



Hedviga Tkáčová, Eva Al-Absiová, Marwan Al-Absi, Martina Pavlíková

„Media Invasion“ Against Islam In The Context Of The Slovak Republic

ABSTRACT

The research of the stereotyping of Muslims and its consequences in the context of the Slovak Republic is highly topical and necessary. The complexity of this research is influenced by the fact that in Slovakia we do not yet have a proven research tradition in this field and there is also a lack of empirical research that would deal with this issue. A so-called mixed research strategy consisting of a combination of qualitative and quantitative research was used for our research purposes. In the qualitative part, we used the method of group interviews, through which we identify the most important sources of information from which respondents learn the most about Islam and topics that reflect the most about Islam in the media. In the quantitative part, an evaluation of the media presentation of Islam is carried out by means of a questionnaire, which is carried out in a research group of 110 respondents. The aim is to obtain, describe and analyse the image of Islam in contemporary media; it is exclusively a research of the media-mediated experience of respondents with Islam. The interpretation of the research puts the findings into a broader context of the issue, presents the most significant examples and consequences of the stereotyping of Muslims in the media and suggests perspectives for the greater inclusion of Muslims despite their cultural or religious differences from the majority population. The research was conducted between the months of April and September 2019.

KEY WORDS

Muslims. Slovaks. Media invasion. Minority. Research.

1. Introduction

The people of post-communist Europe are looking for answers to what values and heritage they should intensively develop in the new global-pluralistic culture. Even Slovaks, after the fall of the forty-year ideology of communism, face a new world, foreign values and mentalities, unknown traditions and religions. Seeing their „differences“ they do not know how to perceive and evaluate them; whether to understand and welcome them as guests or to condemn them forever as intruders. This human insecurity is entered by the media, which boldly, directly and loudly show new worlds, values, mentalities, traditions and religions, and as they are established in society as the creators of opinion and public opinion, they „force“ cultural diversity and its full scope and intensity not only to see, but also to have an opinion on it. At the same time, many of the media contents represent the opinions of „others“ and thus do not require any intellectual effort. They are a presentation of facts but do not force them to think about these facts. They exist for immediate consumption and therefore in attractive formats and attractive packaging.¹ All this is reflected in the current media content, which is increasingly characterized by a kind of „media cultural invasion“.² By this term we mean the phenomenon in which media content dictates to recipients what to think, how to behave and how to feel. In short, the question of evaluating „difference“ is at the same time one of the biggest problems and dilemmas of humanity. The tragedy is the cheap offerings of the media to form our opinions. By accepting this offer, the diversity of the human community and cultural diversity as a result of media presentation become the subject of false simplification, a reason for stereotyping, a cause of suspicion and of condemnation.

According to experts, the media presentation of Islam and the image of events connected with Islam in European countries have a significantly negative charge.³ The consequence of Islam portrayed in this way in the media is an unacceptable social distance among Slovaks in relation to Muslims.⁴ Despite the fact that in the context of this minority (primarily defined by ethnic cultural traditions), the culture of the majority (national Slovak culture) is at the forefront. The attention to social distance among Slovaks in relation to Muslims is also drawn by repeated opinion polls (known as Eurobarometer), which are carried out regularly within the countries

¹ See also: GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S.: Media and Truth in the Perspective of the Practice and Life Form of the Modern "Homo Medialis". In *Communication Today*, 2019, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 4-19. ISSN 1338-130X.

² An example of a cultural invasion is the American flag on a T-shirt, which is often presented in the media as an „Expression of orientation“, it may be a manifestation of sympathy with nationalism. In this example, it can be seen that the media create not only new content in our culture, but also new meanings.

³ See more: ALLEN, CH., NIELSEN, J. S.: *Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001*. [online]. [2020-01-20]. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/199-Synthesis-report_en.pdf>; BECHARI, M.: *Surat al-islam fi al-icalam al-gharbi* [The image of Islam in the Western media]. Damascus : Dar al-fikr, 2004.; KRÍŽKOVÁ, M.: *Neviditelná menšina – analýza mediálního obrazu českých muslimů*. [online]. [2019-08-11]. Available at: <<https://migraceonline.cz/cz/e-knihovna/neviditelna-mensina-analyza-mediálního-obrazu-ceskych-muslimu>>.

