam, Islamophobia, Religious Diplomacy, Social Media, Facebook, University of Bologna, Students, Italy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Here comes the part where all the hard work and study I have done at the University of Siena produces pages of what I consider an enjoyable ride of my academic journey; research about politics, religion, and most importantly, humans and the community we are in.

I would like to thank everyone and everything who has helped me to finish this dissertation. My partner, my family, my friends, my supervisor, all the teaching staff at the university, my respondents, my lovely cats at home, the universe, and most importantly, myself.

This thesis is far from perfect but I'm beyond grateful to have these amazing experiences during my time as a Public and Cultural Diplomacy student. Hopefully, this thesis can be useful, in any way possible.

Siena, July 2024

Author

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I.1   Background

In the West, in the United States and Europe specifically, the perception of Islam has been getting worse as an aftermath of the 9 September 2011 attack. Muslims who migrate to the West are subjected to Islamophobia and discrimination as a result. Islamic organizations, such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, are making concerted effort to be a bridge of communication between the Muslim minorities and the non-Muslims. They are actively pursuing initiatives to promote Islam, in efforts to introduce their religion and culture, to prevent misconceptions and generalizations, while also trying to gain social visibility.

Comunità Islamica di Bologna is an Islamic organization in Bologna that unofficially started working in 2014. They started discussing the idea of bringing together the Muslim community with the leaders' community, principally the presidents of the mosques. However, they are officially registered in 2019. There are currently around 20 members that consists of all the mosques in the city of Bologna, that joined as representative members. Every 2 years, they elect a committee of 5 people to oversee the organization. The organization also claim to not follow any specific Islamic current, because one of their main points are the unity of the Muslim community in Bologna without imposing anything to anyone. The organization believes that Facebook & Instagram best represent the organization online.

Without realizing it, these Islamic organizations are the frontrunners of religious diplomacy. In the case of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, their way of introducing Islam is through cultural and religious events, where others can learn more about their vision and mission to be an agent of peace amidst a multicultural society.

In the digital era like today, utilizing social media to further promote these agendas is highly beneficial. Using platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, if done properly, is truly beneficial for Muslim minorities. Similarly, *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* has been using their platform to invite others to join their events. It may not strictly cater to non-Muslim communities, but their posts about such events show their commitment to uphold

transparency. Not only to most Catholic believers in Bologna but also to other religions and non-believers.

Analyzing the students at the University of Bologna is the first step to comprehend *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* as religious diplomacy actors. The youth are chosen for the scope of the research as they are the future of the world. Moreover, the diversity of the University and Bologna in general helps the research's results to be more diverse and varied. Bologna is also known as one of the centers of the Anti-fascist movement, where arguably, fascism is the biggest opponent of diversity. The importance of the city plays a big role in understanding multiculturalism, especially for Islam who is often depicted in a certain way in mass media.

I.2   Research Objectives
This research aims to analyze the University of Bologna's students' perception of Islamic organizations in Bologna, to further understand *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s role as religious diplomacy actors and how they face the issue of Islamophobia in the West.

I.3   Research Questions
The contextual background of the research drew several questions, as follows.

1. How do university students engage with and perceive *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* as an Islamic organization through their Facebook page?

2. What is the impact of Islamic organizations and their social media on religious diplomacy and interfaith dialogue?

3. What are the potential benefits and challenges of using digital platforms for religious outreach and dialogue?

I.4   Structure of the Report
The research is organized as follows.

1. Chapter I: Introduction

Research background, questions, and structures are laid out as the foundation of the report.

2. Chapter II: Literature Review

Credible textual references relevant to the topic are cited and synthesized to analyze the issues of the report.

3. Chapter III: Methodology

The methods used in the report are revealed to further help the reader understand the structure of the report.

4. Chapter IV: Results

This chapter includes results from the survey and interviews, to further strengthen the analysis.

5. Conclusion

The findings are summarized, explaining the connection between the results and suggestions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

II.1   Islam, Migration, and Islam's Reception in Europe

Before tackling the matter of Islamic Diplomacy in the digital age, which is the main theme of this work, it can be recognized that the complexity of Islam's reception in the West is a fundamental and integral part of this specific angle of Cultural Diplomacy.

The Muslim population in Italy has been growing rapidly in the past few years, making up 2% of the overall population by 2015 (Burdett, 2015:2). Islam in Italy is not new, as Islam's manifestation in Sicily and the surrounding area has been around since the Middle Ages for five centuries in 827 to 1300 (Vicenzo, 2010:55). However, the current emergence of almost entirely Sunni Islam in Italy is rather a recent occurrence and is connected to the International migratory flow prior and post 9/11 (Burdett, 2015:1). Allievi (2005) argues that Islam arrived in Italy to stay, and they have become a social actor within the country. The reaction from the Italian public towards Islam itself has shifted from reductionism to essentialism, where increasingly Muslim immigrants stayed within the country, and the reception from the public has become more convoluted and complicated.

Both Burdett (2015) and Allievi (2005) use Oriana Fallaci's reaction as an example of the complexity of the majority's perception of Islam, as problems emerge while the Muslim community is presenting themselves with Islamic symbols such as hijab, attending mosques, et cetera. Furthermore, the issue of Islam and religious symbols in Europe rose to another level when France issued a Law regarding the ban on religious headpieces in 2004 (Henkel, 2012:5). Wing & Smith (2006:745) further explain that the ban originated regarding religious symbols and the complexity of *laïcité*, or France's commitment of separation between church and state, for the sake of secularism.

Although the French ban also affects other religions such as Jewish, Sikh, Christian, and many more, the problem is heavily centered around the three Muslim girls where the issue first emerged in the late Eighties (Wing & Smith, 2006:745). By 2023, the Muslim population in France made up 9% of the total population, making it one of Europe's largest Muslim populations (Dille, 2023:1). However, 42% of the Muslim population expressed

feelings of discrimination, while 39% of the total population views Islam to be compatible with their society (Dille, 2023:2).

In research conducted by Ipsos, based on 19,731 online adults under the age of 75 across 26 countries, in Italy, only 1% are Muslims, compared to 68% of the overall Christian population (Ipsos, 2023:5). The number decreased compared to the data Burdett used in 2015. Yet, the underlying issue is still the same. According to Alicino (2022:478), Issues regarding religion go hand-in-hand with democracy dilemma. He further affirms the inevitable forms of religious extremism that could be triggered by religious traditions and values, especially if they are a part of the majority, as it is deeply connected to identity. Likewise, this created a paradoxical situation between the Rule of Law and the Rule of God, as Alicino recognized that religious organizations are the wheel of the civic movement, as these prominent actors of democracy will relay their influence towards public participation and cooperation (2022:479).

The notions of fear among the majority that is prompted by the presence of Islam through religious symbols such as the hijab and mosque are arguably caused by the perception of control territory (Allievi, 2005). Mosques and cemeteries, for example, are very central to Islam's core traditions as both are regarded as holy places, that later work as a sense of visibility within diaspora and separation from the general population which Muslims stigmatize as made of "infidels". The presence of mosques and Islamic cemeteries works as a platform to show a sense of belonging among Muslim immigrants, choosing to build them in a new place they now call home. The fear among the majority now lies within said control territory, as now they must share their space with the Muslim immigrants who have different traditions, values, and rituals.

It should also be noted that while some Muslim immigrants refuse to integrate Italian culture as their own, there are some other who perhaps do the opposite, as a natural process of assimilation and adjustment. Inter-cultural exchange is a natural process within the diaspora, as it is a part of ordinary barter between shared communities co-existing in the same space. However, the structural discrimination that exists in Italy affects these processes, for instance, in a survey of 325 Muslims in Italy, 38% of them expressed how their day-to-day activity would be more comfortable if they were not Muslims (Ciocca, 2021:95). These expressions of uncomfortableness uniquely reserve for minorities, as they arguably must

acclimate to the new environment, while in return, the majority also must learn to familiarize themselves with the migrants from different backgrounds than them.

II.1.1 Cultural Diplomacy, Religious Diplomacy, and Islamic Diplomacy

Cultural Diplomacy is described by Cumming (2003:1) as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding." Culturaldiplomacy.org described Cultural Diplomacy as a platform that bridges people together, to further develop a sense of freedom of expression (2004:7). According to UNESCO (2023), in the contemporary era, the new forms of cultural diplomacy can be profitable for countries that are cooperating on dialogue and mutual understanding, to achieve long-term cohesion and understanding. This is not to be confused with International Cultural Relations (ICR), the goals of which are inherently different, as ICR is performed by cultural experts or enthusiasts whose goals are to exchange ideas with another country without any expectations (Isar, 2022). It is also different from Public Diplomacy, where the main goals are to change or influence public opinion in another country and to further promote the national interest (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, n.d.).

Meanwhile, in Religious Diplomacy, also known as faith-based diplomacy, Johnston described the practice of integrating religion as a part of a solution to identity-based conflict and other practices of international politics (2009:3). In the case of this research, it can be argued that Religious Diplomacy, and specifically Islamic Diplomacy, is a part of Cultural Diplomacy, taking Islam as a product and producer of culture and identity. Also, Islamic Diplomacy that is performed in Italy is rather taking a softer route, as the diaspora are mostly non-state actors, a regular citizen who is trying to make their presence visible and understood. However, the same argument should be applied, as the Muslim diaspora in Italy might share problematic sentiments against non-Muslim Italians due to differences in values. Therefore, this will be explained further in the next subchapter.

II.2   The Paradox of Islam Diaspora

As the experiences of people in diaspora is inherently varied due to a variety of experiences, naturally diaspora is diverse. Driss Habti in an article titled *"The Religious*

Aspects of Diasporic Experience of Muslims in Europe within the Crisis of Multiculturalism," explores how diaspora consciousness is generated due to varied experience, yet their sense of identity transcends geographical boundaries, nations, or origins (2014:151). Habti then explores the concept of *dual or paradoxical nature* that initially examined by Meer (2010), that *diaspora consciousness* has two sides. First are negative origins, that may be triggered by discrimination and exclusion. Next is positive affirmation, the agency of diaspora communities in shaping their own narratives from positive identification of shared heritage or political goals (2014:151). This further strengthen their solidarity, as it fosters sense of connection that directly impacts their experiences in Italy, however it can also lead to misuse of agency that is formed through shaping their own narratives in the expense of others, or in in this case, non-Muslim Italians.

While some Muslims in diaspora, specifically in Italy, wanted to be understood as they have different values than non-Muslim Italians, it is important for the Islamic community to share the same attitude. For example, the notion and practice of *da'wah* and how it is arguably practiced as an act of Islamic Diplomacy in Italy. There are multiple interpretation of *da'wah,* and precaution should be taken to avoid extreme interpretation.

Kahin (2015) described *da'wah* as the practice of invitationalism in Islam, done through verbal and nonverbal communication, and is arguably an ageless way of Cultural Diplomacy. If done according to certain strategies and methods, a specific form of *da'wah* is meant to be delivered invitingly and gently (Solihin, 2008). However, the description of *da'wah* by some can also mean an invitation to convert non-Muslims. This can lead to an issue that non-Muslim Italians should be aware of, especially if certain actors take an extreme interpretation of Islam and impose their *da'wah* on others. This issue will be explored further later.

It is important for the Muslim diaspora to understand their stance in the society. If they demand for a specific Italian law that is made specifically for them, they will be treated differently because in enigma, they asked for a different treatment. Eventually, the Muslim minority in Italy is not merely Muslims, they are also Italians, and the issue of multiple identities is important to explore.

II.2.1   Multiple Identities and Its Complexities

According to a dissertation titled, "*The intersectionality of social identities and bicultural belonging among Muslim young adults in Italy: An exploratory study*," Muslim diaspora tend to have three social identities; national identity, ethnic identity, and religious identity (Shabbir, 2023:30-36).

National identity can be defined as a sense of belonging to a wider society (Phinney et al, 2001), while Tajfel & Turner argues that a fundamental aspect of social identity is the inevitable association with national identification that is formed through empathy and a certain degree of connection with the host country (1979). This national identity is further constructed and developed further by the way Muslims act and frame themselves with the entirety of their national identity with others, including the native citizens (Poortinga, 2010). Ethnic identity is a rather complex concept, because there are multifaceted layers of ethnic identification that are not the same to one another (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Shabbir further explains these complexities are shaped by a multitude of interconnected factors that contribute to how people experience their ethnic belonging, such as community, family, peer groups, and individual characteristics (Shabbir, 2023:35). As prior highlighted by research done by Phinney in 1992, Shabbir argues that religious identity, in this case, identifying oneself as "Muslim", often intersects with belonging to a particular ethnic group associated with a Muslim-majority country (Shabbir, 2023:36).

In the research done to 100 young adults with Muslim immigrant origins (43% are second generation and 57% are first generation), Shabbir found that 34% felt that their Italian and Muslim identities are separate and distinct, as they struggle to reconcile being both Italian and Muslim (2023:72). As Muslim diaspora's experiences are unique and cannot be generalized, these complexities emerged.

In an article titled *"Discrimination, Inclusion, and Anti-System Attitudes among Muslims in Germany"* Grewal and Hamid surveyed 1330 Muslims in Germany and found the link between discrimination and anti-system attitudes, by focusing on the interaction of personal and group discrimination (2022:512). As explained in the previous subchapter, according to the concept of *diaspora consciousness*, the experiences of Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries are varied, yet they shared similar identities due to sense of

connection (Habti, 2014:151). However, as Grewal and Hamid examined in their research, Muslims in Germany who experience personal discrimination, especially when experienced as a unique and isolating burden, are most likely to hold anti-system views. They are more prone to adapt problematic and extreme interpretations of Islamism, including support for violence, and opposition to democracy and secularism (2022:525).

In the context of this research, the complexity of multiple identity is further examined through the lens of shared identity in an Islamic community in Bologna, Italy. Understanding how the community represent itself as a group that consists of Muslim minority in Bologna will clarify how they perceive discrimination, not only as an individual but also as a collective. As analyzed from Grewal and Hamid's study (2022), it suggests how important it is to promote inclusivity, even for the members of Muslim communities, because exclusion and perceived injustice may lead them to alternative and harmful ideologies that are not only dangerous for the Muslim diaspora themselves, but also the non-Muslim Italians. Furthermore, it is also important to understand the stance of Muslim diaspora, in this case *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, and their understanding of shared identity.

