

Political culture and ideology

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**Islamic Symbolism in Pro-Russian Arabic-Language Discourse on X:
A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis**

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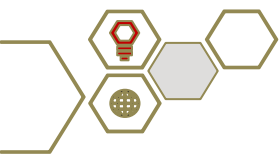
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Abstract. Purpose. The purpose of the article is to examine the discursive and multimodal articulation of Islamic symbolism in pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X. The article focuses on the ways in which religious references, visual markers, and evaluative captions participate in the representation of Russia and its political leadership.

Methods. The study applies multimodal critical discourse analysis as the main methodological framework. This approach makes it possible to examine the interaction between textual messages, visual materials, religious markers, symbolic elements, and platform-specific forms of communication. The empirical material consists of selected publications by eight Arabic-language accounts on X that systematically disseminate pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives. The analysis

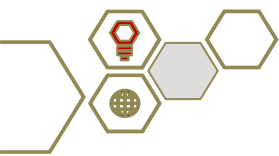


focuses on the visual presentation of Islamic markers, their textual framing, their repetition across publications, and their connection with representations of Russia, Russian society, Russian political leadership, and the West.

Results. The analysis shows that Islamic references and visual religious markers recur in the representation of Russia within the selected corpus. Images and videos provide recognizable religious signs, while captions assign them political and evaluative meanings. A classroom scene with a hijab-wearing teacher frames Russian education as compatible with traditional morality; a mosque for Muslim soldiers connects Islamic practice with the Russian military space; and images of mosques and Muslim women present Islam as part of Russia's social and cultural environment. In some publications, Islamic symbolism is articulated through contrast with the West, which is associated with restriction, hypocrisy, or moral decline. This symbolic association is also personalized through Vladimir Putin: references to his alleged use of Qur'anic verses, visits to mosques, and respect for Islamic traditions present Russian political leadership as attentive to Islam and Muslim religious practice.

Conclusions. The article concludes that Islamic symbolism participates in the multimodal construction of Russia's image by linking religious signs with political evaluation. The analyzed publications incorporate Islamic markers into representations of Russia as a state where Islam is allegedly visible, practiced, and accommodated. This construction operates through visual evidence, evaluative captions, contrastive references to the West, and Putin's personalization of respect for Islam.

Keywords: political discourse; narrative construction; social media discourse; information influence; Arabic-language information space; religious markers; symbolic representation.



Ісламська символіка в проросійському арабськомовному дискурсі соціальної мережі X: мультимодальний критичний дискурс-аналіз

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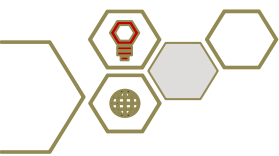
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Анотація. Мета. Метою статті є аналіз дискурсивної мультимодальної артикуляції ісламської символіки в проросійському арабськомовному дискурсі соціальної мережі X. У статті розглянуто, як згадки про іслам, візуальні релігійні маркери та оцінні підписи беруть участь у репрезентації Росії та її політичного керівництва.

Методи. У дослідженні застосовано мультимодальний критичний дискурс-аналіз як основну методологічну рамку. Цей підхід дає змогу аналізувати взаємодію текстових повідомлень, візуальних матеріалів, релігійних маркерів, символічних елементів і платформно-специфічних форм комунікації. Емпіричний матеріал становлять відібрані публікації восьми арабськомовних акаунтів у соціальній мережі X, які системно поширюють проросійські та антизахідні наративи. Аналіз зосереджено на візуальному представленні ісламських маркерів, їхньому текстовому фреймуванні, повторюваності в публікаціях, а також на їхньому зв'язку з репрезентаціями Росії, російського суспільства, російського політичного керівництва та Заходу.

Результати. Аналіз показує, що згадки про іслам повторюються в репрезентації Росії в межах відібраного корпусу. Зображення та

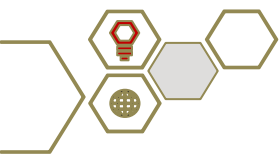


відеоматеріали відображають упізнавані релігійні знаки, тоді як підписи надають їм політичного й оцінного значення. Образ шкільного класу з учителькою в хіджабі представляє російську освіту як сумісну з традиційною мораллю; мечеть для російських солдатів-мусульман пов'язує ісламську практику з російським військовим простором; а зображення мечетей і мусульманських жінок подають іслам як частину соціального й культурного середовища Росії. У деяких публікаціях ісламська символіка артикулюється через протиставлення Заходу, який асоціюється з обмеженнями, лицемірством або моральним занепадом. Ця символічна асоціація також персоналізується через Володимира Путіна: згадки про його нібито використання коранічних аятів, відвідування мечетей і повагу до ісламських традицій представляють російське політичне керівництво як уважне до ісламу та мусульманської релігійної практики.