⁴ See e.g.: MENDEL, M.: *Islám jako nepřítel?: eseje a poznámky k dějinám a současnosti islámu*. Brno : Masarykova univerzita, 2014.

of the European Union.⁵ Research into the attitude towards Islam is also represented in our country in a six-month ethnographic survey of Muslim migrants living in Bratislava. The author of the study, M. Cenker, states that the issue of Slovak Islam in the media is characterized by argumentation, which is often distorted, simplified and, above all, rejecting.⁶ Also interesting is research examining the relationship between a knowledge of Islam and the degree of anti-Islamic prejudice; the analysis confirms that the higher the level of knowledge, the more prejudices we hold against Muslims and the more our fear of Islam grows.⁷ Research has also shown the need for personal contact with Muslims, as the extent of these personal contacts has a positive effect on the perception of Islam.⁸ In this sense, it is also interesting to compare the opinions of the populations of 32 European countries, in which Slovakia placed above the European average (19,7%) on the issue of intolerance against Muslims with a value of 24,5%. They show a higher tolerance for Muslims than Slovakia, while countries in which the number of Muslims is relatively higher than in Slovakia (e.g. Czech Republic- intolerance value 15,2%, Austria 15,4%, Spain 10,8% or Portugal 7,9%).⁹ The conclusions of this part of the research indicate that Slovaks have less sympathy for Muslims and greater intolerance than other European countries.

This situation is also reflected by Slovak Muslims, who perceive the majority society as highly stereotypical. Stereotypes form the basic equipment of our identity. So what influences our hidden and obvious, unperceived and conscious stereotypical view of the „differences“ around us? According to experts, it is primarily the family, followed by the creators of public

⁵ Opposition to Muslims is still very significant in Slovak society, as only 16% of parents would accept that their child entered into a marriage with a Muslim („Vezmem si moslima.“ *Väčšina Slovákov by novinu nerozdýchala.* [online]. [2020-01-02]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/371480/vezmem-si-moslma-vacsina-slovakov-by-novinu-nerozdychala/>>.). Králik and Máhrík point that problem might be as well the lack of critical thinking and especially the lack of interpersonal relationships between different people (KRÁLIK, R., MÁHRÍK, T.: Metaphysics as a base for improving critical thinking. In *ICERI 2019: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation*. Seville : IATED Academy, 2019, p. 8901-8903.). As Tvrdón points helpful might be also raising the educational objectives focused on ethical education and religious education in the context of Slovak education system (TVRDOŇ, M.: Equal opportunities – comparison of ethical education and religious education curricula. In *Proceedings of INTED 2020 Conference*. Valencia : IATED Academy, 2020, p. 5517-5523.). Bulganová and Kačínová point that the focus of the educational process is on the formation of personality through the media. (BULGANOVÁ, D., KAČINOVÁ, V.: Axiocentric Teaching and Learning About Media in the Context of School Practice. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2019, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 85-93. See also: KAČINOVÁ, V.: The Topic of Media-Disseminated Mis-Information and Dis-Information as an Integral Part of General Education in Slovakia. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2020, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 18-31. ISSN 2585-872.)

⁶ CENKER, M.: Muslim Migrants in Bratislava. In *Sociológia - Slovak Sociological Review*, 2010, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 213-236.

⁷ The term „knowledge“ poses a problem. Does it mean the same as „objective“ or „real“ or „credible“ information about Islam and the daily life of Muslims? The knowledge may affect subjective attitudes, but respondents with more negative attitudes may be less open to objective knowledge, so subjective attitudes may also influence the level of knowledge (NOVOTNÝ, J., POLONSKÝ, F.: The Level of Knowledge about Islam and Perception of Islam among Czech and Slovak University Students: Does Ignorance Determine Subjective Attitudes? In *Sociológia - Slovak Sociological Review*, 2011, Vol. 43, No. 6, p. 688.). Even though Muslims have become the objects of daily news in Western countries, the vast majority of people in these countries have very little knowledge about the adherents of Islam. The reasons for this partly lie in educational curricula, which have sidelined the substantial and productive engagement that Europe had with Muslims over many centuries (THOBANI, S.: Muslims in European Education: Liberalism and Alterity. In KARIM, K., EID, M. (eds.): *Engaging the Other: Public Policy and Western-Muslim Intersections*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 67-87.)

⁸ NOVOTNÝ, J., POLONSKÝ, F.: The Level of Knowledge about Islam and Perception of Islam among Czech and Slovak University Students: Does Ignorance Determine Subjective Attitudes? In *Sociológia - Slovak Sociological Review*, 2011, Vol. 43, No. 6, p. 685-686.

⁹ These are the findings of experts from the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Slovakia. The main coordinator of the project was Tilburg University in the Netherlands (See more: *Výskum európsky hodnôt 1999-2000. The European Values Study.* [online]. [2019-01-02]. Available at: <<http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/old/evs.html>>.)

opinion – the media.¹⁰ A. Chudžíková points out that, according to local Muslims, Slovaks associate Islam with extremism and terrorism, while Muslims blame such perceptions mainly on the media.¹¹ Evidence of cases of Islamophobia in the media can potentially be found in the available official data. These, together with unofficial information from non-governmental organizations, recall the increase in cases of media Islamophobia not only in Slovakia but also in many EU member states.¹²