II.3   Islam in The West: USA and Distrusts Towards Muslim Minority

In the Western World, in this case in America and Europe, the discourse about Islam is mainly brought up within the dichotomy of either distrust or the notions of equal rights. As highlighted by Kanjwal (2008:137) in an article titled *American Muslims and the Use of Cultural Diplomacy*, distrust here comes from apparent conjecture and judgment against the Muslim community, driven by mistrust and a significant increase of Islamophobia in America post 9/11. Arguably, the notion of Islamophobia in America is further established and act as a gap between "the West" and "others". In the sense that the experience of Muslims in the Islamic World and Muslims in America are different. Also, the experience of Muslims in America and non-Muslim Americans are different, although both co-exist in the same geographical space. She also further endorses that if Islam's image in America is important, the way Islamic community thinks about non-Muslims equally bears significance, because positive attitude and standpoint should go both ways to avoid disproportionate sentiments.

It is only natural for the American Muslim community, as well as the diaspora, to experience regeneration in the contemporary era, as the new generations should have a different take on matters such as politics and daily life experience. The biggest struggle, as Kanjwal (2008:138) suggests, lies within how the younger generation of this community is going through a completely particular and different experience than the generations prior, and their position thereof is unique. While the public diplomacy route, to improve Islam's image in America, is bound to provoke some types of reaction from most Americans, a more nuanced and subtle approach is arguably more effective. This is where Cultural Diplomacy will be beneficial amongst these new generations of Muslim minorities in America, as in the contemporary era, expressing oneself through arts, literature, and the like will be more accepted at ease. Instead of engaging defensively, what the new generation should be doing is to be more critical towards their religion which often is intertwined with their culture.

This further goes to explain that the Muslim community in America exists within a bubble of cultural-related traditions and values, that are mostly carried out by the first generation of Muslim migrants. Taking an example beyond geographical aspect, whether these migrants came from Arabic countries or Pakistan and so on, the younger generations have similar yet contrasting exposures and starting points. They are Americans, as much as they are Muslims. Hence, pivoting towards a more approachable, attainable, and more self-aware path is the answer to uniting and fusing the West and the Islamic community in the contemporary world.

This dissertation shares a very interesting insight into the idea of how to improve the image of Islam, one of which is to improve the daily life of the Muslim individual itself. It is important for Islam and religious leaders or figures to welcome and embrace its believers although they are part of marginalized communities, such as the Queer community, that are often prosecuted due to certain interpretation of the Qur'an. This is especially important among the newer generation, especially given the fact that Kanjwal (2008:141) incorporates case studies from real-life young American Muslims who are living their day-to-day experience of being young and a part of the minority. Also, centering on humanizing Islam for it to be more attainable and emphasizing Islam and the Muslim community as authentic and imperfect things are a breakthrough for the development of Islam's image in the West.

Although the issues of Islamophobia in America have evolved to the point where the issues are more concerned with improving Islam's image in public, in Europe, especially Italy, the problem lies within the legality aspect and the socio-political factor.

II.3.1   Islam in The West: Italy and the Ambiguity of Equal Rights for Muslim Minority

Compared to the issues of the Muslim minority in America, the diaspora in Italy seems to deal with legality standings. For Alicino (2023:2) in *Constitutional Democracy and Islam: The Legal Status of Muslims in Italy,* the issues of Muslims in Italy are heavily centered around the ambiguity of whether Italy would want to consider the Muslim minority as equal or whether they should have different rights as a part of being "different". This goes deeper on the notion of "politicized" Islam, which resulted from religion-inspired terrorism and immigration, as he argued is triggered by Islam that has been treated as an "exception" (Alicino, 2023:4). This exceptionalism derived from the paradoxical management of Islam as supposedly an equal community yet still shadowed by their "otherness", emphasizing the dominance of Catholicism in the country, although Islam has successfully become the second prominent religion in the country. In his argument, he further emphasizes how Italy's constitution reacts to a new circumstance and as a result, highlights its ambiguous attitude towards the Muslim minority,

> "That, in turn, points to constitutional difficulties in light of the tradition of considering Italy's model of law and religions relations on the basis of the Roman Church and a handful of similar (Judeo-Christian) "confessioni diverse dalla cattolica (denominations other than Catholicism)," as Article 8 of the Constitution meaningfully calls them. To such an extent that this model has increasingly come to be seen in terms of negative externalities: while specifically recognizing rights and benefits in favour of the Catholic Church and few minorities, Italy's "majority religion model" produces unreasonable distinctions against all other beliefs. Islam is an illustrative, prominent example in this regard." (Alicino, 2023:3).

The angle of issues that Alicino took in his book is rather taking a different route, as the legality entanglement between Italy's constitution and the Muslim community is inherently complicated. This caused by a sense of confusion about who is the Muslim community in Italy and what is law they are referring to when handling matters such as funeral rituals, religious attire, education, and many more.

Several legality issues concerning the Islamic community in Italy involve how the mosques cannot receive funding or donations from the public, Muslim weddings are not formally recognized, Islamic holidays bear no validity in the workplace, and so on (Alicino, 2023:5). In addition, Alicino argues that post-COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian War, Italy's standpoint towards the Muslim community is further heightened. This further widens the gap between the experience that American Muslims go through and their counterparts in Italy who are still fighting for their rightfulness in the eye of the law.

After reviewing and analyzing Kanjwal's (2008) and Alicino's (2023) articles, the notion of Islam in the USA and Italy is similar, yet inherently unique and distinctive. They are similar to the issue concerning Islamophobia, however, in Italy, as argued by Giorda and Vanolo (2021:6), Islam does not have a specific agreement (Intesa) with the Italian state, as can be seen from how the Mosque of Rome is considered as an 'allowed cult' (*culto ammesso*). It has laid out a fundamental understanding of how the Muslim community experiences their day-to-day lives, especially looking at the angle of "otherness". However, how does one define what legality rights the Muslim community must have? What are their goals and intentions in the first place?

Perhaps, their main concerns are merely to gain visibility in society, to assimilate, and to decrease judgment and suspicions that are prevalent on the media post 9/11. This brings us back to the discourse of how Islamic organization performs their goals and duties in Italy, especially in the digital era that has been on the rise for the past few years. Arguably, these Islamic organizations are performing their versions of Cultural Diplomacy, opting for a softer approach to at least be accepted in society, as will be explained later in this dissertation.

Hence, it is important to understand the prominence of Digital Diplomacy, to acclimate one's view regarding the ever-evolving fast-paced society, even among the Muslim minority

in Italy. As the Muslim minority has been dealing with Islamophobia and xenophobia online, it is essential to understand the current climate of Islam's politicization on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and so on.

II.4   Islamophobia on Social Media

Although one of the most prevalent religions in the world, in a global sphere, Islam is arguably not very favorable in the public's eyes, especially in the West. Taking an example of a case study done by Annabell Curci-Wallis (2019), based on a Facebook comment section regarding Islamophobic tendencies and characteristics, taking a viewpoint from critical discourse analysis and linguistic analysis, one can see how negative comments on Islam help to reflect one's view regarding this issue. She started the analysis with a case study of a Muslim girl, who was a minor at that time and made a Facebook post regarding her regrets about joining the infamous extremist group, ISIS (2019:5). She was desperate to go home and expressed deep remorse, asking for help on social media. Unfortunately, the comment section was mostly not on her side, leaving behind harsh insulting comments towards her, ISIS, and Islam.

The agenda of Islamophobia that used to only exist in a direct, often candid, and straightforward manner, now also exists within the online realm where people can leave mean comments anonymously. What makes this digital-centered Islamophobia different than direct persecution is that everything happens globally, and it goes beyond the geographical sphere. Especially if a post regarding Islam or made by Muslims is in English, where this language factor spreads the content worldwide.

The other samples of case studies done by Curci-Wallis also help to amplify the notion of Islamophobia online, as she also did a Facebook case study of Eagle Rising (extreme Right-Wing), New York Times (left-centered), and PragerU (Conservative) (2019:24). The Facebook posts containing Eagle Rising's contents are extremely biased and centered around propaganda and conspiracies, with questionable and subjective sources or no source at all. In one of the contents, Eagle Rising accused a Muslim Fencing Athlete, Ibtihaj Muhammad, of bashing America and ridiculing terrorism victims. The post itself is currently unavailable as the Facebook fan page was deleted for crossing the Facebook guidelines. Among the top 100 comments, out of 431 comments, only 2 comments are

semiotically neutral. The rest either believed the post completely or went out of their way to voice their concerns about how a Muslim athlete now represents America as a whole, fearing that Islam is taking over the United States of America (2019:35).

Similarly, in content posted by a non-profit organization that takes an extreme right-wing perspective, PregerU is interestingly taken from a more organized and data-driven approach. The post that PregerU used as a sample, which is moderated by Hussein Aboubakr, offers a new intake about what Moderate Muslims are, and if they exist at all. The video concluded that Moderate Muslims who condone terrorism and extremism do exist but are overwhelmingly outnumbered by those who do not. He wrapped up the video with the values of Islam in the Middle East and the other parts of the world (The West) are not compatible and the issues are bigger than what politicians in the United States care to admit. The comment section itself leans towards the disbelief of Moderate Muslims' existence, voicing their suspicions that no good Muslims ever exist. They are also expressing skepticism of a grey area, believing that a Muslim is either a terrorist or not a Muslim at all (2019:49).

Meanwhile, in a Facebook post shared by the New York Times, the page is leaning toward left-centered views, and the comment is moderated according to hate-speech potentiality. In the Facebook post titled *Anti-Muslim Extremists Retweeted by Trump Are Convicted of Hate Crime*, 2 leaders of an extremist group called Britain First were sentenced to prison for sharing hate speech towards Muslims. The hate speech was an extreme reaction to a rape case where 3 Muslim men were convicted. The 2 leaders were harassing Muslims in public and even in their houses, recording it, calling Muslims pedophiles, and posting it on social media. Out of 100 comments analyzed based on this post, 49 comments mentioned Donald Trump's involvement. He made a post on Twitter containing a link to hate-related videos made by Britain First, soaring the group's popularity. The 49 comments about Donald Trump however are favoring him to also go to jail or showing a sense of embarrassment of having him as the president of the United States (The post was made in November 2017). As the New York Times's comment section itself is more moderated, the comment section seems to gather left-centered mass. The trend in the comment section is also more inclined to understand the differences between hate speech and free speech, although some comments are in favor of the anti-Muslim group, as well as Donald Trump (2019:45).

Out of the case studies done based on Facebook posts from the three samples above concluded that Facebook and other social media, although only exist virtually, have affected the evolution of gathering the public's opinion, which later can be reflected in how they view Islam and the community related to it. This amplification of Islamophobic sentiments is also derived from the creators of the post, as they can control their statements and narrative, regardless of the outcome from the public (Curci-Wallis, 2019:62).

This has opened a gate of discussions of the new era of Cultural Diplomacy because certainly, Digital Diplomacy's continuation resulted from the new trends and practices that have been happening in today's world.

II.5   New Trends in Cultural Diplomacy

Jora (2013:44), in her article titled *New Practices and Trends in Cultural Diplomacy*, explained how the modern version of Cultural Diplomacy is very distinct and far from its once closely related concept, Cultural Propaganda. Jora further validates how important it is to distinguish between the notion of Country Branding and Cultural Diplomacy. The distinction between the two not only further widens the gap between Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Propaganda, but also results from the new players of Cultural Diplomacy. Non-state actors like NGOs have become an integral part of contemporary Cultural Diplomacy, changing the way Cultural Diplomacy is exercised. The dynamics are often related to the fundamental perception of what Cultural Diplomacy is supposed to serve, taking other purposes beyond the state's interests.

Once Cultural Diplomacy is not motivated by commerciality and decenter its scope from self-interest, broadening two-way communication and emphasizing mutual understanding between two or more countries or communities, that is when Cultural Diplomacy reaches its full potential in the new era (Jora, 2013:45). Even for Religious Diplomacy, this paper will explain later, that shared understanding and self-reflection are needed to reach a mutual agreement and therefore benefit both parties. Moreover, the current trend of Cultural Diplomacy not only tackles the state's interest, but broader issues are also being confronted with, such as discrimination, inter-religious issues, racism, and so on.

Therefore, Lucian Jora also emphasizes the significance of Digital Diplomacy, as it is one of the cheapest and most accessible ways for Cultural Diplomacy actors to attain visibility and representation in the digital age (2013:48). In the case of Muslim minorities in Italy, whereas the Cultural Diplomacy actors are immigrants from Muslim countries or Muslim Minorities who were born and raised in Italy, and who are on their way to gaining prominence at least locally, their struggles mainly revolve around legality and recognition.

II.6   Islamic Diplomacy Within Diaspora

Although still a part of Cultural Diplomacy, Islamic diplomacy is arguably a little bit different as it is not represented by one country only. In Islamic teaching, adhering to Islamic law (Sharia) is significant in governing society and ensuring justice as a part of Rule of Law, and for some Muslims, this ideology is important to preserve (Zimney, 2009). In the case of this research, as the fundamental ideologies of Islam also include politics and Rule of Law, preserving Islamic values and to also promote it is important, although it is not an obligation given to them by their country of origin. On the other words, no matter the country, as long as it promotes Islam in a way they want Islam to be promoted, some of these non-state actors believe it is their duties to boost the image of Islam in diaspora, including the figures behind the creation of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* Facebook fan page. Arguably they want to implement a soft power through their platform.

Looking back to the article written by Kanjwal (2008:138), "American Muslims have a unique historical opportunity to constructively situate the relationship between Islam and the West through a more micro-level diplomacy." Similarly, this applies to how Islam in Italy is not bound by one government only, because according to the Islamic view, Islam should be above governmental/national constrict as it also deals with how politics should be according to their values. Also, where Islam existing as majority and Islam existing within diaspora is inherently different.

