

Muslim Brotherhood online religion: a content study of Ikhwantube using Digital Humanities tools

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The advent of digital communication tools and methods a few decades ago vastly expanded the repertoire of religious authorities in reaching their followers. All over the world, religious institutions, preachers, believers and so on have directed their attention towards online applications that aid in creating a sense of community and belonging within their religious community. The Muslim Brotherhood is no exception to this trend, with its plethora of websites, social media sites and satellite channels. Especially since the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood led regime in Egypt in 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood had to divert its main area of focus to its digital loci. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood stems from a highly traditional and hierarchical brand of Islam, these constantly evolving methods to address their followers show that even within a conservative religious group, a lot of effort is dedicated to maintaining a constant online presence.

Following Christopher Helland, this project is constructed within the theoretical framework of religion online versus online religion. Online religion distinguishes itself from religion online by means of a high level of interactivity, unlike religion online which is rather focused on providing information. We agree with Siuda's refinement of this model, which states that the conceptual framework needs to be approached in a more dynamic way. Apart from the overall set-up of the website, with possibilities to comment on a clip and to like a clip, this project takes into account the way in which preachers and speakers interact with their viewers and address their viewers. Even though most of the videos that are posted on Ikhwantube were first of all created for satellite channels, and only later on uploaded on Ikhwantube, we still argue that Ikhwantube as a platform can serve as an important place for a Brotherhood member to practice religious duties that go beyond merely retrieving information about Islam.

With this project, we aim to uncover the Muslim Brotherhoods religious ideological tenets found in a selected corpus from their audiovisual posts on the website Ikhwantube between 2013 and 2021. Ikhwantube is the primary source for audiovisual posts made and/or distributed by the Muslim Brotherhood with a main focus on religion, politics, human rights, the Palestinian cause etc. We selected 2013 until 2021 as our primary focus since this is a period characterized by severe regime repression, in which the Muslim Brotherhood had to reorganize abroad in exile or underground. The fragments that were posted on Ikhwantube come from a plethora of sources - news channels, vlogs, talk shows, sermons etc. We have decided to limit our study to fragments with an overtly clear link to religion, either in their content or by the people speaking in the fragment. Hence, fragments of news shows are by definition not included. In the end, the corpus that we have selected exists of 386 audiovisual fragments in Arabic, mostly the Egyptian dialect and a small percentage of Ḥiǧāzī dialect, the dialect spoken on the Arabic Peninsula.

Analyzing the Muslim Brotherhoods religious ideology during this period can provide interesting insights into the ways they dealt with this repression. Moreover, analyzing this

corpus can indicate whether there was a strong inclination towards specific topics on Ikhwantube in this period, or it can highlight the inclination for specific topics cited in the context of a specific forum (such as a talk show versus a lecture or a sermon).

This research project greatly benefits from the use of Digital Humanities tools during different stages of the project. For the main purpose of our project, namely analyzing religious content, we first of all need to convert all audiovisual materials to textual material. We deliberately chose not to include audiovisual analysis since we do not intend on analyzing the particular ways in which the religious contents were transferred in full. At first we employed the google application ‘speech to text’, alongside voice typing. However, after experimenting with a test-case of 28 videos, we decided to switch to the Whisper open source software. Using these digital tools for generating the transcriptions tremendously improves the efficiency of this process, given the size of the data corpus.

In a later phase of the research project, the qualitative content analysis will be carried out by using Atlas.ti. In the first stage, the coding scheme will be generated using AI. In a second stage, this coding scheme will be revised and adapted accordingly. The use of the AI functionalities of Atlas.ti will allow us to connect the fragments to overarching themes very early on, before delving into the details of these religious themes and the contents of the fragments.

The aim of this presentation is to showcase our transcription workflow, to highlight the advantages of our methods and to explain how we deal with its shortcomings. This project is still in an early phase, therefore we can only present preliminary findings on the transcription process. However, by presenting this research project and stressing the Digital Humanities methods we apply, we believe that we can offer a valuable new entryway into research on the Muslim Brotherhood and its ideology from a new perspective.

Helland, Christopher. (2005). Online Religion as Lived Religion. Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1:1.

Siuda, Piotr. (2021). Mapping Digital Religion: Exploring the Need for New Typologies. *Religions* 12:374.