Висновки. У статті зроблено висновок, що ісламська символіка бере участь у мультимодальному конструюванні образу Росії, поєднуючи релігійні знаки з політичною оцінкою. Проаналізовані публікації включають ісламські маркери до репрезентацій Росії як держави, де іслам нібито є видимим, практикуваним і прийнятним у суспільному та інституційному просторі. Таке конструювання здійснюється через візуальну доказовість, оцінні підписи, протиставлення Заходу та персоналізацію російської поваги до ісламу через образ Володимира Путіна.

Ключові слова: політичний дискурс; наративне конструювання; дискурс соціальних мереж; інформаційний вплив; арабськомовний інформаційний простір; релігійні маркери; символічна репрезентація.

Problem statement. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, Arabic-language digital environments have contained a substantial amount of content that reproduces, amplifies, or adapts pro-Russian interpretations of

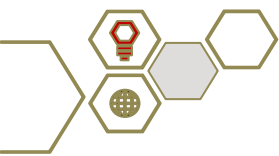


international politics. The social network X is one of the platforms where such communication circulates through short textual messages, videos, images, reposts, symbolic markers, and evaluative captions. For this reason, the analysis of pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X is important for understanding what this communication consists of and how its meanings are constructed at the level of concrete social media publications.

A significant part of this discourse concerns the representation of Russia and its place in international politics. It is shaped through several thematic registers, including geopolitical argumentation, references to multipolarity, criticism of Western policy, appeals to traditional values, and cultural or religious markers. Within this broader set of elements, Islamic symbolism requires separate scholarly attention. It appears in publications that refer to religion, morality, cultural identity, Russian society, and political leadership, yet its discursive and multimodal role in the construction of Russia-related meanings has not been sufficiently examined.

Existing research on Russian communication in the Arabic-language information space has addressed state media, diplomatic channels, strategic narratives, audience reactions, and broader patterns of information influence. However, the organization of pro-Russian discourse on social media remains less explored at the level of concrete multimodal publications. In particular, there is still a need to examine how religious and cultural symbols interact with visual materials, textual comments, platform-specific formats, and repeated narrative patterns.

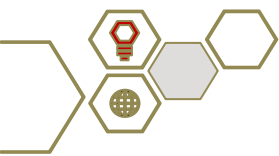
The problem addressed in this article concerns Islamic symbolism in pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X. The article focuses on the ways in which religious references, visual materials, and textual comments participate in the representation of Russia and, in some cases, Vladimir Putin. The study examines selected publications as observable communicative material and analyzes their discursive and multimodal organization.



The scientific significance of the article lies in its contribution to the study of multimodal political discourse, symbolic representation, and Arabic-language digital communication. The analysis helps identify the cultural and symbolic dimensions through which Russia-related meanings are articulated in the Arab information space.

Recent research and publications. The present article draws on studies of Arabic-language media environments, Russian external communication, digital political discourse, religious symbolism, and multimodal meaning-making. Research on Arab media systems shows that Arabic-language communication develops within nationally specific media structures while also depending on transnational channels of circulation. Carola Richter and Claudia Kozman (2021) emphasize the heterogeneity of Arab media systems and the integrative role of shared language and cross-border media flows [1]. Damian Radcliffe, Hadil Abuhmaid, and Nii Mahliaire (2023) demonstrate the continuing relevance of social media for news consumption and public discussion in the Middle East and North Africa [2]. These studies define the broader media environment in which Arabic-language communication on X should be understood.

Research on Russian Arabic-language communication has expanded considerably since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. Elene Janadze (2022) analyzes the increased activity of RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic after February 2022 [3]. Marcin Styszynski (2023) examines the adaptation of Russian narratives to Arab audiences through regional sensitivities and pre-existing interpretive frames [4]. Jonathan Morley-Davies, Jem Thomas, and Graham Baines (2024) emphasize the relevance of pre-existing skepticism toward Western policy for the reception of Russian narratives in the Middle East [5]. Arik Segal (2024) also points to the visibility of Russian international media in several Arab countries [6]. These works explain the broader geopolitical and media context of Russian Arabic-

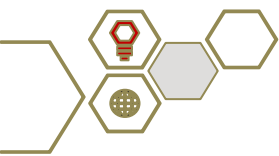


language communication, while the symbolic and multimodal organization of pro-Russian discourse on X requires more focused analysis.

