

The Role of Facebook in Reinforcing Feelings of Hostility and Affiliation toward the Salafi Intellectual Current in Algeria A Field Study on a Sample of Facebook Users

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Abstract

This study seeks to examine the role played by Facebook in shaping and reinforcing feelings of hostility and affiliation toward Islamic intellectual currents, with particular focus on the Salafi current. The prominence of this current within Algerian society has been driven by a set of social, political, and cultural factors.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researchers adopted a descriptive survey methodology, relying on a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The electronic questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample consisting of 150 male and female Facebook users.

The findings of the study reveal that Facebook has played a significant role in strengthening feelings of affiliation while simultaneously intensifying feelings of hostility toward the Salafi intellectual current in Algeria. This is largely attributed to the absence of genuine and institutionalized media platforms dedicated to religious discourse. As a result, proponents of Salafi thought and their followers have increasingly turned to virtual platforms to disseminate and defend their ideological orientation. This trend, however, has been met with strong opposition from various actors particularly secular groups who reject Salafi projects on the grounds that they represent a Wahhabi, takfiri, and extremist ideology.

Keywords: Facebook; Hostility and Affiliation; Salafi Current; Islamic Intellectual Currents.

1. Introduction

In the modern era, the world has witnessed three major revolutions that have profoundly altered the course of history: beginning with the French Revolution, followed by the Industrial Revolution, and culminating in the contemporary communicative and cognitive revolution shaped by human innovation. This latter revolution has, in many instances, become a determinant of human thought and a regulator of behavior. While it provides unprecedented access to information and transcends temporal and spatial boundaries through diverse services, it simultaneously represents a double-edged sword one side of which is particularly detrimental to users. Indeed, contemporary communication networks are among the most influential instruments of globalization in its various forms, posing significant threats to local social, religious, moral, and even cultural values.

Moreover, these communication networks have contributed to the proliferation of discourses of hatred and affiliation in their various manifestations, functioning as incubating environments for such narratives. Verbal violence directed at individuals, institutions, governments, and other entities has increasingly intensified through these platforms. This phenomenon has drawn the attention of regulatory and decision-making authorities, prompting the enactment of laws aimed at regulating user behavior and curbing such practices. Within contemporary Islamic societies, discourses of hatred and affiliation have escalated at multiple levels doctrinal, intellectual, religious, and ethnic reaching unprecedented intensity due to the influence of these media platforms. Such discourses have come to dominate interactions within the same society, where differences have transformed into deep conflicts characterized by language suggestive of severe crimes or grave transgressions. These conflicts often arise merely from intellectual, doctrinal, or ethnic divergence among members of the same community, and sometimes even among those bound by shared cultural or religious ties. Given that intellectual dissonance constitutes one of the most significant factors fueling discourses of hatred and affiliation across modern communication networks platforms that facilitate encounters among individuals holding extreme or intolerant views followers of Islamic intellectual currents, despite their differences in foundational principles, subsidiary issues, or even minor disagreements rooted in historical contexts, have found these spaces fertile grounds for exchanging hate speech, expressions of affiliation, insults, and verbal abuse. This is further compounded by an inflated sense of ego and deliberate attempts to exclude, delegitimize, or morally condemn the “other.”

Consequently, upon entering these virtual spaces, one encounters ongoing conflicts among largely anonymous individuals, each defending their ideological orientation, opinions, and group affiliations. The repercussions of such conflicts have reached alarming levels, having contributed in some contexts to armed conflicts and massacres, as observed in sectarian confrontations between Sunnis and Shiites in several Islamic countries. Within Algerian digital spaces, particularly Facebook pages, intense debates emerge among proponents of various Islamic intellectual currents, most notably Salafism often associated with Wahhabism the Muslim Brotherhood, and Sufism. These debates are frequently followed by waves of accusations, insults, takfir (excommunication), polemics, and the enumeration of perceived faults.

In light of the foregoing, this study constitutes a serious attempt to explore the conditions underlying the emergence of feelings of hatred and affiliation toward Islamic intellectual currents in Algeria, with specific emphasis on the Salafi current, from the perspective of Facebook users.

This is achieved through a field-based survey study conducted on a sample of Facebook users. Accordingly, the central research problem is formulated as follows:

How has Facebook contributed to reinforcing feelings of hatred and affiliation toward the Salafi intellectual current in Algeria?