The negative image of Muslims in the media (as a necessary co-creator of our idea of Islam) is countered by the personal experience of Slovaks with Muslims. As there are relatively few Muslims in the Slovak Republic, there are no systematic meetings between the majority Slovaks and members of Islam, nor a more tumultuous interfaith dialogue.¹³ Most Slovak Muslims consist of students; other groups are traders, entrepreneurs and doctors. Together with their families they live and work in Slovakia and represent a Muslim community of educated employed people with a strong economic background; however, the community is very small and therefore does not require more attention. Slovakia is the only country in the European Union in which there is still no mosque. The attempt of Muslim believers to meet the conditions for the registration of Islam among other churches in Slovakia has also been unsuccessful.¹⁴

2. Methodology

The approach of our research is characterized by an attempt to create a methodology that would determine the evaluation of the media presentation of Islam in respondents. The research will be conducted in a research group consisting of 110 respondents who have exclusively media experiences with Islam; it means that they have never met a Muslim in person, so their view of Islam and believers has been created by the media portrayal of Muslims.

Main research objective: To identify and describe the assessment of Muslims based on the media experience of respondents with Islam. In order to achieve the goal of the research, the qualitative method of group interview will bring us closer in the first part of the research, based on which we will identify individual items of the questionnaire, which will be implemented in the second quantitative part of the research.¹⁵ In the construction of the methodology, we talk about our so-called mixed

¹⁰ See e.g.: RANKOV, P.: *Súmrak televízie očami dnešných študentov: analýza postojov vysokoškolákov*. In URBAN, P. (ed.): *Súmrak médií : Problematika narácie v médiách*. Žilina : Žilinská univerzita, 2013, p. 198-211.; PORUBCOVÁ, J.: *Vplyv sociálnych sietí na formovanie postojov adolescentov*. In URBAN, P. (ed.): *Súmrak médií : Problematika narácie v médiách*. Žilina : Žilinská univerzita, 2013, p. 96-107.

¹¹ CHUDŽÍKOVÁ, A.: *Muslims In Slovakia: Search For Identity and Status In Majority Society*. In SUCHARDOVÁ, H., HUNTEROVÁ, J.: *Muslims in Visegrad*. Prague : Institute of International Relations, 2011, p. 39-56. [online]. [2020-01-02]. Available at: <<https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/muslims-in-visegrad>>.

¹² We mean e.g. the well-known Anti-Hate campaign, the widely represented initiatives of the Center for Public Opinion Research or the activities of the People Against Racism civic association. It is also worth mentioning the Center for Research on Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK), which belongs to the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, which regularly publishes research focused on the activities of Muslims in our territory. See also: *Hlavné témy správy EUMC „Moslimovia v Európskej únii: diskriminácia a islamofóbia“*. [online]. [2019-07-12]. <Available at: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/1936-EUMC-highlights-SK.pdf>.

¹³ The dialogue between Christianity and Islam takes place through wider meetings organized by cultural and educational institutions, for example, the Islamic Foundation in Bratislava, which also covers the operation and activities of the Córdoba Center for Intercultural Dialogue or the Muslim Foundation in Slovakia.

¹⁴ Given that Slovak legislation has required the signatures of at least 20,000 citizens residing in Slovakia to register a new church or religious society since May 2007, this goal is still unrealistic for a small number of Muslims in Slovakia.

¹⁵ The aim of the group interview is to reach a common outcome with which all members of the group agree. The advantage of this method is that the researcher collects the data that is heard in the group during the interaction of the group members. At the same time, the researcher does not interfere with the events with his opinions or attitudes. At the end of the group interviews, the members of the group confirm the results obtained jointly (PRIEST, S. H.: *Doing Media Research: An introduction*. California : Sage Publications, 1995, p. 109.).

research strategy. „Two separate and time-phased parts of research, each with different objectives, different research methods and producing different data,“¹⁶ lead to the fulfilment of the main goal of the research and its sub-goals. The proposed approach of a mixed research strategy is considered appropriate and necessary mainly in such situations, „when qualitative data serves as material for building a theory, creating part of research or formulating working hypotheses.“¹⁷ In the second phase of research, quantitative research methods were used to obtain data.

Qualitative Research

The initial intention to conduct a group interview with a (recommended) number of eight group members failed due to the busy schedule of one group member and the health problems of another member. Nevertheless, we can say that this did not affect the results of the research and its overall benefits. The tasks assigned to the members of the research group were posed by several standardized and pre-formulated questions. The selection of group members was made on the basis of the so-called criteria selection. We consider three criteria to be important: age, gender and education. The reason for applying the three criteria in the first part of the research was the assumption of greater variability of the opinions obtained. Our goal was at the same time to obtain the greatest possible degree of representativeness of the research sample. Throughout the research part, the researcher did not interfere in the processes taking place in the group and acted strictly only as a moderator and record creator. The group worked on the tasks for almost three hours.