A separate group of studies examines Arab digital reactions to the Russo-Ukrainian war. Moayadeldin Tamer, Mohamed A. Khamis, Abdallah Yahia, Seifaldin Khaled, Abdelrahman Ashraf and Walid Gomaa (2023) analyzed approximately 3.1 million Arabic-language tweets and classified them according to sentiment, emotion, and political partiality [7]. Soran Tarkhani (2024) studied comments on Arabic-language news videos and identified a relationship between anti-Western sentiment and expressions of support for Russia [8]. Ragnar Weilandt (2025) argues that regional perceptions of Russia and Ukraine are shaped by attitudes toward Western policy, double standards, and historical grievances [9]. These studies provide evidence about attitudes, alignments, and interpretive predispositions, but their focus remains primarily aggregate, attitudinal, or sentiment-based.

The religious dimension of the article is informed by studies of Islam, media, and political communication. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (2003) show that new media have transformed Muslim public spheres by multiplying the spaces in which religious authority, identity, and political interpretation are negotiated [10]. Peter Mandaville (2014) examines Islam as a transnational political field in which religious identity and authority interact with political projects [11]. Jocelyne Cesari (2014) studies the relationship between Islam, statehood, and political order, which is relevant for understanding how religious markers may be linked with representations of state authority [12]. These works make it possible to treat Islamic symbolism as a communicative form that can acquire political meaning in digital discourse.

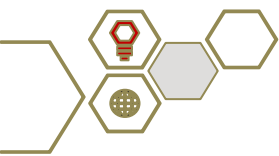
The article also draws on research that explains the cultural legibility of symbolic communication. Donal Carbaugh's cultural discourse analysis conceptualizes communication as a historically situated system of symbolic



practices and emphasizes the role of cultural premises, that is, assumptions and meanings that may be treated as self-evident within particular communicative communities [13]. This perspective is relevant for analyzing references to religious respect in Arabic-language communication. Lisa Wedeen's work on political symbolism and spectacle further shows how political authority may be reproduced through repeated symbolic forms that become familiar, recognizable, and socially intelligible [14]. These works help explain why religious markers in pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse should be examined as part of political representation rather than as incidental visual material.

The methodological basis of the article comes from critical discourse studies and multimodal discourse analysis. Norman Fairclough's approach treats discourse as a social practice and provides tools for examining how political meanings and evaluations are produced in communication [15]. Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is relevant because it connects discourse with shared representations, ideological schemas, and interpretive models [16]. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's theory of visual grammar shows that images have structured meaning-making potential and should not be reduced to illustration [17]. David Machin and Andrea Mayr provide a practical framework for examining how language and visual resources jointly construct actors, actions, evaluations, and ideological meanings [18]. Kay L. O'Halloran conceptualizes multimodal discourse analysis as the study of how language, image, gesture, sound, and other semiotic resources interact in the production of meaning [19].

Despite these contributions, the religious-symbolic dimension of pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X remains insufficiently examined. Little attention has been paid to how Islamic symbolism is organized multimodally in publications that represent Russia, Russian society, and Russian political leadership. The present article addresses this gap by examining how Islamic symbolism participates in the



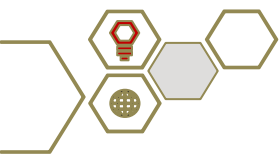
representation of Russia and its political leadership in selected Arabic-language publications on X.

The objective of the article is to examine the discursive and multimodal articulation of Islamic symbolism in pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X. The article aims to identify how religious references, symbolic markers, and evaluative textual comments participate in the representation of Russia and, in some cases, Vladimir Putin. The article, therefore, contributes to the study of pro-Russian narratives, Arabic-language political discourse, and multimodal symbolic meaning-making on social media.

Findings and Discussion. The empirical part of the article is based on a multimodal critical discourse analysis of eight Arabic-language accounts on X that systematically disseminate pro-Russian and anti-Western narratives: Moscow News (@M0SC0W0), Akhbar Rusia Alaitihadia (@Su_35m), Rusia Alaan (@Russianowarabic), Russia News (@mog_Russ), Shuuwn Rusia (@id7p_), Rusia News (@RussiaArabic0), Aliaelamia Alrusia (@Russian__media), and Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press). Their publications include news-like posts, reposts of political statements, evaluative commentary, videos, images, and audience questions.