Islam in Bologna is different from Islam in an Islamic country, for instance, because the community goes through different experiences and the structure is also different. Yet their goal is still the same, they want Islam to be shed in a good light to further encourage cooperation and avoid conflicts. Through said Facebook page, it is important to see how the

effect is on the sample of students if they have any chance to be exposed to their contents on the page.

However, taking a step back is needed in this situation. Apprehending Islamic Diplomacy is vital to fathom how the Muslim minority in Italy performs and exercises its goal of achieving and maintaining trust from the majority. Putting aside the prominent issue of the technicality of the existence of Islam in Italy is not ideal, yet focusing on acquiring confidence is perhaps the method that the Muslim minorities need in this situation for the locals to slowly warm up and lessen their fear and judgment.

II.7   Multiple Interpretations of *Da'wah*

Taking a step back into the understanding of Islam and politics, before digging deeper into Islamic Diplomacy, the historical aspect of it needs to be explained further. According to Ghazi bin Muhammad, after the passing of Prophet Muhammad, two branches of Islam were born, over dispute of the Caliphate or the leaders of Islam that are later known as Sunnis and Shiás (2012:51). As mentioned in the first half of this subchapter, most of the Muslim immigrants in Italy are following Sunnis' branch.

Essentially, there are 6 major beliefs in Islam: Belief in God (Allah), Angels, 4 Holy Books (the Quran, the Gospel, the Torah, and Psalms), God's messengers (Prophets), Day of Judgement, and God's Will (Al-Qadar) (2021). However, Islam also follows 5 fundamental pillars in their politics and daily lives: Qurán (the holy book), Hadith (Prophet Muhammad's words and actions), Sunnah (Prophet Muhammad's wisdom and habits), the history of Islam, and spreading Islam's knowledge and political movement (Ayoob & Lussier, 2020).

According to the Sunni Hadith of Sahih al-Bukhori, Prophet Muhammad sent Khalid bin Al-Wahid to the tribe of Jadhima and Khalid, to invite them to Islam. This is what Islamic scholars call *da'wah* (دعوة), which is a form of invitationalism in Islam (Kahin, 2015).

According to an article titled *Strategy of Islamic Political Jurisprudence Invitationalism and Diplomacy in Making Internationals Safety*,

The goal of the invitation strategy is to reform all human beings, and every human being is in itself a goal whose guidance and reform is independently valuable, rather, it may be argued that in the original Islamic view, the relationship between the two is inverse and that the principle is the unity of human beings, and addressing governments is, in fact, a prelude to which conveying the call of invitation to divine and Islamic values to all individuals. (Dehghani Firoozabadi, 2013, 3: 3).

Although it can be considered as a form of Diplomacy, the authentic definition and concept of Invitationalism is to reform all human beings, therefore a different concept in the Western View (Akhlaghi, A., & Lakzaei, N., 2021). The term *da'wah* itself is mentioned several times in the Quran, as quoted from Quran 2:186,

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِىٓ عَنِّىٓ فَإِنِّىٓ قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِىٓ وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِىٓ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

"When My servants ask you ˹O Prophet˺ about Me: I am truly near. I respond to one's prayer when they call upon Me. So let them respond ˹with obedience˺ to Me and believe in Me, perhaps they will be guided to the Right Way." (Quran, 2:186).

II.7.1 Problematic Interpretation of *Da'wah*

Just like any religious scripture, this verse can be interpreted in many ways. It is not only a matter of the interpretations or called *Tafsir* in Islamic terms, but the number of times *da'wah* showed up in the Quran. The prominence of *da'wah* for some Islamic scholars is rather casual, while other scholars believe *da'wah* is a significant part of Islam and therefore obligatory. For instance, Racius considers *da'wah* to be directed towards non-Muslims or non-believers, or even gone-astray Muslims to embrace Islam and God (Allah) as their one true religion (2004:31).

Salafi-jihadism ideology is another significant example, where the literalist interpretation views violence as an important action to reject non-Muslims and non-Salafi ideologies (Ranstorp et al., 2018:8). According to an article titled, *"A Practical Introduction to Islamist Extremism,"* this extreme ideology also rejects democracy, as it is not in accordance with Salafists values, as follows.

It focuses on *tawheed* (monotheism and God's absolute authority), the principle of sanctity with a clear binary distinction between "us" and "them" that rejects non-Muslims (in many

cases everyone and everything that is non-Salafi). This ideology also rejects secular democracy as full-fledged tyranny while it applies a clear moral framework governing relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. As such, it embodies the ideal of creating a Salafi vanguard. A group of forerunners that propagates, protects and defends the straight path of the Prophet and where *da'wah* plays an important role in the conversion of non-Muslims into Muslims. (Ranstrop, 2020:6).

In the context of Muslim diaspora, it is important to delve into the complexity of multiple identity and strict Islam interpretation, especially Salafi. A study case done in the UK, titled, *"Online Islamic Da'wah Narratives in the UK: The Case of iERA,"* by Mira A. Baz tackles the issue of White British converts to Salafi Islam appear to abandon their British identity after presented and engaged with *da'wah* as proselytism act, or an attempt to convert others to their belief system.

According to their website, iERA is an Islamic missionary group founded in the United Kingdom by Anthony Green in 2009 for proselytizing Islam (iera.org). Taking the case of iERA, Mira examined the members of this Salafi oriented group to change their names to Muslim ones, leaving behind their native cultures such as certain food and sport, as well as adapting Saudi Arabian clothing characteristic, such as *thawb* (white garment) for men, and face veil for women (2016:4). As the group is *da'wah*, in this sense proselytist, oriented group, they have a project called the iERA's Mission Dawah, where they developed several online videos for *da'wah* training, with approximately 230,000 followers on Facebook. However, at least in 2016, Mira found the group to increase their offline activities by setting up *da'wah* groups internationally, perhaps to appease online accessibility of their narrative, reducing the critics, challenges, or public embarrassments that could easily incited virtually (Baz, 2016:282).

II.7.2 *Da'wah* and Islamic Diplomacy

As *da'wah* is also a way of communication, another interpretation of it can be understood as a communication process that is reciprocal and mutual, especially in Intercultural and Interfaith societies (Ardila, 2021:161). Nonetheless, *da'wah* is ultimately carried out by the doer based on their intention and goals. *Da'wah* also has specific strategies and methods, starting with choosing a *Da'i* (a preacher or conveyor) who has a

deep understanding of cooperation and awareness of current issues (Solihin, 2008:120). Especially for Muslim immigrants who are living as a minority, the purpose and intention must be catered to their distinct issues, which are mostly centered around acceptance and tolerance, not to provoke the majority and inflict fear and terror. According to Amin (2022:190), *da'wah* strategy and planning need to be flexible, as situations might differ from time to time, and awareness is necessary to avoid conflict and clash. He further explains that three strategies are useful for *Da'i* to convey their message and relay their invitation, through media and visual aids, through cooperation with leaders from religious or non-religious institutions, and the promotion of religious moderation.

II.7.3   *Da'wah* as A Means of Communication in the Digital Age

Da'wah, despite different interpretations by Muslim scholars, is conducted in two ways. As stated by Millah (2021:214) there are *bil al-oral* (verbal communication) and *bil al-hal* (nonverbal communication). Either way, *da'wah* is still following the principle of communication and the message they want to convey is conducted through speech (verbal) and actions (nonverbal). In the case of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, the organization is arguably performing its way of *da'wah*, promoting Islam and their identity as a Muslim organization on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. It is important to note that in the realm of free religious propaganda in the Italian constitution, promoting Islam is protected by law, a reminder that such law is lacking in some Muslim-majority countries. In research done by Pew Research Centre, in 2021, there are four countries that had very high levels of both government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion: Afghanistan, Egypt, Pakistan, and Syria. For Afghanistan, it is especially hostile ever since the Taliban took over the control and impose their strict interpretation of Islam aggressively (Pew Research Center, 2024). Meanwhile, the freedom of religion is clearly stated in Article 19 of the Italian constitution [Freedom of Religion], "All shall be entitled to profess their religious beliefs freely in any form, individual or in association, to promote them, and to celebrate their rites in public or in private, provided that they are not offensive to public morality." This leads to the discourse of *da'wah* and its usage of social media as a means of communication that is protected by law.

Aziz, et. al. (2022:189) conducted research among *Da'i* who used digital media as their method of *da'wah*, using PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses) as their systematic review.

Author/year of publication	Title	Method	Digital media used	Results
Siti Aisyah Hajar Muhammad Syukron Anshori (2021)	Farah Qoonita's Persuasive Communication Strategy in Delivering Da'wah Through New Media	Qualitative (observation, in-depth interview and documentation)	blog, website, youtube and social media (Instagram)	Da'wah through new media is very effective, namely graphic design, language used and position. The meaning construction strategy Farah Qoonita conveys da'wah through new media to construct the meaning of the language conveyed in order to persuade to understand the message easily. The construction is implemented in the editorial of the message without reducing its true meaning, especially the Al-Quran and the nabawiyah sirah
Dudung Abdul Rohman (2019)	Communication of Da'wah Through Social Media	qualitative-descriptive (library research)	Social media	This research can provide information, data, and facts about da'wah communication through social media. So that it can add to the treasures of insight and knowledge about da'wah activists and the effectiveness of da'wah communication in balancing the times and the demands of the community's needs. It is

Author/year of publication	Title	Method	Digital media used	Results
				also hoped that this research can provide inspiration, spirit, and motivation for the development of da'wah to be more effective and productive by making new breakthroughs by utilizing dynamic, democratic, free, and open social media.
Luthfi Ulfa Ni'amah, Sukma Ari Ragil Putri (2019)	Da'i and the Use of Instagram: Challenges of Da'wah Moderation in the Digital Age	Discourse analysis	Instagram	Instagram is the main and only platform for digital natives who are studying religion
Munawara, Andre Rahmanto, Ign. Agung Satyawan (2020)	Utilization of Digital Media for Da'wah at the Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School (Study on the Social Media Accounts of tebuireng.online)	Qualitative (interviews, text analysis)	website	Use of digital media for Pesantren Tebuireng provides several things to the community, namely: (1) spreading reliable information and making people aware of the importance of tabayyun (2) spreading moderate and reliable da'wah (3) inviting people to use digital media to preach.
Muhammad Afnan Banu Aji, Tri Hastuti Nur Rochimah (2019)	Utilization of Online Media by Yogyakarta Jogokariyan Mosque in Building Communication with Da'wah Activists in 2017	qualitative descriptive (interviews & document data)	Facebook & Instagram	Most widely used media platforms to promote and build communication networks with da'wah activists are Facebook and Instagram based on the intended target audience and level of effectiveness. To evaluate how the online media of the Jogokariyan Mosque is used, they carry out media monitoring of the response from the audience
Ridwan Rustandi	Cyberdakwah: Internet as a New Media in the Communication System for Islamic Da'wah	Qualitative (literature analysis)	social networks, blogs, search engines and other digital instruments	Use of internet media as a new medium in Islamic da'wah opens up opportunities to disseminate massive and significant da'wah messages. The impact of the research is expected to be able to answer various challenges on several problems of cyberda'wah in Indonesia.

source: Jurnal Spektrum Komunikasi (2022:189-191)

Table II.1 Systematic Literature Review for *Da'i* Who Use Digital Media For their *Da'wah*.

II.8   Religious Diplomacy, *Da'wah*, and *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*

According to their website, *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* aims to build networks and relationships across ethnic groups, nationalities, and cultures (inter-community), as well as create a relationship among institutions, other religious communities, mass media, and civil society (extra-community). The organization never considers themselves as a *da'wah* group, they rather describe themselves as an open organization that accepts any Muslims with any currents, nationalities, ethnicities, and school of thoughts. They treat the organization as a way for Muslims to gather, building relationship with other communities, as well as the non-Muslim ones.

This Islamic organization mainly uses social media such as Instagram and Facebook to communicate with their followers. This research delves into how this organization carry out their version of *da'wah*, which will be explained further in the discussion section.

Recent research done in Southeast Asia on the effect of *da'wah* among the youth shows that using social media such as YouTube as *da'wah*'s platform is a great way to appeal to the young masses (Briandana, et.al., 2020:224). Similarly, this paper aims to conduct research among university students, specifically at the University of Bologna, on their reception towards an Islamic organization such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*. This research aims to understand how the organization exercises its *da'wah*, and how it is affecting university students. The research will further work as a reflection of how minority organizations are perceived in Bologna, to indicate or proximate the reception of Islam among the newer generation in the digital age.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

III.1   Research Objective

Islam entered its way into Italy through Sicily 5 centuries ago. However, before and post 9/11, the prominence of Islam has taken into a distinct form, moreover, since Islam in Italy does not have the same legal standing as it was supposed to have (Alicino, 2023:2). The objective of this research lies in the importance of assessing the perception on Islam among Italians in view of the ever-growing number of immigrants in the country.

According to Istat, in 2021 alone, around 8.7% of the overall Italian population is made up of foreign citizens (Istat, 2022). Meanwhile, according to Ipsos, the Muslim population makes up only 1% of the total Italian population (Ipsos, 2023:5). As a part of the religious minority, Muslims living in Italy have been expressing feeling uncomfortable, because of fear and judgment (Ciocca, 2021:95). In 2023, Italy was a prevalent destination for immigrants and foreign residents, climbing up to a 3.9% increase, compared to January 2022 (Istat, 2023). In 2023, Bologna's total population was 814,000 (macrotrend.net), and 11.95% are foreigners (AdminStat Italia), while the Muslim minority's statistics are currently not up to date. Regardless, the diversity in Bologna is expanding year by year, especially among youngsters, as it is home to one of the oldest universities in Italy, the University of Bologna. According to the University of Bologna website, in 2021, among 93,753 students, 7,630 are made up of international students. This specific sample will reflect the diversity of Bologna as a student city, which may represent Italy's future as one of the most popular destinations in the EU for foreign newcomers.