1st Partial objective: Identify the sources from which they most often draw information about Islam.¹⁸

2nd Partial objective: Identify the topics that the group members learn the most about Islam in the media. The obtained data will be used for us in the construction of the questionnaire in the second, quantitative part of the research. The questionnaire will allow us to obtain data on deeper processes of Islam's evaluation in the media.

Qualitative research - main points of research

1 st research question:	From what sources do members of the research group learn the most about Islam?
2 nd research question:	What topics about Islam do members of the research group learn the most in the media?

Research method

The group interview	Addressed was 6 members of the group
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TABLE 1: *Qualitative research – main points of research*

Source: own processing, 2021

¹⁶ GAVORA, P.: *Spríevodca metodológiu kvalitatívneho výskumu*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2007, p. 168-169.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ The members of the group understood the term *source* as any communication channel through which information about Islam reaches them (it was not a question of searching exclusively for media sources). The members of the group suggested nine sources, from which they had to choose five sources that inform them the most about Islam. At the moderator's instruction, they selected the five selected sources according to their importance. The members of the research group were given a similar assignment also in the case of defining such topics about Islam, which, according to them, are most heard in the media, i.e. 2nd Partial objective.

The obtained data represented a set of specific items in the questionnaire - sources and topics. We obtained the following five items defining the sources: **internet, television, press, radio, news agencies**. In addition to the five items listed, we also listed an item „others“ in the questionnaire.¹⁹ Based on a group interview, we identified a set of seven media-related topics about Islam, which were formulated into questions in a questionnaire.

Question no. 1	Please rate the extent to which you are familiar with the term „satanic verses“
Question no. 2	Please rate the extent to which you are aware of the conflict between Islam and the West over the „caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad“
Question no. 3	Please rate to what extent you know the so-called „the veil law“ (French regulation prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols)
Question no. 4	Please rate the extent to which you are aware of the incorrect media interpretation of Pope Benedict XVI's lecture. at the University of Regensburg
Question no. 5	Please assess the extent to which you are aware of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center of 11 September 2001
Question no. 6	Please rate the extent to which you are aware of reports of penalties for defamation of family honour (murder of women, acid attacks, mutilation, abduction, imprisonment, beatings)
Question no. 7	Please rate the extent to which you watch reports on demonstrations by Islamic radicals

TABLE 2: *Topics on Islam in the media: transferred to the questions in the questionnaire (i.e. evaluated by the respondents)*

Source: own processing, 2021

Let us add that the group interview is a type of qualitative method that we used not only to obtain individual items for the questionnaire. The method also served us in the correction of definitions of working hypotheses (so-called group reflection of working hypotheses), which we worked with in the second, i.e. in quantitative research.

Quantitative Research

The draft questionnaire presents a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions, i.e. a so-called mixed questionnaire.²⁰ The questionnaire begins with several personal questions, the aim of which is to define the respondent on the basis of their age and gender. The questionnaire contains scale questions (with graduated answers), closed questions (with the possibility to answer yes - no) and open questions (all answers are possible). We decided for a quantitative approach and a research method – a questionnaire – with the intention of eliminating the subjectivity of the researcher as much as possible. However, we chose the questionnaire method mainly for its usefulness, and thus the ability not only to document the detailed state of the event but also to analyse the investigated phenomena. Since quantitative research is primarily about the attitudes, value orientation and opinions of our research group on the image

¹⁹ Semi-closed questions, which allow the researcher to include the item „other“ in the questionnaire, were placed in the questionnaire due to the potential possibility of the respondent to supplement their opinion or attitude to the phenomenon under study. Respondents rarely used this option.

²⁰ GUNTER, B.: *Media Research Methods: Measuring Audiences, Reactions and Impact*. London : SAGE Publications, 2000, p. 26.

of Islam in the Slovak media, we believe that the research results and its overall contribution do not need to take into account the representativeness of our research group.²¹

The research group will evaluate the presentation of Islam in the current media, respective to resources (contribution of the research group). It is exclusively a research of the media-mediated experience of the respondents with Islam.

3rd Partial objective: Evaluation of the presentation of Islam by respondents who have exclusively media-mediated experiences with Islam.

The questionnaire was designed in two forms. The first was an online version of the questionnaire, using Google Drive, which is provided by Google in the online space. Google Drive is a virtual data centre, respectively a virtual server (cloud computing), in which the online questionnaire was placed. In this way, we addressed 800 respondents. 125 completed questionnaires were returned. Fourteen online questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete answers. The second way of administering the questionnaire was in paper form. 150 respondents were contacted in this way; 78 completed questionnaires were returned. Thirteen questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete answers. These two ways of addressing the respondents generated 172 questionnaires.