This corpus is suitable for multimodal critical discourse analysis because the relevant meanings are produced through combinations of textual, visual, and symbolic elements. In the case of Islamic symbolism, the analytical focus is placed on publications in which references to Islam, Muslim communities, religious practice, or religious respect are connected with representations of Russia, Russian society, or Vladimir Putin. The following analysis, therefore, examines how these references are visually presented, textually framed, and incorporated into broader Russia-related representations within the Arabic-language discourse on X.

The association of Russia with Islamic visibility and religious accommodation is one of the recurring patterns in the analyzed corpus. This pattern is produced



through a combination of visual and verbal elements: images or videos provide the recognizable religious marker, while the accompanying caption explains how this marker should be interpreted in relation to Russia, Russian society, or Russian political authority. Islamic symbolism in these publications therefore functions as part of a broader representational structure rather than as a purely descriptive reference to religion.

A publication by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) from 24 September 2024 illustrates this mechanism. The post contains a video fragment allegedly showing an educational setting and is accompanied by a caption that describes education in Russia as “beautiful and constructive” and as forming “the generation of the future.” The text also presents Russia as a safe environment for children, contrasting it with America and Europe, where children are allegedly exposed to “ideas of decadence and abnormality.” The video shows a woman in a classroom who appears in the role of a teacher and wears a hijab (Fig. 1). Within the multimodal structure of the post, the hijab functions as a visible religious and cultural marker. It connects the educational setting with Muslim identity and makes the image of Russian education interpretable through categories of religious compatibility and social safety.

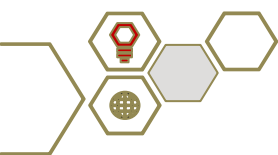
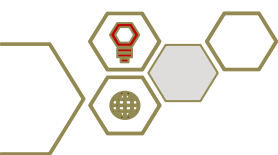


Fig. 1. Screenshot of a post by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press), September 24, 2024.

Source: Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press), X, September 24, 2024, https://x.com/Russian__press/status/1838602275251532050

The meaning of the publication is produced through the interaction of these two elements: the image presents a Muslim-coded educational scene, while the caption assigns to it a broader political and moral significance. Russia is represented as a space in which education, religion, and traditional morality are presented as compatible.

The same logic appears in publications that connect Russia with Islamic religious infrastructure. In a post by Rusia News (@RussiaArabic0) from 5 January 2025, a video fragment shows a small wooden structure in a forested area. The caption identifies it as “a mosque in the forests of Russia for Muslim soldiers participating in the special military operation” (Fig. 2). In this way, the publication connects Islamic practice with the Russian military space and incorporates Muslim identity into a representation of Russia’s wartime order: the alleged location of the mosque suggests that Islamic practice is maintained even under wartime conditions.



Third, the reference to Muslim soldiers integrates Muslim identity into the Russian war narrative.

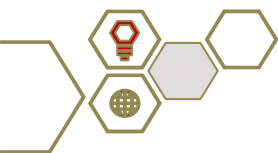


Fig. 2. Screenshot of a post by Rusia News (@RussiaArabic0), January 5, 2025.

Source: Rusia News (@RussiaArabic0), X, January 5, 2025, <https://x.com/RussiaArabic0/status/1875889114140365267>

An identical post was later published by Aliaelamia Alrusia (@Russian__media), which indicates the circulation of the same symbolic association across more than one account in the analyzed corpus [20]. In a post by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) from 9 December 2024 depicting a Kazan mosque, Russia is described as being highly interested in the construction of mosques [21]. The visual image of the mosque functions as an evidentiary anchor for this claim, while the caption refers to the Kazan mosque as evidence of Russia's interest in mosque construction and presents it as one of the most beautiful mosques in Europe.

Numerous posts refer to Muslim women in Russia. A publication by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) from 27 September 2024 states that Russia is the



homeland of many peoples, nationalities, and cultures, and that Muslim women live freely in Russia. The accompanying visual material supports this claim by placing the Muslim female figures at the center of the post's representation of Russian diversity [22].