Utilizing *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s Facebook page as one of a few Islamic organizations in Bologna will help assess and analyze the perception of Islam among the University of Bologna students. Using the diverse students at the University of Bologna as a sample would make the data-gathering process easier with the possibilities of various answers that would make this dissertation more varied. Furthermore, Bologna is well known for its anti-fascism movements, also often called *Antifa*, where young students are often seen advocating and marching down the street (Bartolini, 2022:318).

As further argued by Morabia (2021:2), "People today who exalt their race and stand for some form of authoritarian regime may not call themselves fascists, but their

insurrectional plans belong to the history of that political movement." Arguably, fascism is the biggest threat to diversity, and this research must be conducted in a city where anti-fascism is upholding its popularity, where society is rather open and accepting of foreigners due to the anti-fascist movement. The research done at the University of Bologna works to evaluate the water of the general Italian's perception of Islam and the religious diplomacy strategy conducted by the Muslim minority. Afterward, hopefully, more research can be performed further, to see if the religious diplomacy strategy works in the consensus.

III.2   Research Type and Method Approach

The collaboration of textual references, qualitative, and quantitative approaches is organized to extract and gather as much data as possible, to answer the research questions regarding the religious diplomacy strategies conducted by *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* on their Facebook page. For textual references, the paper references scholars with relevant topics to support and strengthen the arguments. Other sources of data gathering are also used, for example taking references from news articles and the like.

As for the qualitative data, various data is gathered from oral or written interviews with experts, which are mostly conducted through virtual meetings and email exchanges, as follows:

1. Nazmul Arman Tanna-President of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*

2. Osvaldo Costantini-Anthropologist and Professor from the University of La Sapienza, Rome, Psychology of Development and Socialization Processes who is also specializing in migration, religious studies, and ethnic minorities.

3. Francesca Cadeddu-Executive Director of RESILIENCE (REligious Studies Infrastructure: tooLs, Innovation, Experts, conNections and Centres in Europe) and Associate Editor for Brill Research Perspectives Series on Religion and Politics.

As for the quantitative data, the methodology is as follows:
1. Sampling (selecting 23 University of Bologna students from various religious backgrounds)

2. Data Collection and Analysis (online surveys through google form)

III.2.1 Data Type

1. Primary Data

Primary data is a data-gathering method that is conducted by the researchers themselves (Oxbridge Essay, 2021). In this research, the data are gathered by conducting a survey and interview that did not exist prior.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data is a data-gathering method carried out by other people in the past (Oxbridge Essay, 2021). This research references authors and scholars who did their research on related topics, taken mostly from virtual libraries and sources.

III.2.2 Research Design

For the quantitative data collection, the sample of 23 University of Bologna students is required to visit *Comunità Islamica di Bologna's* Facebook page, as illustrated down below.

Image III.1 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna's* Facebook page

Afterward, they are required to answer questions that are divided into 2 sections on Google Forms. This virtual tool works as a solution for gathering, recording, and preserving data in the digital era. Google Forms also provides charts and figures based on multiple-choice or definite answers. In the survey itself, 1 section contains 6 questions regarding their name/initials, age, country of origin, study degree, and sense of religiosity. The first half of

the 2nd section contains multiple-choice questions regarding their familiarity with Islam and the Facebook page, while the second half contains their comments on the Facebook page and Islamic Communities in Bologna. The Facebook posts are in Italian; however, Facebook provides an automatic English translation with little to no loss in the meaning of the translated version, as confirmed by two Italian native speakers.

III.3   Research Time and Location

All the research and data gathering were conducted from November 2023 to March 2024 at the University of Bologna and in the city of Bologna. Meanwhile, the interviews with the experts were conducted through virtual meeting platforms and emails.

III.4   Data Analysis

Once enough data is compiled and sufficient, the data is integrated into the discussion part of this research while maintaining critical analysis by synthesizing and combining the information to achieve an empirical and scientific result.

III.5   Data Verification Test

Observation is done to maintain empirical evidence based on the qualitative data result, double-checking the information given to avoid inaccuracies or errors. Emphasizing readability and clarity throughout this research ensures the information transferability qualities to the readers. Furthermore, the research is supervised by Ventura Marco, a professor at the University of Siena, as well as an expert in Law and Religion. The credibility of this thesis is also defended and confirmed by experts at the University of Siena.

III.6   Ethical Consideration and Limitation

The survey is done while maintaining the right to preserve anonymity. The participants are allowed to use initials instead of their real names, and they are also not obligated to leave their email addresses if not desired. Personal information such as email addresses and real names given by the participants are also secured and protected.

III.7   Research Limitation

The research's scope is limited to only one Islamic organization to lessen the weight of data gathering and time constraints. Additionally, only 23 participants were chosen for the sampling method as another effect of limited resources and duration. Potential biases are

also a probability as the author is a foreign resident in Italy, although not particularly a part of any Islamic community/organization, or any religion in any case.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH RESULT

IV.1   The Sample and The Possible Future of Diversity in Italy

As the oldest university in the Western world, the history of the University of Bologna dates to 1088, making its legacy last even until today. Making up a total of 93,753 students in 2021 alone, the university where the first woman to have a doctorate in science, Laura Bassi, is known for their progressive and broadminded values, especially in diversifying its members. As mentioned previously, from data taken from their website, the University of Bologna is quite diverse, with 7,630 international students by 2021, and is also a popular destination for foreign students to do their international student exchange program. When organizing the survey on Google Forms, it can be inferred that creating a specific section related to the participant's identity is significant to understanding the diversity that might affect the result of the survey. Therefore, the first part of the survey is mainly tackled on this matter.

IV.1.1 Section 1: Identity-related Information
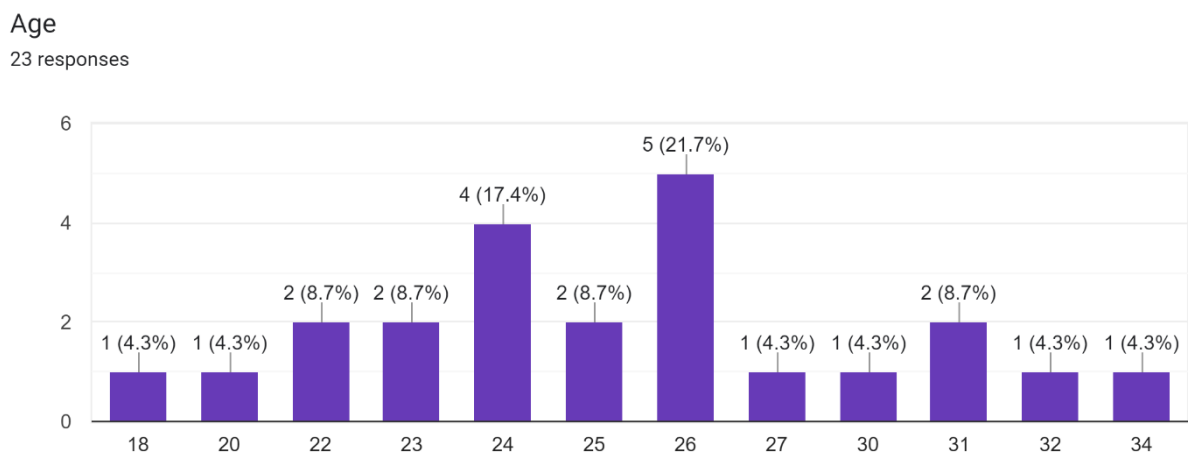
1. Age

Figure IV.1 The Students' Age

Out of 23 responses, within the timeframe the participants filled the survey, 5 students are 26 years old (21.7%, the highest), 4 students are 24 years old (17.4%, second highest), 2

students are 22 years old (8.7%), 2 students are 23 years old (8.7%), 2 students are 25 years old (8.7%), 2 students are also 31 years old (8.7%), while there is 1 student each who are 18, 20, 27, 30, 32, and 34 years old respectively. With most respondents being 26 years old, it may reflect the reception of Islamic organization, such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, specifically their online presence on Facebook. As the main focus of this dissertation is the organization's Facebook page, the average age of the respondents plays a big role on reflecting the current popularity of Facebook, whether it is plummeting, rising, or stable. This will be explored further in the comments left by the respondents, and how it affects the results of this survey.

2. Study Degree

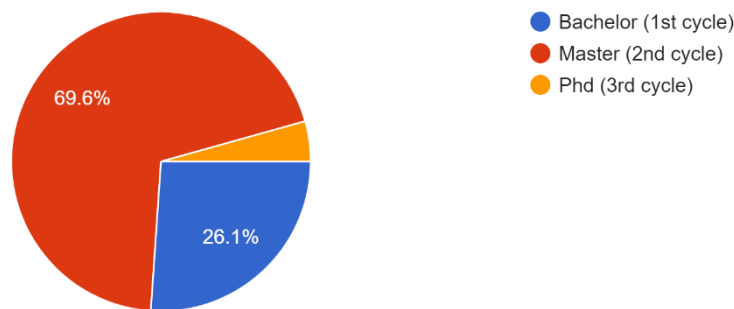What is your current study degree?
23 responses

Figure IV.2 The Students' Study Degree

The trend shows that there are 16 students (69.9%) who are currently enrolled in the master's degree program (2nd cycle) at the University of Bologna, while there are 6 students (26.1%) who are pursuing a bachelor's degree, and only 1 person (4.3%) who is in the PhD program.

3. Country of Origin
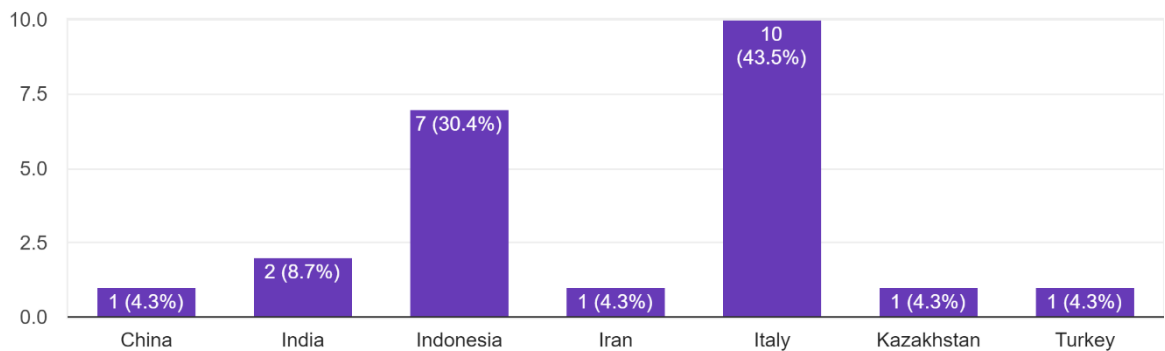
Country of Origin
23 responses

Figure IV.3 The Students' Country of Origin

Although the survey is done as an online survey, spread via WhatsApp on Students' Group Chat, the answers consisting of 7 different countries further reflect the diversity within the University of Bologna. Even if Italy makes up the highest number of respondents with 10 responses (43.5%), the rest of the 13 respondents are from other countries. Indonesia makes up the second-highest number with 7 responses (30.4%), India has 2 responses (8.7%), while China, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, and Turkey each make up 1 single respondent (4.3%).

4. Sense of Religiosity

Do you think of yourself as a religious person?
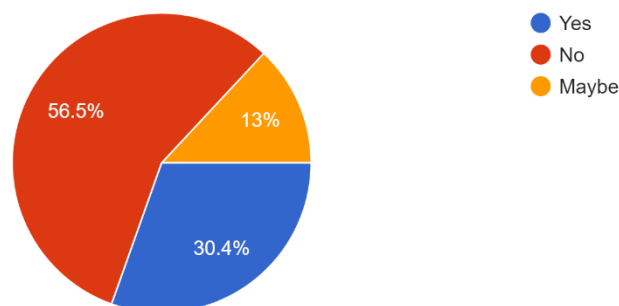23 responses

Figure IV.4 The Students' Sense of Religiosity

Here comes the part where the respondents must further specify their sense of religiosity, in a way how it connects with their sense of self and identity. Out of 23 respondents, 13 (56.5%) of respondents do not consider themselves religious, 7 (30.4%)

respondents consider themselves religious, while the rest 3 (13%) of respondents are indifferent about it. The students are also asked to specify their religions, although not obligatory to respect their privacy. 13 respondents deliberately answered this specific question, 9 are Christian (and the branches such as Catholic, Pentecostal, et cetera), and the rest are either Hindu, Islam, and others (atheism, and so on).

Based on the samples, although it does not represent the total students at the University of Bologna or even the total population of Italy, it does reflect the variety of answers to further explore the perception of Islam and *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* as one of a few Islamic organizations in Bologna. The diversity in the University of Bologna also reflects the possible future reaction of the Italian majority, as the country is becoming more popular among foreign residents and immigrants alike as their destination.

IV.2 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* Facebook Page and Its Perception

In this part of the survey, the questions are mostly about how the participants perceive the Facebook page, regarding their first impression, their knowledge of Islam before the survey, and how good the Facebook page is in delivering and representing Islam as a religious organization. There are 17 questions, 12 of which are close-ended, choosing between 1-5 as a scale of their proximity answers, while the rest 5 are open-ended questions relating to their comments or remarks regarding the Facebook page, and other Islamic organizations.

IV.2.1 Familiarity with Islam and *Comunità Islamica di Bologna'*s Facebook Page
1. Familiarity With Islam

As mentioned previously, the participants are quite diverse, however, how familiar are they with Islam? The question "How do you rate your knowledge of Islam", refers to their acquaintance and awareness of Islam, not to their expertise or fluency in Islamic law, holy books, et cetera. The question has 5 levels of answers, as follows.
1: Not at all: The respondent rates their knowledge of Islam as none.

2: Very little: The respondent has very little knowledge of Islam.

3: Somewhat: The respondent is somewhat familiar or knowledagble of Islam.

4: Quite knowledgable: The respondent has relative knowledge of Islam.

5: Extremely Knowledgable: The respondent is highly knowledgeable about Islam.