As 62 respondents stated that they have personal experience with Muslims, for the needs of our quantitative research, focusing on respondents who have exclusively media experience with Islam, we used the final 110 questionnaires. We converted the questionnaires we had in paper form to online form to unify the form of all questionnaires and to easily process the data. Data processing took place electronically, using automatic answer collection and by transferring them to a spreadsheet editor.

Quantitative research – main points of research	
1 st research question:	What sources of information do respondents use most often?
2 nd research question:	How do those respondents who have only media-mediated experience with Islam evaluate the presentation of topics about Islam in the media?
Research method	
Questionnaire	Questionnaire 950 respondents were addressed in two forms, 203 questionnaires were returned (31 were excluded for incompleteness; 62 had a personal experience with Muslims that we needed to exclude). 110 stated that they had only media experience with Islam.

TABLE 3: *Quantitative research – main points of research*

Source: own processing, 2021

²¹ Representativeness is, in a sense, a relative quantity. This is also confirmed by the results of the census (for example, on the issue of the religious affiliation of the population), to which several warnings have been made about the question of their incompleteness; their value is indicative, it includes a number of inaccuracies and subjectivism. A similar view is expressed in empirical research on Islam in European countries, where official information on ethnic, religious or racial data is subject to a disclosure ban. In the legislation of specific states, the ban is discriminatory. The ban on publishing ethnic, religious or racial data applies, for example, in France, Italy, Germany, Austria and Sweden (See more: ŘEBŘINA, J., SYLLOVÁ, J.: *Právní úprava národnostních, etnických a jazykových menšin v Itálii, Německu, Rakousku, Švédsku a ve Velké Británii*. Praha : Parlamentní institut, 1999.).

3. Results

Our research was conducted between the months of April and September 2019. The description of the evaluation of the presentation of Islam among respondents who have only media-mediated experience with Islam provides answers to the following partial research questions:

- a) What resources do they use to find Islam-related topics?
- b) What keywords do respondents use when searching for topics related to Islam?
- c) How respondents evaluate topics about Islam in the media.
- d) How do they evaluate the media presentation of seven selected topics about Islam?
- e) Do the respondents find other topics in the media than those identified in the questionnaire?
- f) What degree of conflict do respondents attribute to topics about Islam in the media?
- g) Do respondents also find positive topics about Islam in the media? If so, which ones?

From the list of sources for obtaining information about Muslims, respondents cite the Internet as the most common source of their information. As the most common source, it is mentioned by up to 98,2% of respondents, while the Internet is mentioned as a necessary source for obtaining information by every surveyed respondent (we recorded it in 100% of respondents).²² The second most common source of information is other people and interviews with them (83,6%). The third source mentioned is television (60,1%). We see that the opinion of the research group is most often formed through the media (mostly through the Internet and television), but at the same time it cannot be overlooked that people are also an important source of new information.

When using resources in the media, the first condition in the effort to obtain information is the inclusion of keywords. That is also why we were interested in the contents of the respondents in connection with Islam and its followers. We believe that a certain tendency can also be seen in the presentation of keywords, which is followed by thinking and understanding the research set. If respondents who had only media experience with Islam needed information about Islam, most of them would seek information in the media through the keywords terrorist, war and violence. We believe that a certain tendency can be seen in the presentation of keywords, which is followed by the thinking and understanding of the research group – Muslims and topics related to Muslims are clearly associated with violence among respondents; we confirm the negative attitude of the respondents towards Islam and its followers.

As many as 89,1% of respondents evaluate the presentation of topics about Islam in the media as always negative; in the five-point rating scale, this is the most negative rating.

The second highest value is occupied by 7,3% of respondents who cannot assess the presentation of Islam in the media, respectively to review. From the choice of topics that respondents noted about Islam in the media, they are most familiar with the topic of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (97,3%). The topic of punishments for tarnishing family honour in Muslim countries is the second most famous topic in the media. Based on the media presentation of Islam, the respondents are also aware of the topics of veil law, and caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. Respondents are least familiar with the topic of the misinterpretation of the words of Benedict XVI. in Regensburg, and the case of the Satanic verses.

To the supplementary question of the questionnaire about whether the respondents „saw other topics about Islam in the media than those mentioned above“, 68,4% say no. The other 31,6% most often reflected in the media, in addition to the above-mentioned topics, are the following topics: the attack on the Madrid metro, jihad, the Taliban's attacks on European capitals. The survey of respondents to addressing Islam through the media also points to a worrying fact – the question „do you find positive topics about Islam in the media?“. The entire research group answered (100%) that it does not find positive topics about Islam in the media.

²² The choice of topics is the benefit of a group interview in the qualitative part of the work.