The hijab is especially important in this group of publications because it functions as a highly recognizable visual marker for Arabic-speaking audiences. In the analyzed discourse, it appears in different contexts: education (as was observed in a publication by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) from 24 September 2024), public life and symbolic comparison with the West. A post by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) from 18 November 2024 shows a woman putting on a hijab and frames the scene through a direct contrast with the West (Fig. 3). The caption states that in Russia the hijab is not considered a crime, but rather a sacred duty of Muslim women. It also describes the scene as a message to the “hypocritical Western world.”

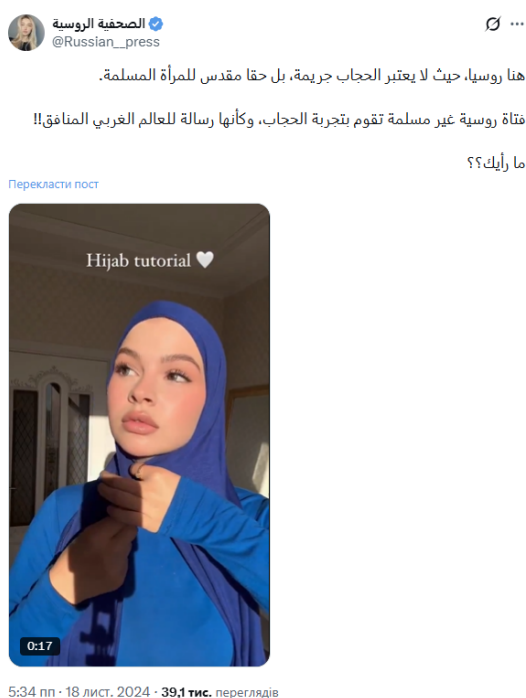
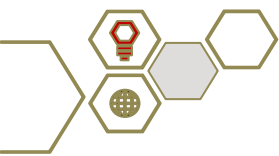


Fig. 3. Screenshot of a post by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press), November 18, 2024.

Source: Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press), X, November 18, 2024, https://x.com/Russian__press/status/1858534129475735554



The video functions as visual evidence for the caption's claim: the act of putting on the hijab is presented as a visible sign of religious acceptance, while the textual framing turns this scene into a broader statement about Russia and the West. In this case, Islamic symbolism is articulated relationally. Russia is represented through the acceptance of the hijab, while the West is invoked as a contrasting space associated with restriction, hypocrisy, or hostility toward Muslim religious practice.

This opposition is a recurring pattern in the communication of some of these accounts. It is produced through a condensed multimodal arrangement: a visual marker of Islam, an evaluative caption, and a contrastive reference to the West.

Another important feature of the analyzed discourse is the personalization of Russia's alleged respect for Islam through Vladimir Putin. A publication by Russia News (@RussiaArabic0) from 8 November 2024 states that the Russian president "always" uses verses from the Holy Qur'an in his speeches and asks whether any Western leader has ever done the same [23]. The accompanying video shows Putin speaking in an official setting and referring to Qur'anic verses. In multimodal terms, the video provides a concrete visual instance, while the caption generalizes this instance into a recurring feature of Putin's political persona. The question about Western leaders adds a relational dimension: Putin's alleged use of Qur'anic references is presented as a marker that distinguishes him from Western political figures.

A similar personalization appears in a publication by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) from 23 November 2024. The post states that Putin visited one of the mosques during his trip to Chechnya and describes him as "the true leader who respects all religions, nationalities and cultures" (Fig. 4). The visual material shows Putin in the presence of Chechen religious and political figures, while the caption generalizes this visual scene into a broader statement about leadership, respect, and cultural diversity.

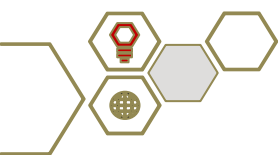
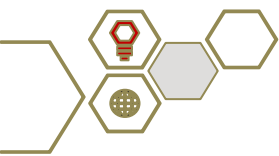


Fig. 4. Screenshot of a post by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press), November 23, 2024.

Source: Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press), X, November 23, 2024, https://x.com/Russian__press/status/1860349111800607196?s=20

The case of citizenship photographs for foreign Muslim women, published by Alsahafia Alrusia (@Russian__press) on 15 January 2025, further demonstrates how the representation of Putin can be connected with everyday religious practice. The post states that foreign Muslim women can now take official photographs for citizenship documents without removing the hijab, because “Putin respects the traditions of Islam” [24]. Here, the Islamic symbol is linked with bureaucratic procedure and state recognition. The hijab becomes a sign through which the post interprets the relationship between Muslim identity and the Russian state. The final clause personalizes the policy through Putin, presenting him as the source or embodiment of respect for Islamic tradition.