To address this main research question from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, the study raises the following subsidiary questions:

1. How did Salafi thought emerge and develop in Algeria?
2. Has social injustice influenced religious practices within Algerian families?
3. What is the nature of Salafi discourse in Algeria?
4. How have images circulated on Facebook contributed to reinforcing feelings of hatred or affiliation toward the Salafi intellectual current in Algeria?

The significance of this study stems from the importance of the topic it addresses. Social

networking platforms have become numerous and diverse, and their use has evolved into a social necessity and a marker of modernity. These platforms serve as spaces for the discussion of intellectual issues of various kinds, where opinions converge and diverge. Such divergence may escalate into conflict depending on individuals' dispositions and inclinations, thereby transforming into hate discourse that reinforces feelings of hatred or affiliation toward specific intellectual currents.

From a theoretical perspective, the importance of this study lies in its engagement with one of the most prominent Islamic intellectual currents, which emerged as a result of doctrinal and intellectual differences. These differences have been further intensified by the political affiliations of Islamic movements and the conflicts and factionalism associated with them, in addition to disagreements over jurisprudential issues, legal rulings, and theological questions. Practically, the study contributes by providing data and statistical insights into the conditions surrounding the emergence of the Salafi Islamic current in Algeria from the viewpoint of Facebook users. It also examines the types of issues and discourses circulated through this platform and their role in reinforcing feelings of hatred or affiliation toward this current.

2. Key Concepts of the Study

2.1 Facebook

Facebook is defined as “a social networking website on the global internet that allows users to create private or public profiles, provided they possess an email address or a mobile phone number. Through this platform, users can publish content of their choice, add friends, follow other users, create or join groups, and engage in interactive practices such as liking, sharing, commenting on content, and replying to comments” (Qenawi, 2015, p. 10).

Additionally, Facebook enables users to send private messages and engage in instant, written, and video conversations, while offering a range of other interactive services. The primary objective for which this platform was designed is to facilitate communication among individuals, regardless of the consequences that may result from such interaction.

2.2 Hatred

Linguistically, hatred refers to feelings of rancor, resentment, and aversion. The verb *kariha* denotes finding something repugnant or detestable and experiencing revulsion toward it. This meaning is reflected in the Qur'anic verse: “But He has endeared faith to you and made it pleasing in your hearts, and has made disbelief, defiance, and disobedience hateful to you” (Al-Hujurat: 7). Classical Arabic dictionaries further define hatred as resistance, hardship, or rejection, while it is also described as detesting an act of wrongdoing and harboring aversion toward it (Al-Ma'ani Dictionary, 2022).

Terminologically, hatred refers to the dominance of feelings of resentment, hostility, and anger over an individual. Such feelings are often shaped and fueled by specific individuals or organized groups against other individuals or groups perceived as different from the prevailing majority in terms of language, ethnicity, or religion. In many cases, these sentiments are driven by political motives. Hate messages often find fertile ground in societies experiencing broader social, economic, or political problems, as well as deep societal divisions (Al-Khasawneh & Al-Atoum, 2020, p. 303).

2.3 Affiliation (Belonging)

Linguistically, affiliation denotes lineage or association. It is said that a person affiliates with another when they trace their ancestry or identity back to them. The term also implies

attribution and connection to a particular lineage or group (Al-Fayrouzabadi, 2008, p. 1655; Ibn Manzur, 1405 AH, p. 342).

Terminologically, affiliation refers to genuine intellectual attachment to a specific cause or group, which is subsequently manifested through behavior and actions (Al-Karasneh, 2010, p. 51). Affiliation to Islamic intellectual currents thus entails adherence to their ideas, orientations, and values, with such adherence becoming evident through actions and reactions. More broadly, affiliation is an innate human instinct, rooted in the individual's need to connect with others and to unite with them in order to gain acceptance and recognition within a social group. Through this sense of belonging, individuals achieve both unity and distinction, which grants them rights while simultaneously imposing duties (Yaqub, 2009, p. 19). Affiliation is a dynamic process shaped by human will, continuously evolving through expansion, diversification, and reconfiguration of its social circles (Salim, 1998, p. 14). Human beings thus affiliate with their homeland, society, social groups, values, norms, and collective ideas.