Turned out, out of 23 participants, only 1 person (4.3%) is confident with their knowledge of Islam, while the majority of the participants (11 respondents, 47.8%) stated that their knowledge of Islam is at level 2 (not knowledgable). However, there are 7 respondents (30.4%) who are somewhat familiar with Islam, and 2 others (8.7%) are quite aware of this Abrahamic religion.

How do you rate your knowledge of Islam?
23 responses
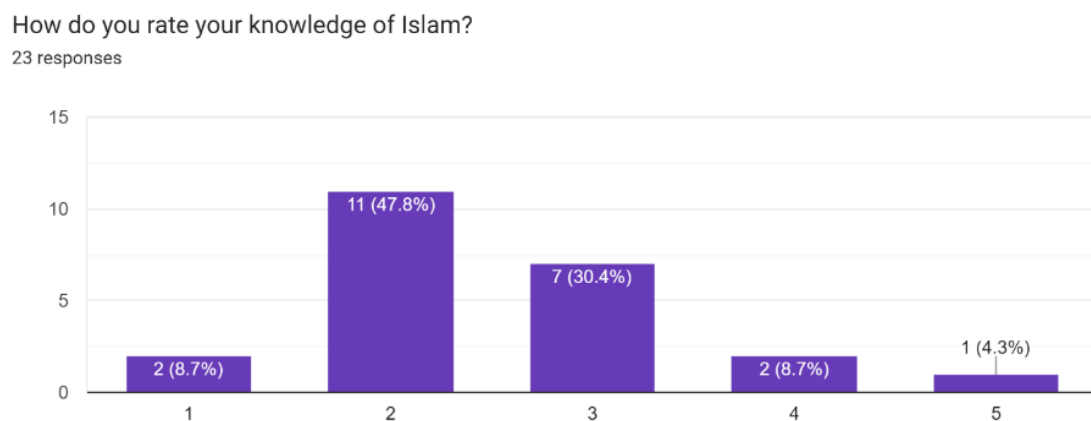
Figure IV.5 Knowledge of Islam Rating

2. Facebook Popularity

Facebook is a social media and networking platform that has been around since the mid-2000s, however, its popularity rose in the late 2000s (Statista, 2003). Nowadays Facebook has been integrating its focus on the metaverse project, as the platform has been branching out to different projects over the years (Coursera, 2023). *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* chose to open their page on Facebook and Instagram, which both are under the same company, Meta. This research focuses on Facebook only, because of a few reasons. The Facebook page is currently more up-to-date than their Instagram page, with more or less 11.000 followers and approximately 9.700 likes, compared to the 1.925 followers they have on Instagram. However, does it matter since Instagram is currently more popular among

youngsters? In the survey below, the students are given a few questions in regard to their Facebook usage with 5 levels of answer, with explanations as follows.

1: Very rare/Not at all: The respondent has no familiarity, knowledge, or experience with the subject in question.

2: Rarely: The respondent has extremely limited familiarity, knowledge, or engagement with the subject.

3: Somewhat/Sometimes: The respondent has a moderate level of familiarity, knowledge, or engagement with the subject.

4: Often: The respondent is relatively familiar with, knowledgeable about, or frequently engages with the subject.

5: Very Often: The respondent is highly familiar with, knowledgeable about, or frequently engages with the subject.

How often do you use Facebook?
23 responses
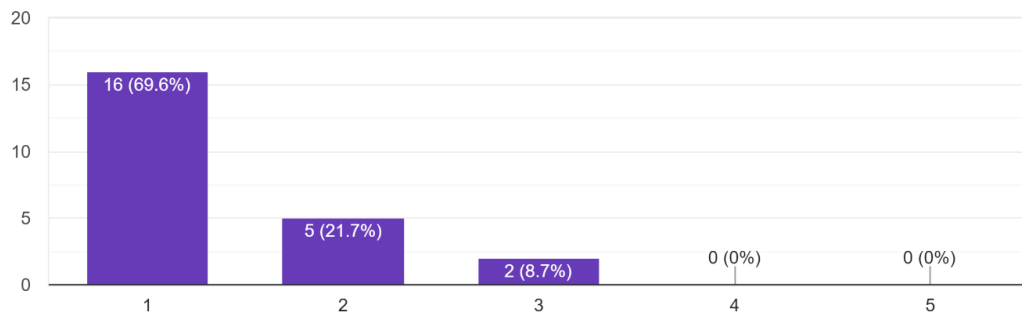
Figure IV.6 Facebook Popularity Among Respondents

The participants are not on Facebook much, since no one chose "often" or "very often" to answer this question. Out of 23 participants, 16 (69.9%) answered "very rare/not at all", while 5 answered "rarely" and 2 others chose a middle ground. Perhaps, this can be *Comunità Islamica di Bologna'*s homework in the future to keep up with the trend and choose other platforms that are currently on trend with the youngsters.

IV.2.1 Part 2 of Section 2: Commentary

In the second half of this section, the respondents are asked to answer questions specific to their awareness of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* their Facebook page, and other Islamic organizations.

1. *Comunità Islamica di Bologna'*s Familiarity

Have you heard of Comunità Islamica di Bologna prior to this survey?
23 responses

● Yes
● No

95.7%
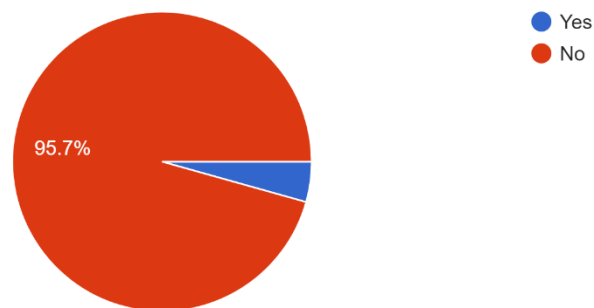
Figure IV.7 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s Popularity Among Respondents

In this question, the respondents are asked regarding the organization's popularity, with indications as follows.

1. Yes: Have heard it prior to the survey and is familiar with it.

2. No: Never heard of it and not familiar with it at all.

As one of the few Islamic organizations in the city, with 11.000 followers on Facebook, this Islamic organization is not very prevalent among university students, with only 1 respondent (4.3%) who has prior knowledge of it. This directly connects to their unfamiliarity with the Facebook page as well. The respondent who was aware of the Facebook page mostly knew it from "word of mouth", as both the page and the organization are unknown among the public.

2. After the Survey

From the content that Comunità Islamica di Bologna provided in their Facebook page, would you be interested to look at the rest of their content?

23 responses
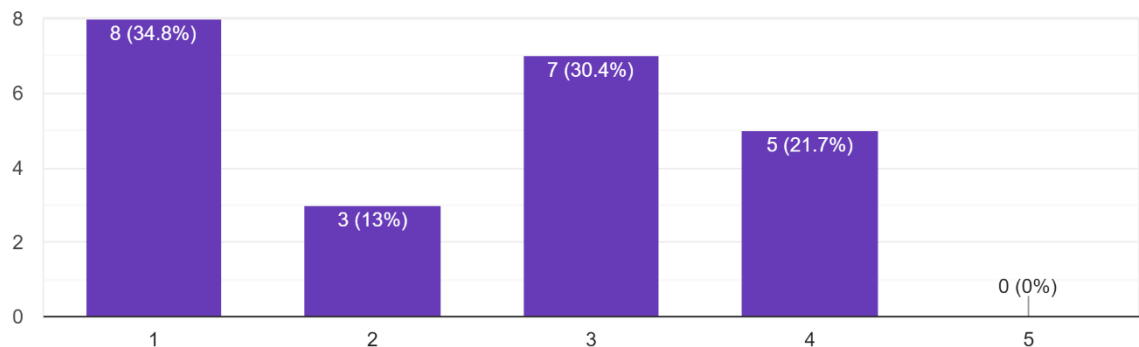
Figure IV.8 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna***'s Interests After the Survey**

In this question, the respondents are asked about their level of interests towards the organization, after completing the survey, with 5 levels of answer.

1: Not at all: The respondent has no interest to look at the rest of the organization's Facebook page.

2: Very little/Barely: The respondent has very little interest to look at the rest of the organization's Facebook page.

3: Somewhat: The respondent is indifferent/neutral.

4: Likely: The respondent is interested to look at the rest of the organization's Facebook page.

5: Extremely likely: The respondent is extremely interested to look at the rest of the organization's Facebook page.

Although the organization and the Facebook page are relatively unknown among the respondents, after looking at the content provided on their page, 5 respondents are interested in exploring their content further, as indicated in level 4, "likely". This could be a starting point for the organization if their contents are updated often and engaging. Furthermore, 7 (30.4%) respondents expressed their indifference towards the possibility of looking at the rest of the contents, meanwhile, the rest are not very interested, 3 respondents (13%) are at level 2, while 8 (34.8%) respondents are not interested at all.

Would you be interested to join any future events they post (or going to post) on their Facebook page?
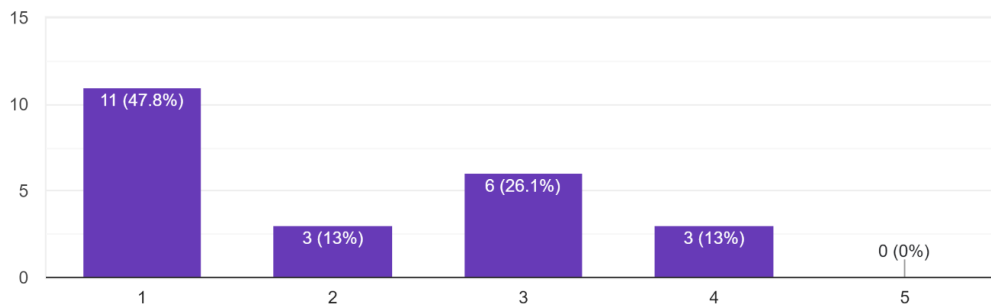23 responses

Figure IV.9 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna***'s Interests Among Respondents**

In this question, the respondents are asked to answer questions related to their willingness to engage with the organization, their Facebook page, and their future events, signified by 5 levels of answers, as follows.

1: Not at all: The respondent has no interest to engage further.

2: Very little/Barely: The respondent has very little interest to participate.

3: Somewhat: The respondent is indifferent/neutral.

4: Likely: The respondent is interested to participate.

5: Extremely likely: The respondent is extremely interested to participate.

The respondents are generally not very interested in engaging with the Facebook page, or the Islamic organization, as the rate of respondents who are interested in joining future events by the organization is extremely low, with only 3 (13%) respondents. They are also not very interested in participating in discussions under the Facebook posts, with 17 (73.9%) respondents expressing their unwillingness to do so. Most respondents also stated that they are reluctant to share the Facebook page with others, with only 1 respondent interested in recommending the page to others.

However, the survey shows that there is room for improvement for the Facebook page, as well as the organization, with 14 people who are somewhat satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied with the Facebook page. The indications are made up of 5 levels, as follows.

1: Not at all: The respondent is not satisfied with the organization's Facebook page at all.

2: Very little/Barely: The respondent is barely satisfied with the organization's Facebook page.

3: Somewhat Satisfied: The respondent is indifferent/neutral.

4: Satisfied: The respondent is satisfied with the organization's Facebook page.

5: Very Satisfied: The respondent is very satisfied with the organization's Facebook page.

3. The Facebook Page and Islam

How well do you think the Facebook page communicates important information about Islam?
23 responses
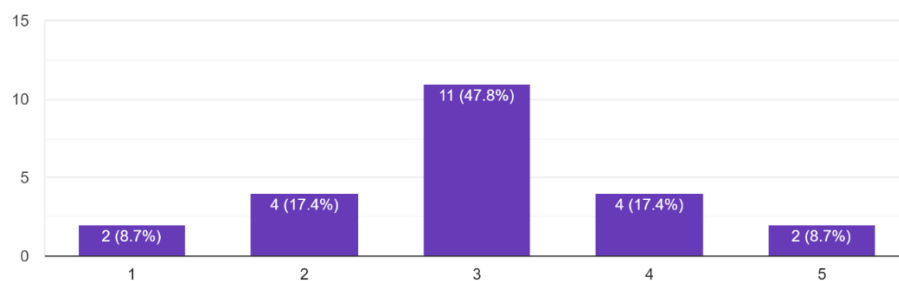
Figure IV.10 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s Contents

For questions related to the Facebook page and Islam, there are 5 levels of answer as well.

1: Poor: The Facebook page poorly communicates important information about Islam.

2: Fair: The Facebook page fairly communicates important information about Islam.

3: Good: The Facebook page communicates important information about Islam well.

4: Very Good: The Facebook page communicates important information about Islam very well.

5: Excellent: The Facebook page excellently communicates important information about Islam.

The results are generally equally divided. The respondents found the Facebook page to be both successful and unsuccessful in conveying information regarding Islam. If one

looks at the page, it can be inferred that this is mostly because although the page is informative, eye-catching, and helpful, they are not updated as often as needed. Often, they only update the page once a month, which is not enough, considering how fast world events related to Islam are unfolding. When answering the question about how helpful the page is in furthering their knowledge of Islam, the answers are also almost alike, with 12 respondents stating that the page is not accommodating, while the 11 others are somewhat content, content, and very content about it.

4. Commentary: Topic of Interest

In this specific question, the respondents are asked to state their topics or areas of interest they want to see on the Facebook page. Most respondents are eager to see more content on Islamic cultural and traditional facts, such as food, music, history, and even Islamic attire. Some respondents are interested to know more about Islamic Sharia Law and jurisprudence (Fiqh), and Islamic teachings that they know of or quite well-known, such as halal food, the use of hijab for women, the curiosity of Islamic gospel and music, holy places such as Mosque, and many more. Meanwhile, some others answered that they also want to see more in-depth world issues related to Islam, such as cooperation with other religions, and the current conflict with Israel that has been happening in the occupied territory of Gaza.

5. Commentary: Suggestions

When asked about the possibility of following *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s other social media pages, a few of the respondents expressed their interest in following them on Instagram. Some even already followed them on their Instagram after they filled out the survey. This opens opportunities for the organization to post more on Instagram to reach more young audiences, as they are more likely to prefer trendy and hip social media such as Instagram and TikTok. As also confirmed by one of the respondents who suggested the organization focus more on Instagram, as stated below,

"I think young people (especially in Italy right now) are not using FB anymore, but it's useful to connect other age targets."