Across the analyzed examples, Islamic symbolism appears through several recurring visual and textual forms, including religious architecture, Qur’anic



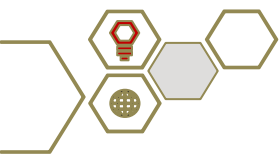
references, the hijab, Muslim women, and Muslim soldiers. These elements are repeatedly connected with representations of Russia, Russian society, and Russian political leadership. In some publications, they become part of an explicit contrast between Russia and the West.

From the perspective of multimodal critical discourse analysis, the analyzed publications demonstrate a recurring division of semiotic labor. Visual materials provide recognizable signs: a hijab, a mosque, a Muslim religious setting. Captions stabilize the interpretation of these signs by connecting them with Russia's political and moral image. The repetition of similar combinations across different accounts contributes to the stabilization of a broader representational pattern. Russia is made visible as a space where Islam is allegedly respected, practiced, and institutionally recognized; Putin appears as a personalized figure through whom this association is articulated at the level of leadership.

At the same time, the analysis should be interpreted with several limitations. The article analyzes discourse and representation rather than motivation or impact. The empirical material nevertheless shows that Islamic symbolism is a meaningful component of the selected pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X. It participates in the construction of Russia-related meanings through the interaction of religious markers, visual evidence, evaluative captions, and repeated symbolic associations.

Conclusions. The article examined Islamic symbolism in pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X through the framework of multimodal critical discourse analysis. The analysis showed that Islamic references and visual religious markers constitute a recurring component of Russia-related representations in the selected corpus. These markers appear through images of mosques, references to Qur'anic verses, depictions of the hijab, and mentions of Muslim soldiers.

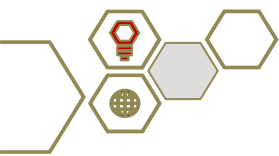
The study demonstrates that Islamic symbolism is articulated through the interaction of visual and textual elements. Images and videos provide recognizable



religious signs, while captions assign them political and evaluative meaning. In this way, a classroom scene with a hijab-wearing teacher, a mosque associated with Muslim soldiers, a video of a woman putting on a hijab, or a scene of Putin visiting a mosque are embedded into captions that connect them with broader representations of Russia, Russian society, state policy, or political leadership. The analyzed posts, therefore, construct Russia-related meanings through the combination of religious markers, visual evidence, and interpretive textual framing.

Several recurring patterns were identified. First, Islamic symbolism is associated with representations of Russia as a space of religious visibility and Muslim social presence. Posts depicting mosques, Muslim women, Qur'anic recitation, or Islamic practices present Islam as part of Russia's social and cultural space. Second, in some publications, Islamic symbolism is articulated through contrast with the West. In these cases, Russia is represented as a space of religious acceptance, while the West is invoked as a contrasting space associated with hypocrisy, restriction, or moral decline. Third, the symbolic association between Russia and Islam is personalized through Vladimir Putin. Publications that refer to Putin's alleged use of Qur'anic verses, his visits to mosques, or his respect for Islamic traditions attach religious respect to the image of Russian political leadership.

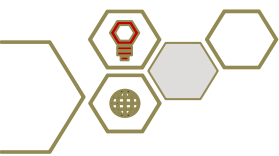
The research objective has been achieved: the article identified the main forms through which Islamic symbolism appears in the selected pro-Russian Arabic-language discourse on X; explained how these elements participate in the representation of Russia; and showed how captions and visual materials jointly produce Russia-related meanings. The findings remain limited to the analyzed corpus and should be interpreted as an analysis of discourse and representation. The study does not measure audience reception or the overall scale of this discourse in the Arabic-language segment of X. Further research could expand the corpus to other platforms, including Telegram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, in order to



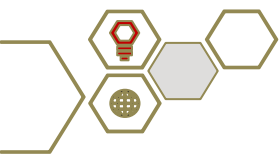
compare how Islamic symbolism circulates across different digital environments. It would also be useful to combine multimodal critical discourse analysis with computational methods to examine the scale, repetition, and circulation of similar symbolic patterns. Such research would help clarify whether the patterns identified in this article are specific to the selected X corpus or form part of a wider repertoire of religious and cultural representation in pro-Russian Arabic-language communication.

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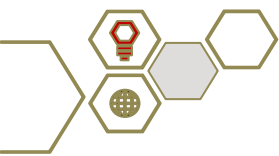
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