3. Previous Studies

A review of the existing literature reveals several previous studies that addressed the topic of this research or one of its variables. Among the most prominent are the following two studies:

3.1 Study by Ernest Gellner

An article by Ernest Gellner entitled "The Social Basis of Algerian Salafism," translated by Abu Bakr Baqader and published in *Ijtihad Journal* in 2000. In this work, the author examines the actual beginnings of the Salafi reform movement in Algeria during the colonial period, which coincided with the reformist call led by Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis and the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars.

3.2 Study by Mohammed Habi and Kamal Ouissi

An article by researchers Mohammed Habi and Kamal Ouissi entitled "The History of Religious Currents in Algeria and Their Contemporary Orientations: Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood as Models," published in *Al-Badr Journal* at the University of Bechar in 2012. This study provides a descriptive account of the emergence and development of certain religious currents in Algeria specifically Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood by relying on the inductive method.

These two studies served the theoretical dimension of the present research by providing foundational insights into the emergence of Salafi thought in Algeria and identifying the key social, political, and cultural factors that contributed to its formation. They also supported the empirical dimension of the study by reinforcing some of its initial assumptions, particularly those related to the enhancement of feelings of affiliation or hostility toward the Salafi current as a result of specific social and political conditions.

4. The Salafi Intellectual Current in Algeria

4.1 Emergence and Development of the Salafi Current in Algeria

Origin of the Term and Its Emergence

From a linguistic perspective, Arabic dictionaries agree that the term *salaf* refers to predecessors or those who came before. In *Maqayis al-Lughah*, Ibn Faris explains that the root letters *sin-lam-faa'* denote precedence and advancement, from which the term *salaf* is derived to describe those who have passed on. The term *al-sullaf* likewise refers to those who came before.

Terminologically, Salafism is among the concepts surrounded by ambiguity and lack of

precision in several contemporary intellectual and political circles within the Arab and Islamic world. Some perceive Salafism and Salafis as representing a conservative, rigid, and even reactionary current within intellectual life particularly in the domain of religious thought. Others, however, view Salafism as one of the most enlightened and reform-oriented currents in religious thinking (Amara, n.d., pp. 20–21).

Salafism is commonly defined as a concept derived from al-salaf al-salih (the pious predecessors), referring to the first three generations of Muslims who directly experienced the emergence of Islam and are regarded as exemplary models for the proper Islamic way of life to be emulated by later generations (Meijer, 2014, p. 16). The term is also extended to include all those who followed the path of the Companions, the Successors, and those who followed them with excellence until the Day of Judgment, as well as the leading scholars of Islam who were acknowledged for their religious authority and intellectual prominence. Anyone adhering to their creed and jurisprudence is thus considered affiliated with them.

Salafism as a Contemporary Intellectual Movement

As a contemporary phenomenon, Salafism constitutes an Islamic religious movement and group characterized by a sectarian orientation (Jadid, 2012, p. 15). It seeks to reform Islamic beliefs, rituals, and acts of worship by purifying them from polytheism, superstition, and religious innovations.

This is achieved through a return to the primary sources of Islam the Qur'an and the Sunnah and adherence to the practices of the Companions and the Successors, while maintaining distance from political engagement and partisan affiliations.

The early manifestations of Salafism emerged following the Ottoman Empire's inheritance of the Mamluk state, a period marked by intellectual stagnation and the proliferation of innovations and superstitions that eventually permeated the modern state. This stagnation created vulnerabilities within the Islamic East, which Western colonial powers sought to exploit. As Islam increasingly appeared alien within its own societies, the movement of awakening and renewal in the modern era adopted Salafism as a pathway to counter religious innovations and superstitions, striving to restore Islamic leadership to the Arab world after the Ottoman Turks proved incapable of confronting the advancing colonial threat.

As a result, prominent figures of the modern Salafi movement emerged, including Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Abdelhamid Ben Badis, Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi, and Muhammad Rashid Rida, among others (Amara, pp. 20–21).