"I would like to know more, but I don't use Facebook."

Many also commented that while the Facebook page is fine, its potential can be further increased by expanding its content on Islam's trivia, and general knowledge, and can also be curated towards people outside of the Muslim communities to further amplify their appeal, as below,

"The posts seem very helpful to promote events related to Comunità Islamica di Bologna, but maybe it would be helpful to do also more informative posts about general knowledge regarding Islam (traditions, films/movies/books related to it)."

"(Post) more informative knowledge to people that are outside of the Islamic community."

"I would like to see more activities and promotions about the communities, which would make the communities more visible, and the city more culturally diversified."

"About Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) with a solid basis on the living in non-Islamic majority countries."

The respondents are also pointing out the lack of consistency in posting schedules, as the page is not as active as it should be, especially if they want to do well on social media,

"I think the page should update more often and expand its content."

"To keep the page updated with more events."

"More cooperation and events for the future."

"More consistent post, I guess."

As the survey reached its end, we arrived at the big question of how *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* operates, especially on social media, whether they have their reasoning regarding their choice of platform, their posting schedule issues, and many more. In the following section, an interview was conducted with the president of the organization to learn more about these.

IV.3   Interview with the President of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*

In this part of the analysis, an interview session was arranged with the co-founder and current president of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* Nazmul Arman Tanna, to further deepen internal insights into the organization. Tanna was born in 1985 in Bangladesh and

moved to Bologna in 1996. He earned his bachelor's degree at the University of Bologna in 2005-2008, and his master's degree in 2009-2011. As a Muslim minority and immigrant in the campus and the city, he realized that there are many who are not familiar with Islam or how Muslim usually performs their religious rituals, values, and customs.

IV.3.1   History, Visions, and Missions of the Organization

As a former student of the university and a current resident of Bologna, he understands that for the future generation of Muslims in the city, specifically the students in his alma mater, a stand should be taken to shift Islam's image in the public. He uses words such as "peaceful image" and "harmony" to describe his goals for the Muslim community to have in the city. He uses his experience as a newcomer who practices his faith despite little resources as a fundamental objective when trying to build the Muslim minority community in the city. When he was still a student, he remembered that minority organizations are quite rare. It was also a challenge for him to practice his Islamic duties, such as a lack of a praying room dedicated to Muslims. The praying room, specifically, is considered one of the most important things to have for Muslims. They need a clean space that is accessible to water sources, as they need to clean themselves, also called 'partial ablution' (الوضوء/al-wuḍū'), to be performed before prayers (salah) five times a day. He wants to ensure that future generations of University of Bologna's students who are Muslim to finally able to practice their faith with no worries in the university area.

Tanna further explains back then, there were a few prayer rooms, but they were mostly owned by the city or the local community, and not specific to the Muslim community only. Similar to other religions, the Muslim community in Bologna desires to have prayer places that can also be a center for their community. Other than serving as a place of worship, funeral prayers, homeless shelters, marriage ceremonies, and many more, the notion of prayer places or mosques as a space for meditation, political discussions, and exchange of knowledge is nothing new, as it has been a part of Islam's history since their first establishment (Qureshi, 1990).

Image IV.1 A Mosque and Islamic Center in Bologna

Here is an example of a mosque in Bologna that also serves as a communal space for Muslim minorities in the city, located just a little bit further from the city walls of Bologna. Mosque An-Nur and *Centro di Cultura Islamica di Bologna* was founded in 1990, a non-profit association open to all Muslims from different backgrounds and languages. Serving similar purposes, The CIB (*Comunità Islamica di Bologna*), was established in 2014. As explained by Tanna, the organization carries out dual functions. First is inter-community, which aims to create networks, synergies, and relationships between the various Islamic cultural centers belonging to different ethnic groups, nationalities, and cultures. Secondly, the extra-community aims to relate to institutions, associations, other religious communities, mass media, and civil society in Bologna.

On the website, the vision and mission of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* are aligned with the initial objectives that Tanna mentioned in the interview. The organization aims to increase diversity and plurality to cater to both locals and migrants. They use the Italian term "*convivano*", which means "coexist", further emphasizing their vision to gain mutual respect, support, and collaboration between the Muslim community and the locals, including

between the members who may consist of different Islamic currents. Their missions are also various, ranging from becoming an attentive religious community, meaning they want to be an active agent as citizens who just happens to have different backgrounds than the locals, to be a bridge between the Muslim minorities to the city of Bologna. They aim to promote peace and interreligious, intercultural, and intergenerational dialogue.

Image IV.2 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna's* **Open Mosque Day, 2019**

The organization itself has been actively holding various events to further show its identity as an Islamic organization, such as the annual Ramadan Dinner/Iftar Street (preparing and hosting dinner events in the holy month of Ramadan to break fast at sunset together), open mosques events, Eid Celebration (Celebrated at the end of Ramadan), and charity events (recently they donated 14 thousand euros to the Local Health Authority), and even donating health gears during COVID-19. In these events, the staff also organized other ways to promote and show the cultural identity of Islam or traditions that are often performed by Muslim-majority countries, such as henna (body arts for women), Arabic music, halal

food fest, Arabic calligraphy, Islamic antiques, and nick-nacks, and most importantly a gathering place.

This information from the website about the organization is again further emphasized by Tanna. He explained that the organization's goal is to transform the city of Bologna into a cohesive and united city in its plurality, including hosting the events mentioned in the previous paragraph. He then explains that all their events are created with the focus of bringing the Muslim community together so that people from different countries and backgrounds can participate as one in these events, no matter the language. He also mentioned that during the Iftar Street event, they let the non-Muslim community experience Ramadan so they could be familiar with Islamic tradition that may seem odd or unique by non-Muslims. The organization also invites them to the open mosque days, to broaden their thoughts on the religion. An interesting approach to softly promote Islam in a new way in the contemporary Western world by this fairly new organization. It is also important to note that although they hold Islamic events, they never impose on non-Muslims to attend the events. These events are celebrated in public spaces, and non-Muslims are free to join, but they do not have to if they do not want to.
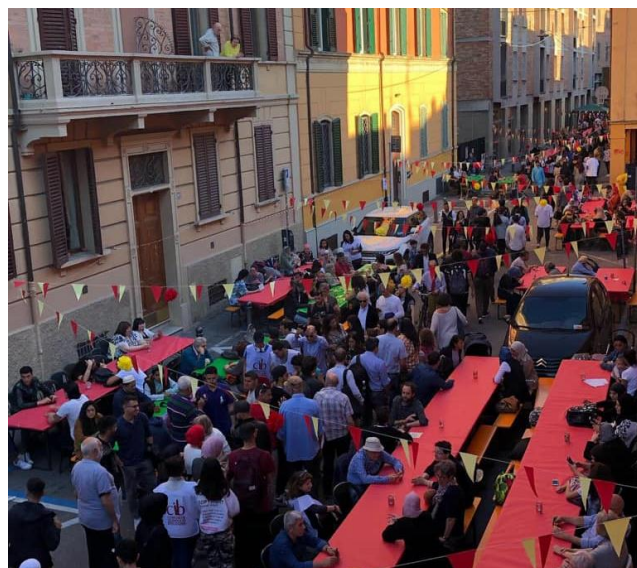

Image IV.3 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna***'s Iftar Street, 2019**

Based on the events hosted by the organization, it is quite apparent that the organization's goal is to build a foundation of trust between Muslim minorities and the locals. This further insinuates the argument that for Muslim minorities, the goals are to lessen

fear, judgment, and suspicion, and to lessen 'otherness'. In other words, rather than to gain ambitious goals, they aim to coexist with the non-Muslims, to familiarize the locals with this inherently unique community.

However, as the organization is further cementing their stance in the non-Muslim society, an analysis of their willingness to coexist is further analyzed in the chapter, where they collaborate and team up with other Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

IV.3.2 Collaborations and Community Engagements

As mentioned briefly in the previous section, the organization often collaborates with other organizations or parties for their events, such as with one of the main Italian Islamic Association (*L'Unione delle Comunità Islamiche in Italia*/UCOII), local health authorities (hospitals and red cross), and even with other religious organizations or figures such as Matteo Maria Zuppi who is the current Archbishop of Bologna. Not only with Catholic organizations, but the organization also collaborated with the local Jewish community in the past. As can be seen from their Facebook post, the organization along with other religious organizations, collaborated and organized a Peace March in Bologna. Not only it was attended by the mayor of Bologna, but local Jewish and Christian community leaders were also present.

Image IV.4 Bologna Peace Walk, 2023

As mentioned by Tanna in the interview, these collaborations are organized to achieve and maintain transparency with other religious organizations, for example with a Christian community, to show them what happens in the Islamic cultural centers and mosques. He further elaborates that these events work to invite them to Islamic religious events, so when the other religious organizations invite *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* to their events, a mutual relationship is sustained and upheld. For these reasons, the events hosted by the organization are not limited to Islamic events only, as they are taking local context, trends, and other religious events. For example, during COVID-19, the organization collaborated with UCOII to provide 2000 sanitary masks for the needy.

Image IV.5 Collaboration with UCOII During COVID-19 Pandemic

The collaboration with UCOII holds a significant tie between the two organizations, as UCOII itself is a prominent body in Italy. UCOII was founded and initiated by some members of the USMI (Union of Muslim Students in Italy) back in 1990. As one of the biggest Islamic organizations in Italy, today there are around 153 individuals who participate in the association.

According to their website, they aim to make an effective and inclusive Muslim organization in Italy. To further respect Islamic principles, while maintaining harmony with

the Italian Constitution and international charters. They also emphasize their goal to be a bridge of peace and justice for all, to achieve a cohesive representation of the Muslim community according to Art. 8 of the Constitution (to guarantee the exercise of worship, integration, and respect, according to the Italian legal system). It should be noted that *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* is an independent organization that does not belong to a certain party. However, they often collaborate on common issues and causes.

IV.3.3   Challenges

When asked about the challenges of being an instigator of an Islamic organization in Italy, specifically in Bologna, Tanna mentioned two things, Islamophobia, and generalization. As explained in the literature review section, there are studies that show Muslim migrants who reside in the European Union mostly have an issue with perceived injustice. The generalization of Muslims has also been getting worse post 9/11 and ever since terrorism issues concerning ISIS emerged in the past few years.

Post 9/11, then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi tangled in a controversy regarding his speech against Islam in Berlin. As cited in The Independent, Berlusconi stated, "We must be aware of the superiority of our civilization, a system that has guaranteed well-being, respect for human rights and – in contrast with Islamic countries – respect for religious and political rights, a system that has as its value understanding of diversity and tolerance" (2001). He then received major backlash, including from his opponent, Massimo D'Alema who criticized the notion of superiority that Berlusconi implied in his speech (VOA, 2009). Furthermore, the backlash also came from Amr Moussa, then secretary of the 22-Nation Arab League (The Independent, 2001).

After receiving the backlash, Berlusconi apologized for his speech, however, he insisted that his words were taken out of context (The Guardian, 2001). He emphasizes that his claim on Western civilization's superiority is rooted in its value system, which generated prosperity while guaranteeing respect for human rights. The controversy ignites one of the oldest and most-read Italian daily newspapers, Corriere della Sera (Milan Daily), to refute his arguments, in a news article titled "*The Arab League: Berlusconi's Sentences are Racist*" that was published anonymously (Corriere della Sera, 2001), as translated by Phillip Willan

from The Guardian, "The inappropriateness of Berlusconi's declarations is evident: we need to widen the front of those opposed to fundamentalist terror within the Islamic world, and certainly not to create, however involuntarily, further problems for partners who are already in serious difficulty" (Willan, 2001). As further cited from the newspaper, many political figures from the European Union made their statements, disagreeing with Berlusconi's speech. Romano Prodi, then President of the European Commission, stated that "We are equal, we have the same rights". Then Belgian Foreign Affairs Minister, Louis Michel, also remarked that what Berlusconi said was unacceptable and "almost barbaric". He further exclaimed that those who deem themselves superior to others are not well-informed about the political and cultural reality of Europe.

In the interview, Tanna also suggests that in the digital era like today, mass media and social media often generalize Muslims by using inappropriate labels such as terrorists, extremists, and so on. He further explains that the struggle Muslim minorities must face in the West due to Islamophobia and generalization are the main fuels for the organization to first and foremost promote peace and harmony. As explained previously, the organization organized several events and invited figures from other religious organizations to show their transparency and effort in coexisting with others. To show that they are willing to participate in the events hosted by other religious organizations, to maintain a mutual relationship and collaboration.

He then stated that although the issue of Islamophobia is a common issue for almost all Muslim minorities, it is even a harder slap for the young generations, as they are principally targeted and suffering from these issues. Taking the example of the religious headpieces issue in France, which is severely targeting Muslim girls, the issue even started in an academic setting. In an article titled *Islamophobia in European Schools: Multinational Phenomenological Research*, rounds of interviews are conducted with 36 teachers across Europe to examine Islamophobia in the academic setting. A teacher in Paris said, "I usually do not discriminate among my students. However, after the Muslim terrorist attacks especially in the Western world, unfortunately, I am making such discrimination. Although I do not define myself as anti-Islamic, it gives me worry that the foreigners and especially the Muslim students increase geometrically in the schools. I think that Muslim students cannot have the values of the Western world and they should be extracted from our schools…

Plus I hate Muslim students and discriminate them to the Catholics or others. Especially in student evaluations, and I give them lower marks than non-Muslims… I even think that Muslim students do not have the right to a good education" (Baltacı & Kayacan, 2019). Another teacher from Utrecht also stated that the hatred towards Muslim students is justified. Although they are not directly responsible for the terrorist attacks today, in the future they will be a potential threat. In the research, many participants suggested that wearing religious symbols, especially Islamic, poses physical and psychological danger to students.