Researched significant unit	Research set (110 respondents)	
The most frequently used sources of information	Internet	98,2 %
	Interviews with other people	83,6 %
	Television	60,1 %
Keywords characteristic of Islam in the media	Terrorist, war, violence	
General evaluation of topics about Islam in the media	Always negative	89,1%
	Cannot assess	7,3 %
Existence of positive topics about Islam in the media	Does not find	100%

TABLE 4: Interpretation of the evaluation of the most frequently used sources, keywords in the use of these sources and topics about Islam in the media

Source: own processing, 2021

4. Conclusion

In the qualitative part of this study, a six-member research group identified (1) „sources“ from which information on Islam is most frequently learned and (2) seven topics about Islam that are most common in the media. Their verification took place in the second, quantitative part of the research by means of a questionnaire.

Findings among other things confirm that the existence of Islam in the post-Christian countries of Western Europe, including Slovakia, is (1) influenced by a negative media image of Islam and Muslims and (2) almost exclusively presented in the media through negative topics with an emphasis on conflict. The strong negative media presentation of Islam and Muslims encourages mutual misunderstanding of the cultures involved, leading to a mutual sense of threat, growing hostility, and discrediting of Western culture on the one hand, and Islamophobia on the other. The stereotyping of Muslims as a consequence of the reality constructed by the media also contributes negatively to these phenomena. Although these are phenomena that never lead to good and growth, but on the contrary, to destruction and decline, they occur on a daily basis. The description and analysis of the research results, which confirmed the negative evaluation of the media presentation of Islam, are a starting point for realizing this fact and a challenge to attempts to correct it. The results of the study generate several findings that can be divided into three levels according to hypotheses:

H1 The research team's opinion on Islam is formed mainly through the media.

In research of the stereotyping of Muslims, as a necessary co-creator of the reality that the media is creating for us, we start with the fact that Slovaks are significantly less likely to have a personal experience with a Muslim due to the low number of Muslims in their territory. Based on this, we formulated the first working hypothesis, which was confirmed. Of the 172 questionnaires collected, only 62 respondents (36%) stated that they also have personal experience with a Muslim man or woman. In 87% of cases, this was an experience that was not marked by mutual conversation.

In addition, respondents cite the Internet from a list of sources for obtaining information on Muslims; up to 98% of respondents mention it as the most common source. The second most common source of information is other people and communication with them (70%). The third source mentioned is television (63%). In the context of the entire research, in addition to the media, the importance of personal interviews, which have an impact on the evaluation of Muslims and Islam, is thus shown; we also do not rule out the importance of the respondents' personal experience with followers of Islam, which also takes place through mutual conversations. Briefly, in the research file, we confirm the importance of personal experience in the process of obtaining information about Islam.

Let us return to the confirmed hypothesis about the main media influence on the respondents' opinion. As we know, the media creates their content. However, each medium determines a mixture of different media contents. They are e.g. news, reality shows, talk shows, etc. Many of these media contents represent the views of „others“ and therefore do not require any intellectual effort; they are a presentation of facts but do not force them to think about those facts; they exist for immediate consumption and are therefore offered in attractive formats. We describe the attractiveness and even the absorption of recipients into media content through the term „media invasion“; it dictates to the recipient what they should think, how they should behave and how they should feel.

The „media invasion“ directed against Islam is becoming the subject of a growing number of studies and research. Their aim is to research the media presentation of Islam in Western countries, on the basis of which warnings are raised about the effects of media presentation on the majority society, i.e. a society characterized by the culture of Western countries. The findings of the research strikingly agreed that the „media invasion“ directed against Islam has markedly negative connotations. This in turn leads to an increase in Islamophobia and social negativity towards Islam and its followers by the majority population. We think that the Slovak media fail mainly in not taking into account the differences between nations, social statuses and social roles (differences are lost, for example, between Muslims in Germany and Slovakia, although their status differs significantly, note). The image of Islam is thus characterized by a significant negative stereotyping through the dominant media channels without taking into account differences. It should be pointed out that the Islamic world is a mixture of diverse ethnicities, languages, cultural traditions, political beliefs and secular and religious orientations. Muslims are united in faith in God and in the Prophet Muhammad as his messenger, and are bound together by many religious practices, but they differ in views about many other aspects of their faith and practices acceptable in their real daily lives.

H2 Topics on Islam in the media (i.e. media presentation of Islam) are rated by respondents as rather negative.

The second working hypothesis refers to the research of the above mentioned authors. Among them, for example, M. Cenker states that there is often a distorted, simplified and rejected argument about Islam in the media. The dominant media and lack of personal experience with Muslims brings partial and certainly not positive information about Muslims among Slovaks, without a deeper context. Based on this, we formulated the second working hypothesis, which was not confirmed. As many as 70% of respondents rate the presentation of topics about Islam in the media as always negative. The survey also shows that the entire research group (100%) does not find any positive topics about Islam in the media.