4.2 The Reality of the Salafi Current in Algeria

The roots of the conservative Salafi current in Algeria can be traced back to the colonial period, particularly with the emergence of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars. Many of its leading figures such as Abdelhamid Ben Badis, Tayeb al-Okbi, and Bashir al-Ibrahimi received their religious education in the Hijaz, where they were influenced by Wahhabi thought. As a result, they shared with the Wahhabis the principle of distancing religion from political engagement and focusing instead on religious reform through combating polytheism, religious innovations, superstitions, and Sufi brotherhood practices that were widespread during this dark period of Algerian history.

In rural areas, the worship of saints, sorcery, charlatanism, myths, superstitions, and the veneration of the dead had become prevalent. Consequently, it was incumbent upon the Association during this period to prioritize religious reform. In this context, Abdelrahman

Lemchichi states:

“This movement derived its orientation from a moral, cultural, and identity-based questioning, rooted in the religious foundations of the Salafi doctrinal heritage that emerged in the seventeenth century, within the framework of the principles articulated by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida. These thinkers sought to return to the past and to foundational sacred texts in order to reduce the criticisms directed at these texts during that period and to promote the renaissance of the Islamic world” (Habi & Ouissi, 2012, p. 14). Ernest Gellner, in describing the rapid development of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and its effectiveness within Algerian society, notes:

“Within only four years, the Algerian reform movement had become a genuine religious party, organizing an effective propaganda apparatus and ultimately imposing itself on the attention of the entire country including the administration as a movement characterized by victorious dynamism”(Gellner, 2000, p. 199).

Gellner further outlines the core features that defined the concept of Salafi reform among the scholars of the Association and the firmness of its leaders in confronting anything that undermined religion. Ben Badis and al-Okbi, in particular, were in full agreement regarding the fundamental principles of Salafi reform most notably the struggle against religious innovations, especially those associated with Sufi practices. Sheikh al-Okbi was among the least cautious leaders of Algerian reform, speaking harshly and unapologetically about saints and Sufi adherents. He was a determined reformer, convinced of the righteousness of his cause and confident in eventual victory (Gellner, 2000, p. 197).

4.3 Salafism after Independence

The early manifestations of the Salafi current in Algeria after independence became more apparent in 1976, particularly through the activities of Sheikh al-Ashmawi. Through his repeated visits and his delivery of religious lessons and lectures focused on Islamic education and youth formation, he played a significant role in influencing large segments of Algerian youth. Several prominent figures in the field of religious preaching emerged under his influence, including Abdelmalek Ramdani and Ali Belhadj, the latter of whom later diverged toward what became known as scientific Salafism. Some of these individuals also traveled to Saudi Arabia to pursue formal religious education (Habi & Ouissi, 2012, p. 15).

In his book *Madarik al-Nazar fi al-Siyasa* (Perspectives on Politics), Abdelmalek Ramdani notes that the Salafi movement in Algeria experienced its most prosperous period following the decline of political Islamist movements and factions, such as Algerianization-oriented groups, Tablighi Jamaat, and the Muslim Brotherhood. During this period, mosques multiplied across the country, flourished with worshippers, and became centers of religious learning.

Salafi creed nearly attained a position of prominence within Algeria, manifestations of polytheism diminished in many cities, and people adopted numerous Islamic practices that strengthened their relationship with religion (Ramdani, 1415 AH, p. 95).

Ramdani attributes the exceptional spread of religious knowledge during this period unprecedented since independence to three main factors. First, Salafism itself emphasized education and the dissemination of religious knowledge, particularly through graduates of the Islamic University of Medina. Second, Algeria benefited from the presence of one of the most prominent hadith scholars of that era, Sheikh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani. Third, the state organized major book fairs that witnessed remarkable public interest in Islamic publications. As a result, the scientific Salafi call gained prominence, particularly in the capital, and gradually expanded beyond it, despite the limited number of its preachers and

references and the intensity of opposition it faced in official forums (Ramdani, 1415 AH, p. 96).

However, the political crisis that struck Algeria in the early 1990s led to the emergence of a new form of non-activist Salafism, commonly referred to in Algeria as scientific Salafism. This trend flourished amid political turmoil, despite initially lacking a favorable environment for disseminating its ideas. With the increasing repression of Islamist movements including activist Salafis and the growing focus of many Islamists on political concerns at the expense of religious preaching, scientific Salafism emerged as an alternative to political Islam. Abdelmalek Ramdani and Ali Ferkous are regarded as leading figures of this trend in recent years. Among its primary objectives are the pursuit of religious knowledge derived directly from recognized scholars, abstention from political engagement, and avoidance of opposition to political authority (Habi & Ouissi, 2012, p. 18).