IV.3.4 Digital Engagements

Previously, 23 students from the University of Bologna were asked to participate in a set of questionnaires regarding the *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* Facebook fan page. In this section, Tanna as a representative of the organization explains their online platform, such as their systems, goals, and missions.

He first explained that their online platform was established firstly to follow the trend of the moment, as the way of communication has changed. He further explains that having an online platform is one of the easiest ways to reach people. Nowadays, not only social media is used by people to stay connected, but it is also used to share information, news, and updates. As one of the organization's main goals is to be a bridge between Muslims in Bologna and others, they aim to stay connected through the posts they make online.

Image IV.6 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna***'s Website**

They first started with Facebook, then Instagram and now they are currently working on their website. All the posts are in Italian, as their main target audience is local Muslims and non-Muslims (even indirectly). However, the posts can be generated and translated into English automatically, so non-Italian speakers can see their posts, albeit the translation can be different and inaccurate.

Tanna explains that having an online presence in the community is highly important, as it plays a big role in their mission and vision. The online platform across social media also functioned as a Call for Action (CFA) for volunteers to help with their events. Including the annual Iftar Street event that was held on March 23, 2024. They also share past events for the audience to see their activities, upholding their mission to maintain transparency as a minority group in Italy. They also often post their collaborations with other religious organizations, further implying their commitment to be a link between minorities and others.

Image IV.7 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna***'s Instagram Page**
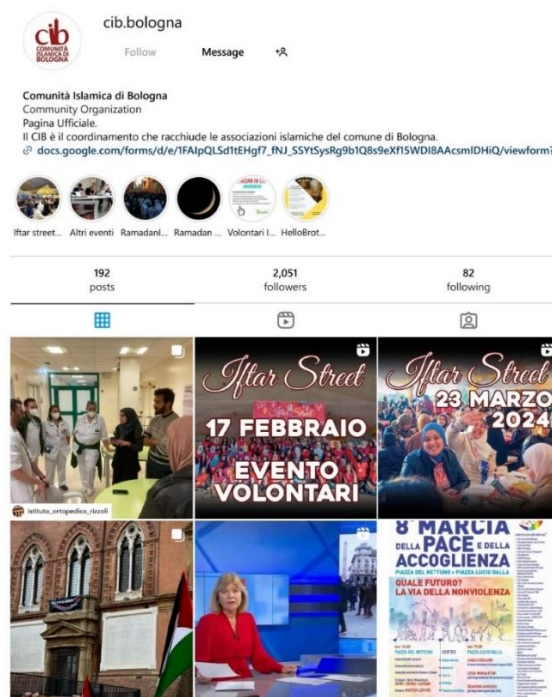
Not only do they post about events, but they also use the platform to share their identity, to show their visibility in International or global issues. Recently, as the conflict of Israel-Palestine has been on the rise post-October 7th, the organization made several posts online. The posts are mainly a platform of engagement and to voice their solidarity towards

fallen Muslims and a call for a Ceasefire. The online platform is also used as a way for others to engage in the comment sections, a place for Muslims in Bologna and Italy to communicate and share their thoughts and opinions on current issues. They also post other global issues, such as natural disasters in the Muslim-majority country, Morocco.

IV.3.5   Engagements Towards the Youth

As explained previously, Tanna, although the issue of Islamophobia affects almost all levels, considers the new generation of Muslim minorities gets the shortest end of the stick. In the example used previously, Islamophobia in academic or school settings is arguably one of the most unfortunate instances that these youths must face. Education should be a right for all, regardless of their background. While it is difficult to change one's perspective on Islamophobia, Tanna believes that every effort counts.

Not only do they use digital platforms for their cause to bring light on their side of the story, *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* also ventures their effort to appeal to youths. In December 2019, the organization, UCOII, and the University of Bologna collaborated to celebrate World Arabic Language Day. Tanna stated, "As I said before we are focused on the whole community, not only on a part of them. For sure, university students are an important part of the community. We had some collaborations with the University of Bologna in the past, such as the *Giornata Internazionale della Lingua Araba*, a seminar in UNIBO that took place on the 18th of December a few years back. We'll look forward to going ahead with this type of collaboration in the future."

Image IV.8 *Giornata Internazionale della Lingua Araba* Event at the University of Bologna

Other than collaborating for seminars, Tanna expresses that the young generation of Muslim immigrants, such as from the University of Bologna, play a big role as volunteers at the organization. Cultural events such as Iftar Street and Arabic Language seminars that they post online help to create exposure, to further develop a sense of strength in the young Muslim community. It also encourages the youths to be proud of their religion, as it is challenging to assimilate while preserving their identity, culture, and religion in non-Muslim country such as Italy. Tanna explains that the youths are the backbone of the organization, "There are other organizations focused on youngsters, like *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*/GMI (Young Muslims of Italy, Bologna). Usually, we need the help of the young people as volunteers at our big events like iftar street or open mosque. In these cases, we collaborate with the other organizations focused on youngsters."

Image IV.9 Volunteers of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* for Iftar Street

Tanna is optimistic that these youths will be the one who continues to be a bridge of peace between the Muslim community and others. To show that they are bringing the message of peace of Islam, that Islam is a peaceful religion, far from the generalization and stereotypes that most people in the West usually have about them. He also believes that

these young Muslims do not have to sacrifice their beliefs to show that they do not wish harm on anyone, especially the people of Bologna.

IV.3.6 The Future Plan of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*

When asked about the long-term plan of the organization, Tanna again emphasizes the importance of tackling the issue of Islamophobia first. He explains that bringing the issue forward would be the focus of the organization.

As for their online platform, they wish to improve their social media, and even add more in the future, such as a YouTube channel. As mentioned by one of the survey's participants in a few sections before this, one pointed out that the organization's social media needs to be more up-to-date. Regarding this, Tanna agrees, however, as an independent organization with small-scale permanent staff, the organization is working with quite limited resources. He explains that even before the recent reorganization in the Fall, there were only five permanent members. Due to this issue, they put their focus on more immediate issues. Nonetheless, the team has been planning to be more active, especially amidst the current tension of conflict in the Middle East. *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, along with several organizations, joined a Peace March in Bologna on January 1st, 2024. The event was also attended by Matteo Zuppi (representing the Italian Episcopal Conference), Ines Miriam Marach (representing the Jewish Community in Bologna), and Yassine Lafram (representing UCOII).

Image IV.10 Bologna Peace March, January 1ˢᵗ, 2024

As the conflict arises, the issue of the generalization of Islam as a religion of terrorists has been spreading rapidly. *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* also uses their platform to make posts concerning this, and the Call for a Ceasefire in Gaza.

Image IV.11 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna***'s Facebook Post**

By far, the organization's social media has been trying to be more active since the crisis broke out. Whether it is about peace march events that they work on with other organizations or sharing a post (reposting) about injured people from Gaza who are being treated at Rizzoli Hospital, Bologna.

Image IV.12 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* **Reposting** *Instituto Ortopedico Rizzoli*

IV.3.7   The Term of Islamophobia: Is It Properly Used?

In his interview, Tanna often uses the term "Islamophobia" to explain his experiences as a Muslim living in Italy, however is it properly used? First, breaking down the term is necessary in this case. According to the United Nations, Islamophobia is,

> A fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, it targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim.

In the **IV.3.3 Challenges** subchapter, the author has gathered articles regarding case studies involving the fear of Islam across schools in Europe, as well as the controversy that tangled Berlusconi regarding his insensitive remark against Islam in Berlin. However, after analyzing several collaborations and events that *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* organizes throughout the years, it is apparent that they are free to do their activities because they are protected by the Italian constitution of Article 19, Freedom of Religion. In other words, the term Islamophobia in the context of the daily life in Bologna and Italy, as experienced by Tanna, is more likely a shared experience, even without direct personal encounters. While Tanna witnessed Islamophobic remarks online or from cases he saw on the media, it is perhaps not directly applicable to him or Muslim diaspora that exists within the *Comunità Islamica di Bologna.* However, it is also important to understand that not all Muslims experience Islamophobia in the same way, and while solidarity within a diaspora is essential, it is important to be cautious about overly generalizing experiences.

Furthermore, going back to the **II.2 The Paradox of Islam Diaspora** subchapter**,** the usage of the term Islamophobia that Tanna uses perhaps a real example of *paradoxical nature* of *diaspora consciousness*, whereas he takes the suffering of other Muslims into his own, as they share similar values and political goals as fellow Muslims, although he never met the victims of exclusion or Islamophobic remarks directly. This further insinuates one of the two sides of *diaspora consciousness*, which is negative origins, where people in diaspora may share the same sentiment due to negative experiences that involving their

identity, although their experiences are not entirely the same (Habti, 2014:151).

IV.3.8. The Notion of Balance and Mutual Respect

One may argue that rather than demanding the non-Muslim Italians to adapt to the Muslim diaspora, it is important for the community to adopt the "non-Muslim way of life". However, it is important for both the Muslim diaspora and the non-Muslim Italians to reach a middle ground without sacrificing their identity and culture, by navigating a path of integration that respects both sides.

Here are some suggestions that may be helpful in reaching a balanced environment.

1. Focuses on Common Ground

Highlighting differences often happened in a diverse society, however, in the case of this research, it can be seen how important for different communities to find similar and universal values amidst said differences. Bologna Peace Walk, that was held by the Muslim, Jewish, and Catholic community in 2023 is a good example of how several communities able to put aside their differences for a good cause. Hopefully similar events like this will flourish even more in the future.

2. Interfaith Dialogues

Interfaith dialogues are extremely important to promote mutual respect. Not only the Muslim community or *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* needs to be heard, but they also need to be open to hear others, especially the non-Muslim or non-believers' communities. After all, it does not mean they should sacrifice their identity, rather, it is to create a healthy environment where no one is left behind. No matter it is from the Muslim or the non-Muslim community.

3. Celebrating a Multifaceted Identity

Identities are complex, but it is what makes a society rich despite their differences. It is important for these diverse society celebrate their differences, to challenge homogeneity without sacrificing their culture and identity.

These suggestions will be implemented further, especially within the discourse of the use of *da'wah* as an agent of Religious Diplomacy, and whether the organization is performing it.

IV.3.8 *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* and *Da'wah* as An Agent of Religious Diplomacy

As explained in the literature review section, *da'wah* is an act of invitation for others to Islam. When asked about the probability of the organization performing *da'wah*, Tanna underlines that *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* is not a *da'wah* organization. He emphasizes that the generalization of Muslims as religious extremists is rampant in the media, and he fears that associating themselves as a *da'wah* organization will do more harm than good. Also, he emphasizes that there is no specific Islamic current or school of thoughts that the organization's members should follow, as they do not wish to impose anything to anybody.

As explained in the **II. 7.1 *Da'wah* as A Means of Communication in the Digital Age** subchapter, *da'wah* arguably can also be interpreted as a way of communication. Rather than just an act of invitation, *da'wah* can be performed as a peaceful invitation to Islam. Tanna then agrees that while Islamic organizations, especially in the West, are often misunderstood as 'militant' and 'extreme', he reassures that *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s main goals are to promote peace and harmony.

As explained previously, there are some extreme interpretations of Islam that uses *da'wah* to enforce others, especially non-Muslims, such as iERA, the Salafi oriented group in the United Kingdom.

In *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s case, the organization never intended to perform *da'wah*, and just trying to be a representative of Muslims in Bologna. If the outcome is inviting people to Islam, even indirectly, it is already outside of their knowledge because it is not their intention. Tanna repeatedly emphasizes that the organization's main value is to create social cohesion and harmony, and they never established themselves as a *da'wah* organization. While religious extremists may take an extreme interpretation of *da'wah* to convert non-Muslim to Islam, it is important to note that a non-problematic interpretation of *da'wah* exist. To treat *da'wah* as a form of communication strategy, and to peacefully promote Islam that is protected by the Italian constitution. It is also important for not only

Comunità Islamica di Bologna, but other Islamic communities to commit themselves as a peaceful and nonviolent community, as an important step in preventing an extreme interpretation to exist in the first place. Afterall, it is not the organization or religion that people should be wary of, but problematic and extreme interpretations. Extreme interpretation exists everywhere, it does not merely exist in Islam, but also in other religions and extreme ideologies. The same standard should be held no matter the religion.

Nonetheless, *da'wah* is called an invitation for a reason. Different methods exist, including peaceful ones. If we are taking the technical term of *da'wah* strictly as 'invitation', no force is needed. Whether others are interested in learning about the religion or not, the organization is just taking action to make their presence known, to lessen judgment that may exist due to lack of knowledge or ignorance.

On the other hand, arguably, the organization has been performing *da'wah* as a form of religious diplomacy—in this case, Islamic Diplomacy—even indirectly, as can also be seen from the survey results. Many who were unfamiliar with the religion are starting to take an interest in Islam. Moreover, *da'wah* as a form of communication can function to exchange ideas, in the sense that Muslim minorities who are a part of the organization can share their voice online and offline. This means those who are performing *da'wah* should also be open for any kind of challenges or skepticism about Islam and respect the differences. Communication happens two ways, and it is important for da'wah, as a form of communication, to be performed correctly. It should be approachable, honest, and most importantly, open-minded, without having to sacrifice their values. Being true to themselves while being open to critics is important, therefore there are a few suggestions explored in the previous chapter on how to do so. Instead of letting misunderstanding and generalization against Islam, one can share their perspective, including by engaging in content that the organization posts online. Similarly, accepting interreligious dialogue is highly advised while tackling the issue of multifaceted society, to accept confrontation or critics with open arms. Using *da'wah* as a form of religious diplomacy is inherently doable, despite difficulties. Hence, Islamic Diplomacy here is more about promoting social cohesion amidst religiously diverse Bologna. As it stands, the organization currently has the potential to be one of the most prominent actors in Islamic Diplomacy.

Afterall, freedom of religion is protected by law and the Italian Constitution, it is a matter of individuals or organization to perform their religious values properly and peacefully.

IV.4   Interview with Osvaldo Costantini

After the interview session with the president of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* an interview was conducted with Osvaldo Costantini, an expert who has been in Religious Studies and similar fields for a few years, to understand Islamic organizations in Italy and their stance as a political actor.