The findings of the questionnaire agree with the opinion of the members of the research group in the qualitative part of the survey. According to all members of the group, the fear of Islam and the negativity of the media, which portrays Islam mainly as a violent religion, are the ones that create the most fertile breeding ground for Slovaks to create stereotypes against Muslims. In addition, members of the research group think that Slovaks, in their stereotypical view of Islam, „*make very little distinction between whether they are an educated and integrated European Muslim in society or a Muslim-foreigner.*“ The religion of Muslims, which is preceded by the negative „reputation“ of Islam in society preceded by the media, is determined. This statement is also confirmed by many studies or representative research. We agree with the conclusions of our research and agree that the identity of Muslims is created primarily by the religion of Muslims, i. e. Islam.

Of the seven topics on the subject of Islam that are most common in the media (according to the research group in the qualitative part of the research), the most well-known topic for the respondents to the questionnaire was the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. It is necessary to point out the depth and impact of the event (i.e. the number of people directly affected by the event). We will only recall the fact that the fall of the two skyscrapers in the

heart of America is behind a definitive connection between Islam and radicalism and terrorism in the global media, which certainly has a significant impact on the perception of Slovaks.

As we state in the introduction, the media presentation of Islam in Slovakia began in 1989 with a media presentation of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, continued with the work the Satanic Verses and resonated with the third in connection with the bestseller Not Without My Daughter. In the context of our findings, the second moment is interesting, when Islam was to enter the consciousness of Slovaks – the satirical work of S. Rushdie's Satanic Verses provoked significantly negative reactions on both sides of the conflict in 1988-1989; the media reported on the case frequently and intensively. This is one of the reasons why it is surprising that in our research group, respondents state that they are hearing about the topic for the first time; up to 68,3% respondents state this answer. Based on this, it can be stated that our research group records the negative media presentation of Islam only in connection with the events after the media case of the Satanic verses. Based on a quantitative assessment of the topics about Islam in the media, our respondents' perception of the negative presentation of Islam in the Slovak media does not begin until the event of a terrorist attack on World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. Islam begins in the first year of the new millennium and continues towards a gradual but definitive shift to stereotyping Muslims and categorizing Islam as a violent religion.

Considering the negative depiction of topics about Muslims and Islam in the Slovak media, we recall another observation from the research group: „*Slovak media offer information about Islam, which takes place in large European countries.*“ Thus, it is not primarily the experience of Slovaks with Muslims, as our group has very little (or no) personal experience with Muslims; the media-mediated experience is therefore dominant. An interesting reflection of this phenomenon is that up to 100% of respondents in the questionnaire state that they do not find positive topics about Islam in the Slovak media. For Slovaks, it is, so to speak, a double-mediated experience with Islam: 1) it is experience from the media and 2) it is the experience that other European nations have. As much as this is understandable on the one hand, it is dangerous on the other. The description of this experience is characterized by an argument that is often distorted, simplified and rejected. Moreover, the negative experience of Europeans with Islam, paradoxically, also incites the danger of intolerance and ethnic tension in Slovak society. In short, the absence of positive topics about Islam in the European and domestic media, in our opinion, conditions the increase in negativism, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

It is all the more sad that the Slovak media automatically takes over negative content from the European context and portrays European Islam and Muslims, as well as Muslim immigrants, as a threat and a real threat to territorial integrity, cultural sovereignty and the dominance of the majority nation - ethnic Slovaks. We consider this to be a very unhelpful trend, both in the issue of the opinion-forming of the Slovak media and in the issue of building peace between civilizations, cultures and religions. In short, there is a lack of consideration in Slovakia of the fact that the situation with Islam in Slovakia is, and will probably be, different for a long time from the situation of large European countries; at least due to the small number of Slovak Muslims existing at present.

H3 Topics about Islam in the media (i.e. media presentation of Islam) are described by respondents as rather conflicting.

As the number of Muslims in Slovakia is low, Slovaks learn about Islam from the media in an international context. Islam is mostly associated with negative phenomena and events in the foreign media, as the studies presented above confirm; a common intelligence value associated with Muslims is conflict. Based on this fact, we formulated the third working hypothesis, which was not confirmed. The vast majority of respondents rated the topics of Islam in the media as always conflicting (74%). From the choice of topics that are heard about Islam in the media, the respondents are most familiar with the topic of the terrorist attack on World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (78%). The other 26% reflect from the media, in addition to the topics presented, also topics informing about the attacks of Islamic radicals on European capitals, topics related to jihad and Taliban attacks.