5. Methodological Procedures of the Study

5.1 Type of Study and Research Method

This study falls within the domain of descriptive research. Description is defined as “an analytical approach based on sufficient and accurate information about a specific phenomenon or subject over a known period or periods of time, with the aim of obtaining practical results and interpreting them objectively in a manner consistent with the actual characteristics of the phenomenon” (Obaidat et al., 1999, p. 46).

Through this approach, the researchers sought to achieve the objectives of the study, which focus on identifying the role played by social networking sites particularly Facebook in reinforcing feelings of hatred and affiliation toward the Salafi intellectual current from the perspective of its users. To this end, the researchers employed the sample survey method to examine a segment of Facebook users.

5.2 Study Population and Sample

The study population refers to all units that the researchers seek to examine, whether individuals, groups, publications, or other entities. In this study, the population consists of all Algerian Facebook users who consider the platform a source for acquiring and deepening information, as well as for shaping and reinforcing feelings of hatred or affiliation toward the contemporary Salafi intellectual current.

The electronic questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample comprising 150 respondents of both genders, representing diverse educational, cultural, and age backgrounds. Because the research population is not precisely defined and lacks a comprehensive sampling frame, it was not possible to select a random sample. Nevertheless, this sampling approach enabled the researchers to reasonably represent the original population. A total of 146 completed questionnaires were received and analyzed, with the aim of examining how Facebook has contributed to intensifying feelings of affiliation or hostility toward the Salafi current in Algeria.

5.3 Research Instrument and Construction Procedures

The primary data collection instrument for this study was an electronic questionnaire designed on the basis of previous literature addressing similar research topics, in addition to the researchers' own academic and professional experience in the field. The questionnaire was structured around three main axes:

The relationship between religiosity and social injustice;

The content of Salafi discourse in Algeria;

The image of Salafism on Facebook;

To ensure the validity and effectiveness of the instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of university professors from various Algerian universities, who assessed its relevance and measurement adequacy.

5.4 Limits of the Study

Thematic limits: The study focuses on the conditions underlying the emergence of feelings of hatred and affiliation toward the Salafi intellectual current in Algeria from the perspective of Facebook users.

Spatial limits: The research was conducted within the Algerian state, as it represents the geographical context in which the researchers reside.

Temporal limits: The study was carried out during the second semester of the 2021–2022 academic year.

Human limits: The study was conducted on a purposive (intentional) sample of Facebook users, specifically those who are active on the platform on a daily basis.

After collecting the data, the researchers coded and entered them into a computer using Microsoft Excel. The data were then processed, analyzed, and statistically interpreted in order to extract the study's findings.

6. Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of the Study Results

6.1 The Relationship between Religiosity and Social Injustice

The activities of Salafi groups in mosques, associations, and public spaces have played a significant role in influencing large segments of youth, both through the religious figures who represent this current and through their modes of operation. This growing influence has raised concerns among certain secular political parties, which have expressed apprehension regarding what they perceive as the expanding reach of Salafism within Algerian society. Media attention has likewise been drawn to this phenomenon, particularly due to the unease expressed even by moderate Islamic parties, which have viewed this current as an extension of Wahhabi thought and as being disconnected from local Algerian Islamic culture.

This situation has consistently raised questions regarding how this current managed to emerge within Algerian society and what underlying factors enabled its development and expansion.

The study indicates that 95.33% of respondents believe that Algerian citizens' perception of the absence of an effective role played by the state and its institutions in providing adequate services has led to a sense of alienation. This feeling is closely associated with perceptions of social injustice, particularly among youth. Respondents emphasized that they observe a privileged segment of wealthy youth enjoying extensive opportunities both domestically and abroad, while others struggle persistently to obtain social housing or secure employment contracts merely to cope with harsh living conditions.