IV.4.1   Osvaldo Costantini's Background

The interview with Osvaldo Costantini was held on February 16, 2024. Costantini is an anthropologist, researcher, and professor at La Sapienza University Rome. His scope is unique, as he ventures into Eritrean and Ethiopian Pentecostals in Rome, while also studying other fields such as refugee studies, migration, religious congregations, Evangelical immigration from the Horn of Africa, Orthodox Christianity, as well as other matters concerning religion and diaspora in Italy. In specific to Islam, he is involved in long-term research concerning the right to housing, other matters relating to the coexistence between different communities with Muslims and locals, as well as the Muslim diaspora's connection with their religion.

IV.4.2   The Role of Islamic Organizations in Italy

Costantini's expertise is within Rome, he takes instances where Islamic communities in Rome have become a tool of mediation, between local communities and institutions. He further states that it is important that these communities are taking stances and footing in the West, where Islamophobia and negative perceptions against Islam flourish in the mass media. The importance of these communities gets deeper each time, they also function as a bridge of communication about their roles, wants, and needs, as well as about their space and their position in the political context. He explains that, especially nowadays, since the issue of Palestine-Israel is taking a different level, knowing about their political rights is

significant as they have been showing their solidarity towards Muslims, such as organizing protests, peace marches, and many more.

Based on Costantini's experience with Islamic organizations in Rome, within the local context of Bologna, regardless of the city, they share similarities. Arguably, Islamic organizations in Bologna, such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*, serve similar roles. The importance of their visibility in society is not merely to coexist, but to also exercise their political rights, to join political movements. Although the context can be taken as an Islamic organization showing a solidarity stance with other Muslims, it cannot be denied that it is their equal right to practice their roles. The intention may be religious, but the practice is beyond that, as it is still tied to their political rights. For *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* their vision and mission are to be an agent of peace, but it does not mean that they cannot also be political actors that play their role within religious diplomacy.

As Costantini explained in the interview, Islamic organizations in Rome are significant so that the institutions or authorities can understand what their needs and wants as a diaspora in Italy. Like so, Islamic organizations in Bologna, such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* can function as a vessel to comprehend their situation to achieve the coexistence that Muslim communities and locals could have.

IV.4.3 Islamic Organizations and Engagement Towards the Youth in the Academic Setting

Talking about Islam is almost always conjoined with Islamophobia, especially in the West. Costantini stated that taking the context of Islamic organizations in Rome, grassroots engagement with youths is organized by local universities and local mosques. Costantini then referred to his colleague, Carmelo Russo, also from La Sapienza University. Russo is a part of a research team, tackling the issues of Shared Religious Place. He and his team are working on a monographic volume for a journal on *Historia Religionum*, focusing on the Great Mosque of Rome.

When asked about engagement towards youths, Costantini emphasizes that knowledge-sharing through education is significant in gaining exposure. Youths who are more open and exposed to Islam from their education, lead openness in consuming content

from Islamic organizations. Just like how *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* shares their religious events or activities on social media, the use of online presence is valuable in acquiring attention. Subsequently, the audience also needs to be open in the first place, therefore the freedom of learning about Islam, without bias, in an academic setting is important.

IV.4.4 Islamic Organizations and Situational Context

This is where Islamic organizations are not only beneficial to their members but to their environment. Islamic organizations such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* whose alleged main goal is to be an agent of peace, can demonstrate their values and goals through situational context. Costantini states that if Islamic organizations can acquire another approach to endorsing their values during hardships, it can work as leverage for these organizations to display their motto. For instance, during COVID-19, natural disasters, and the like.

Comunità Islamica di Bologna as an Islamic organization has been demonstrating this 'approach' to endorsement, as they are putting efforts into charity. As stated in the previous section, in the past they collaborated with other organizations to donate masks and participated in financial aid donations to local health authorities. These charity efforts show the organization's commitment to their surroundings, and as a result, it is beneficial for them to gain the trust of others.

IV.4.5 Islamic Organizations, Fascism, and Anti-Fascism Movement

Talking about fascism in a conversation about immigrants and minorities naturally came, taking the local context, Bologna is known for its anti-fascist movements, as also acknowledged by Costantini. During the conversation, he discussed a book titled *Arafat va alla Lotta*, a narrative on a young Egyptian who met a labor union where he pointed out Arafat's struggles as an illegal immigrant in Italy come from him being exploited. In his desperate attempt to find a better life in Italy, Arafat faces oppression, in the form of Italy's

faulty capitalist structure, where his desperation is exploited through *caporalato* (illegal hiring).

Arafat's struggle is then connected to how fascism in Italy has been taking a new form. Agnew argues that instead of the old-fashioned original fascism ideology that was first popularized by Benito Mussolini from 1922 onwards, in the contemporary popularity of right-wing in Italy, arguably fascism now is just the same brand, but a different name and formula (2023). While the original form of fascism cannot be replicated, its core values and ideologies can be used with slight or big adjustments. Marked with anti-immigrant sentiment, Euroscepticism, a strong national identity, and of course, exploitation of immigrants in work settings, the new fascism may not be as visible as it used to be, but it can be felt.

IV.4.6   Islam and Others

In the literature review section, an excerpt from Kanjwal (2008) titled *American Muslims and the Use of Cultural Diplomacy*, argues that instead of engaging defensively, what the new generation of Muslim immigrants should be doing is to be more critical towards their religion which often is intertwined with their culture. However, Costantini disagrees with this statement. Instead of Muslims being critical of their religion, Costantini argues that it goes both ways. Others should also do so; it does not only apply to Islam. The Western ways are not the only correct way to do things, and vice versa. This also connects to the previous section where the former Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi made an insensitive statement after the 9/11 attack regarding Islam and Islamic countries as being inferior to those of the West.

Costantini believes that no ethnicity is superior to another, and that no religion is better than the other. Humans are equal, if Muslims should be critical of their religion, the same thing applies to other religions. This goes with saying that Islamic organizations in Italy should not be afraid to show their visibility in Italy, including *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* especially if the goal is to be a bridge of communication between the Muslim minorities and the majority. Costantini argues that in the case of Muslim minorities and Islamic organizations in Italy, they should be able to act on shifting the power relationship between them and the majority so they would also not let themselves be taken advantage

of, without the fear of being misjudged and generalized as terrorists. The case of Arafat and his struggle with illegal hiring and exploitation has introduced him to the Labor Union, to acknowledge his rights in the workforce. The same thing should be applied to these Muslim minorities, in this case, is to show their identity without the fear of judgment.

IV.5   Interview with Francesca Cadeddu

While the interview session with Costantini is more from an anthropologist's point of view who resides in Rome, a virtual discussion with Cadeddu is rather taking the perspective of an expert who works within the academic setting in Bologna, and a research institute specializing in Religions and Politics.

IV.5.1   Francesca Cadeddu's Background

Cadeddu is currently a researcher in Contemporary History at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, however, she has been residing in Bologna as she is a part of Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII (Fscire) since 2011. The foundation itself is a research institute in Bologna, that publishes and organizes research related to religious science. According to Cadeddu, the foundation mainly focuses on Christianity, however, it is not only limited to it, by far they have been working on research regarding religions that are crossing its path such as Islam and Judaism. Cadeddu also serves as the deputy secretary of the foundation, in charge of all the activities related to the development of the European research infrastructure on religious studies. Even though the name of the foundation is based on the name of the Pope, Giovanni XXIII, they are not a Catholic research center. They are holding the papers or archives of Giovanni XXIII, hence the name.

IV.5.2 Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni XXIII's Roles in Bologna

As a research institute, the foundation does not consider itself as the main figure of religious diplomacy. Their main goals are to bring insights into initiatives and knowledge about religion. Rather, they aim to be a platform where scholars, experts, and authorities can collaborate and use their voices to discuss and start dialogue initiatives, specifically within the religious sphere. In other words, they are not the main actors or directly involved in

religious diplomacy, but they do participate in and support organizations to have such dialogues. For instance, the research institute participated in the Bologna IF20, an interfaith event where religious figures, scholars, and authorities had a formal meeting of interfaith dialogue in 2021.

The foundation's main aim is to promote knowledge and increase one's interest in learning more about religious studies. It does not mean that the knowledge is strictly about the rules of said religion, but to learn about other aspects such as their history, doctrines, texts, and other impartial parts of the religions.

IV.5.3 *Fondazione per le Scienze Religiose Giovanni* and *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*

Cadeddu explains that the Foundation, although working within the realm of religious studies, does not have any institutional relationship with any Islamic organizations. They do have some type of connection, as they would invite Islamic communities such as *Comunità Islamica di Bologna* when they organize public events, lectures, or interreligious dialogue concerning Islam, but merely because they reside in the same city. In the interview, she also explains, that other than the institute's focus on Christianity, as Muslim communities in Italy do not particularly have a formal space for activities—such as worship and gathering—they would meet in rooms or spaces that are organized by Islamic organizations. It is rather difficult to specify a legal or special relationship with any Islamic organizations. In other words, as a research institute, they do not possess any formal relationship with the organization, however, they do collaborate when needed, depending on certain events.

IV.5.4 Challenges of Research Institute Related to Religious Studies in Bologna

Although not particularly focusing on Islam, the Foundation cooperates with the University of Bologna to organize a master's degree program in which they are including Islam as one of their curriculums. The course is called LM-64-*Scienze delle Religioni* (Religious Science), where the history, doctrines, texts, and archeology of Islam are being taught.

When asked about the challenges the institution faces, taking the local context of Bologna, Cadeddu explains that, in Italy, religious studies are often taken as not scientific enough.

However, if it is specifically only within the Bologna context, the challenges are not that prominent, as the University of Bologna is supportive of organizing the course. However, it is also related to the prospect of interest to promote the study of religions in Bologna. As the institution's main goal is to promote knowledge regarding religions, the issue emerges as the students who are studying the course, the type of career they will have in the future is quite limited.

The author of this dissertation argues this is where this master's course plays a role, as the existence of the course will help students who have misconceptions about Islam due to lack of knowledge can learn more about it with the nature unbiased perspective of academic setting. Although not necessarily about Islam, the presence of the classes will further increase one's interest to learn more about the religion. Not only to the students of Bologna but also within or outside Italy, as the University of Bologna is well-known. It can be argued that acquiring knowledge through education is a better way of learning about other religions, including Islam, as it will be advantageous to both the students to open their perspective, and the religion itself to acquire more insight outside of its believers.

IV.5.5 Islamic Organizations and Religious Diplomacy: An External Perspective

Cadeddu agrees that Islamic organizations are active actors in religious diplomacy. Their involvement in diplomatic activities such as representing Islam in cultural or political events shows that they have the initiative to promote the religion. From an external perspective, Cadeddu is not sure if Muslim communities are represented enough, but when Muslim representatives are endorsing Islam, she believes that they are participating in religious diplomacy efforts.

The author believes that acknowledging Islamic organizations as actors of religious diplomacy is needed, to further understand their position in the society. Afterward, they can further cooperate with local institutions to realize the initiatives, such as collaborations in organizing courses in schools, universities, and the like. It does not even have to be specifically about Islam, but can cover multireligious studies, to learn and unlearn certain biases and convictions. After all, Cadeddu acknowledged that Muslim communities in the West, or in Europe, are often misunderstood, but arguably, so are other religious minorities.

Therefore, venturing into the academic field can be highly beneficial, both for the Muslim communities and for the non-Muslim Italians.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

V.1   Conclusion

Based on the survey conducted to understand the University of Bologna's students regarding *Comunità Islamica di Bologna*'s Facebook page, it can be deduced that the organization is on the right way to maximize its potential as an actor of religious diplomacy in the digital age. The use of social media is very well aligned with the current trend, thus taking advantage of it is the correct step to take. The debate is not merely whether they are actors of religious diplomacy, but rather how they make use of the opportunities and prospects as one of the most prominent Islamic organizations in the city of Bologna. Their aim as an agent of peace should be utilized further, especially for the issue of Islamophobia that is growing rapidly post 9/11 and the current issue of Israel-Palestine.

After analyzing the literature review, survey, and the interviews with experts, a mutual effort to identify problematic stance and to find common ground is extremely important to reach social cohesion that the organization is aiming for. For Muslim diaspora, it is important for them to not fall into the trap of religious extremism that are often violent and aggressive. It is crucial to understand that values, outside of their own, are as important. Although these values are against their religious values, to achieve social cohesion mean mutual respect amidst differences and respecting these disparities. Likewise, non-Muslim minorities are challenged to accept cultural differences that are unfamiliar to them.

Not only it is the organization's effort that is needed to tackle said issue, but the local authorities are institutions also play role in reaching said goal. Therefore, the youth should be the first to be approached, through academic means such as the critical inclusion of knowledge about Islam in study plans, as the Muslim diaspora should also familiarize themselves with other religions that exist in Italy, including non-religious beliefs such as atheism, to lessen misconceptions about one another. Arguably, the turnover of knowledge is incredibly significant in confronting misconceptions about any religion, whether it is Islam, Catholicism, Judaism, and even non-believers. Spreading unbiased comprehension of the religion or culture is essential in battling against racism, generalization, and hostile treatment towards each other that may exist within multifaceted Italy.

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The usage of social media nowadays is also incredibly powerful, as everyone can be an agent of communication, other than relying on the conventional ways of media and journalism. Once minorities acknowledge their rights in society, they will be able to use their voice to gain visibility, lessen judgment against them, and show their identity. In the case of *Comunità Islamica di Bologna,* using online platforms is a powerful means to communicate, promoting Islam, but the same attitude should also be done. They need to be open for any confrontation, critics, or challenges from non-Muslims, whether it is online or offline. Afterall, social cohesion can only be successfully performed if both parties are willing to break down barriers.

V.2   Suggestion

A wider data source can be useful to further analyze the stance of religious diplomacy by Islamic organizations in Italy, especially considering the context of the digital age. The utilization of a different age group can also be advantageous to further understand the reception of Islamic organizations in Bologna, and eventually Italy, to measure their role in Religious Diplomacy.

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