This is a double confirmation of the hypothesis, as according to the members of the research group in the qualitative part of the research, mainly conflicting topics are presented in the media. Members talk about topics that point to cultural or religious conflicts between the Muslim minority and the post-Christian majority in European countries, while at the same time topics „with high social relevance involving several actors and with a direct (negative) impact on the public“. The increase in negative media content is due to the high selection of news. Only a report that has as many news values as possible is able to generate media attention and thus has the possibility of publication. These include, in particular, topicality, dramatization, negativity, exclusivity, novelty, elitism, story or conflict. News values thus, on the one hand, give the report credibility and timeliness, but on the other hand, they lead to a great stereotyping of the content of media products. As a result of the „media invasion“ Muslims are portrayed as foreigners locked up in their communities. In addition, the underlined difference presents them as a potential threat. If the recipient does not have personal experience with a Muslim, he or she acquaints Muslims marginally and superficially through the media; he learns partial, not very positive, information about Islam without a deeper context. The media presentation of the differences of Muslims in comparison with the majority society also has a negative effect. The difference is emphasized in the media, often recalled and without further explanation, i.e. without the possibility to understand or accept it as a manifestation of the natural variability of human society. Despite the presented negatives, we do not expect that the Slovak media will start writing about Muslims in a different way in the near future than they do today; the change probably will not occur without external pressure.

Our further findings are related to the emphasis on the conflict of Islam with other societies in the Western media. We can see that the respondents to the questionnaire associate conflict with violent events involving Islam in the media. The findings from the questionnaire again support the conclusion of the members of the research group, according to which we note in contemporary Islam mainly the interconnection of military, political and religious efforts, emphasis on personal commitment of Muslims in matters of faith, or their open demarcation against opponents or non-believers. We therefore believe that there is at least a double discrepancy between the prevailing thinking, where Islam wants to be perceived as a peaceful religion and the (hateful) statements of Muslim radicals against unbelievers (based on purposefully interpreted verses of the Qur'an), which are often presented in the media. On the one hand, it calls for the establishment of „everyday topics“ that would also reflect the everyday life of Muslim communities in the media, and on the other hand, it also calls for a deeper examination of Islamic commitment to peace and the idea of tolerance to „difference.“ According to A. Minarovič, the loss of the peaceful content of Islam as a result of its radicalization also appears to be conflicting. According to the author, the forms of contemporary Islamist movements vary from state to state, and yet they are united by the fact that „in most of these movements undemocratic attitudes and suppression of human rights and freedoms prevail, which is clearly at odds with Islam's basic vision of a peaceful, tolerant and human society.“ Thus, the media cannot be blamed to a large extent for content that reflects Islam in this way. However, this does not change the fact that the effort to truly present the lives of Muslims (not only radicals), in the media can create an alternative to a negative „media invasion“ against Muslims, and at the same time certainly contribute to greater tolerance in the context of intercultural relations.

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Authors



PhDr. ThDr. Hedviga Tkáčová, PhD.

Faculty of Humanities
University of Žilina
Univerzitná 1
01026 Žilina
SLOVAK REPUBLIC
hedwiga.tkacova@gmail.com

Hedviga Tkáčová is an assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. She graduated in Theology at Comenius University in Bratislava and completed her doctoral studies in Journalism at the Catholic University in Ružomberok, Slovakia. Her pedagogical and research activities focus on new media, pastorate opportunities through new media, media manipulation, academic education, interreligious dialogue, cultural diversity education and education of adults.



PhDr. Eva Al-Absiová, PhD.

Faculty of Arts
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Nám. J. Herdu 2
91701 Trnava
SLOVAK REPUBLIC
eabsi23@gmail.com

Eva Al-Absiová is an assistant professor at the Department of Ethnology and World Studies. After graduating in Library and Information Science at Charles University in Prague, she studied Modern Arabic at the Faculty of Human Sciences and Literature, University of Damascus in Syria. She obtained a PhD degree in Cultural Studies at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. Her research and pedagogical activities focus on issues of Arab culture, Arabic and the status of women, with a special focus on ethno-cultural contexts and cross-cultural discourses. She cooperates with state and local organizations working with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Marwan Al-Absi, PhD.

Faculty of Arts
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava
Nám. J. Herdu 2
91701 Trnava
SLOVAK REPUBLIC
malabsi198@gmail.com



Marwan Al-Absi is an associate professor in Cultural Studies. He works at the Department of Ethnology and World Studies. He graduated from the Faculty of Journalism and completed his doctoral studies in History of Asia and Africa at Charles University in Prague. He worked for several years at Syrian Arab Television in Damascus and later as a film consultant in Slovakia. He has been working at university institutions since 2002. He deals with the issues of the Middle East in historical, cultural and religious contexts. His main areas of research are Arab culture, Bedouin traditions, ethnic minorities in the Middle East, with a special focus on cross-cultural discourses and Arab-European cultural contacts.



PhDr. Martina Pavlíková, PhD.

Faculty of Arts
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra
Štefánikova 67
94974 Nitra
SLOVAK REPUBLIC
mpavlikova@ukf.sk

Martina Pavlíková is an assistant professor at the Department of Journalism. She graduated in English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava. She completed her doctoral studies in the field of Cultural Studies at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. She has also given several lectures and completed research stays at foreign universities. Her research is devoted to the literature of English-speaking countries, ethical behaviour in the mass media and modern trends in visual arts.