Social injustice has thus contributed to difficult living conditions within Algerian society, with a more pronounced impact on young people. Consequently, families have often encouraged their children to attend mosques as a protective alternative to the streets. Mosques were perceived as spaces that instilled values of patience and tranquility, ultimately promising spiritual reward, whereas the streets were commonly associated with drug abuse, social problems, and various forms of delinquency that could lead to imprisonment. In this context, Salafi discourse gradually found its way into mosques, attracting youth facing diverse social challenges by offering them a perceived safe haven capable of alleviating the hardships of daily life.

According to the study's findings, Salafi discourse is characterized by its explicit rejection of

political partisanship and confrontation with ruling authorities. Instead, it frames life's difficulties as divine trials or punishments resulting from spiritual distance from God. As such, Salafi-oriented youth often gravitate toward communities that emphasize reliance on God, collective advice, and consultation rather than resentment and protest, which are viewed as pathways leading to confrontation with law enforcement and eventual involvement with the judicial system.

Moreover, this current has proven particularly capable of spreading and expanding in economically marginalized areas, where material poverty facilitates the manipulation of emotional needs under the pretext of seeking security and stability absent in broader society. The events that unfolded in Algeria toward the end of the twentieth century especially following the October 1988 protests appear to have laid the groundwork for the emergence and development of Salafi thought in the country, particularly in its scientific and relatively moderate form. This variant does not pose a direct threat to political authority, as it is grounded in abstention from political engagement and opposition to rulers, while prioritizing the moralization of society and the religious education of individuals in accordance with a conception of Islam free from innovations and moral transgressions.

The expansion of Salafi thought within Algerian families was therefore not a purely organic process, but rather one shaped by a set of circumstances, most notably the prolonged social hardships experienced by Algerian individuals as a result of persistent social injustice. Despite the absence of social media platforms during earlier phases of this expansion, nearly every family eventually came to include one or more members influenced by the values promoted by Salafi thought. According to the study's results, turning toward religion represented a form of salvation from the multiple crises experienced by Algerian society, particularly given that Islam continues to be perceived as a fundamental pillar in the historical construction and development of civilizations.

The emergence and development of Salafi thought cannot be attributed solely to the ideological foundations articulated by its early proponents. Rather, it is closely linked to the receptiveness of the general public to this thought. The general population often lacks the cultural immunity and philosophical-scientific capacity required to critically analyze, contextualize, and interpret the nature of social relations formed under specific socio-historical conditions. In this regard, Mohammed Amara notes in his work *Salafism* that Salafi thought found its primary support among the general public rather than intellectual elites, as it relied heavily on textual traditions and transmitted reports while opposing philosophical reasoning and speculative theology (Amara, n.d., p. 51).

The present study further demonstrates that broad segments of society do not possess the intellectual and educational resources necessary to critically engage with the various ideological currents introduced by contemporary tools of change, whether promoted by internal or external actors. This limitation is largely attributable to deteriorating living conditions caused by poverty and low income resulting from unequal wealth distribution. These circumstances have often compelled young people particularly males to abandon formal education at an early stage in search of employment opportunities, including informal trade sectors that are frequently dominated by Salafi networks. This economic reality has, in turn, facilitated the diffusion of Salafi thought among youth populations.

Despite the theoretical availability of mechanisms capable of satisfying individuals' material and emotional needs, prevailing economic policies have rendered such fulfillment largely unattainable. This is due, in part, to the structural position of third-world countries within the global political and economic system dominated by imperial powers, which constrains their capacity to ensure equitable development and social justice.

6.2 The Content of Salafi Discourse in Algeria

Discussing the type of discourse employed by Salafi ideologues one of the key factors behind the rapid spread of this current within Algerian families first requires examining the substance of this discourse and how it managed to produce influential advocates despite the absence of formal schools, religious lodges, or institutional structures dedicated to constructing or promoting Salafi thought. In many cases, the street itself proved sufficient for producing committed defenders of this current. Religious circles held after prayers in mosques were often met with resistance, both from state authorities represented by security institutions and from segments of society that continued to associate Salafi thought with the violent events that marked Algeria at the end of the twentieth century.

Salafi thought derives its foundational principles primarily from prophetic texts, with its adherents emphasizing literal application and minimizing the role of rational interpretation. These texts are perceived as definitive and immutable, thereby rejecting, according to Salafi proponents, any form of intellectual or ethical reflection that has historically accompanied human reasoning. In this framework, revelation is privileged over reason and *ijtihad*, leading to the rejection or even condemnation of attempts to reread Islamic heritage in order to produce religious knowledge aligned with contemporary civilizational realities and independent from excessive attachment to the past.

Supporters of the Salafi current further reinforce their vision through scriptural evidence, such as the Qur'anic verse: "Indeed, there has been for you in them an excellent example for whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day" (Al-Mumtahanah: 6). This approach has led to a strict adherence to textual authority without modification, rendering Salafi groups, in the eyes of the modern state, as though they belong to a bygone social order. Consequently, several Islamic and secular actors have questioned the religious legitimacy of Salafi claims. This, in turn, prompted leading Salafi scholars in Algeria to break their silence and publicly defend their orientation in an effort to counter what they perceived as campaigns of distortion.

Numerous statements issued by Salafi figures in Algeria emphasized that Salafism poses no threat to society, that its adherents were not involved in acts of violence against Algerians, and that the movement seeks security, stability, knowledge, and social reform without opposition to political authority. Calls such as those issued by Sheikh Ali Ferkous enhanced the credibility of Salafi discourse among its followers, as it presents itself as a non-confrontational approach focused on moral and religious reform rather than political ambition. The cognitive structure of Salafism is thus grounded in identifying authoritative religious figures from whom interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunnah are derived, as well as broader conceptions of life, humanity, and society. This reliance ultimately prioritizes textual adherence over critical inquiry, reflection, or innovation (Arkoun, 2002, p. 12), contributing to perceptions of Salafism as an intellectual current confined to the earliest stages of Islamic history.

The Algerian public remains divided between acceptance and rejection of this discourse. Individuals seeking personal freedom, intellectual exploration, and modern forms of cultural expression often find little appeal in Salafi thought. In contrast, those searching for spiritual tranquility and salvation from life's hardships frequently perceive Salafism as a refuge promising divine reward.

The study reveals that 74.66% of respondents agree that the discourse adopted by Salafi scholars across the Islamic world has significantly contributed to strengthening feelings of affiliation and facilitating the spread of Salafism in Arab societies. This is largely because the discourse distances itself from political engagement and state affairs, focusing instead on individual and communal reform. Such characteristics render Salafism relatively free from

political responsibility and social obligations, making it particularly appealing to individuals within economically fragile and middle-class segments of society.

It can thus be argued that the content of Salafi discourse has played a decisive role in its rapid dissemination within Algerian society. It functions as a form of spiritual therapy for the daily pressures, psychological strains, and social problems faced by individuals. Life's challenges are framed as divine tests, and patience, repentance, and devotion are presented as the primary means to achieving both worldly and eternal happiness. Consequently, this discourse has succeeded in attracting individuals marginalized by failed economic policies and deprived of dignified living conditions, offering them spiritual fulfillment and emotional reassurance.

6.3 The Image of Salafism on Facebook

In addressing whether Facebook has contributed to reinforcing feelings of hatred or affiliation toward Salafi thought within Algerian society, it is necessary to consider additional variables. Previous studies indicate that social media users can be divided into distinct categories based on their levels of cultural awareness and critical capacity. One group perceives Salafism as an attempt to reproduce early Islamic religious values by emulating the model of the *salaf al-salih*, effectively representing a return to the historical context of Islam's initial emergence. Another culturally informed group interprets adherence to Salafism as an effort to reconstruct an idealized Islamic society in the present era.

In contrast, a third group characterized by limited cultural capital derives its presence primarily from the volume of comments and reactions it produces. This group seeks to express either support for or opposition to various social phenomena, including the emergence and evolution of Salafi discourse in Arab societies.

The image of Salafism on Facebook is therefore inseparable from its image within society at large. Socioeconomic marginalization and class inequality referred to by sociologists as social exclusion have prevented large segments of the population from actively participating in the public sphere, particularly in expressing opinions and contributing to decision-making processes that serve the public interest. Salafi adherents often perceive themselves as having been institutionally excluded, as evidenced by the rejection of political party accreditation attempts, which they viewed as a means of participating in public life. As a result, Facebook has become an alternative space for visibility and expression.

Although Facebook's founding philosophy emphasizes rational dialogue, respect for differing viewpoints, and freedom of expression within a democratic framework aimed at achieving consensus around public issues, political authorities in many Arab countries have expressed concern regarding the spread of Salafi ideology particularly in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. This concern has led to increased monitoring and regulation of religious discourse on social media platforms.

Salafi actors rely heavily on religious discourse to establish legitimacy and to reproduce their ideological framework on Facebook. Given that broad audiences often function as passive consumers of information lacking the capacity to critically evaluate or contextualize content due to prevailing social and cultural constraints Facebook has become a powerful tool for disseminating Salafi narratives without meaningful scrutiny.

The platform has thus served as an open media arena for all actors, including Salafi preachers advocating for the reconstruction of society according to a specific religious ideology rooted in an idealized historical period. This vision seeks to preserve modern technological tools while rejecting behavioral norms associated with Western modernity. Consequently, Algerian society remains divided between supporters and opponents of Salafism.

The study indicates that 69% of respondents believe Salafism contradicts modern values and

practices, perceiving it as an attempt to confine individuals to a past historical era. This perception is particularly prevalent among university-educated youth who engage in cultural activities such as music, cinema, and mixed-gender socialization that are incompatible with Salafi norms. As a result, Salafism is frequently criticized on Facebook as an outdated and restrictive ideology.

Conversely, 27.33% of respondents view Salafi thought as a legitimate effort to revive the Prophetic Sunnah, asserting that such revival is essential for contemporary Muslim societies. This group perceives Salafism's political neutrality as a strength and believes that media campaigns both domestic and international seek to distort Islam out of fear of an Islamic revival. Members of this group actively and fervently defend Salafism on Facebook.

Meanwhile, 18.66% of respondents attribute hostility toward Salafis on Facebook to the negative image created by certain Salafi preachers themselves, citing their silence in the face of injustice, lack of exemplary leadership, and involvement in conflicts with other Islamic movements.

While the use of social media for religious outreach is intrinsic to both Christian and Islamic movements, effective engagement requires openness to dialogue, debate, and critical examination. However, Salafi discourse often rejects discussion of religious texts and demands unquestioned adherence, a rigidity that has inadvertently facilitated criticism and opposition.

In response to sustained media attacks, Salafi actors have at times escalated their rhetoric, accusing rival Islamic movements particularly the Muslim Brotherhood of hostility and conspiracy. This escalation has occasionally diverted Salafi discourse from its original reformist objectives toward ideological conflict and legitimacy struggles.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the role of Facebook in reinforcing feelings of hostility and affiliation toward the Salafi intellectual current in Algeria. Through a descriptive analytical approach based on a field survey of Facebook users, the study demonstrated that social media particularly Facebook has become a central arena for ideological confrontation and symbolic struggle between supporters and opponents of Salafism.

The findings reveal that the spread of Salafi thought in Algerian society cannot be understood in isolation from broader social, economic, and political contexts. Persistent social injustice, economic marginalization, unemployment, and the perceived absence of effective state intervention have created a fertile environment for religious discourse that promises moral reform, spiritual reassurance, and social stability. In this context, Salafi discourse has succeeded in attracting significant segments of youth by offering a non-political, text-centered interpretation of Islam that emphasizes patience, obedience, and personal piety.

At the same time, Facebook has played a dual role. On the one hand, it has served as a platform for Salafi actors to disseminate their discourse, defend their ideological orientation, and strengthen feelings of affiliation among followers. On the other hand, it has amplified hostility toward Salafism by providing a space for criticism, satire, and ideological opposition particularly from secular, modernist, and culturally liberal users who perceive Salafism as incompatible with contemporary values and lifestyles.

The study further indicates that hostility toward Salafism on Facebook is not solely the result of external media campaigns, but is also partially attributable to the discourse and practices of certain Salafi figures, including their rigidity, rejection of dialogue, and perceived disengagement from issues of social injustice. These factors have contributed to reinforcing negative representations of Salafism within the digital public sphere.

In conclusion, Facebook has emerged as a powerful tool in shaping perceptions, emotions, and attitudes toward the Salafi intellectual current in Algeria. It has intensified both affiliation and hostility by transforming ideological debates into highly visible, emotionally charged interactions. This underscores the need for more balanced religious discourse, greater openness to dialogue, and the development of critical media literacy among users in order to mitigate polarization and promote constructive engagement within Algerian society.

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