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Critical Journal of Social Sciences
EDITORIAL

Charting New Paths in Critical Social Inquiry

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Critical Journal of Social Sciences*, a new interdisciplinary platform dedicated to fostering rigorous, reflective, and critical scholarship across the social sciences. The world we live in is increasingly complex, uncertain, and contested — shaped by rapid political, economic, cultural, and technological transformations that cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Now more than ever, we require spaces where diverse forms of knowledge can come into conversation with one another, allowing scholars to reflect collectively on pressing social questions.

This journal was founded on the conviction that deep social inquiry cannot remain confined to a single discipline or method. Instead, we must embrace an open, interdisciplinary, and engaged form of critique that bridges theory and practice, history and present, global and local. Our aim is to provide a home for research that advances critical thinking, examines power and inequality, and explores the connections between lived experience and broader social structures. In this light, this first issue represents the culmination of months of preparation and the beginning of a collective, ongoing conversation across diverse disciplines — from sociology and anthropology to political science, education, cultural studies, and beyond.

We live in an era characterized by rapid and often disorienting transformations. The social, political, and economic realities we face are complex, fluid, and increasingly difficult to interpret with the traditional tools of a single discipline. Climate change, global inequalities, the crisis of democratic legitimacy, ongoing struggles for social and racial justice, and the profound impacts of digital technologies and artificial intelligence all pose new kinds of questions that demand interdisciplinary thinking, collaborative methodologies, and, above all, critical sensibilities.

At *Critical Journal of Social Sciences*, we believe that scholars must not only describe the world as it is, but also interrogate the power structures that shape it. Critical scholarship, for us, means situating research within the histories and contexts that produce oppression and inequality. It also means seeking connections across diverse forms of knowledge — breaking down the barriers that separate academic disciplines, and acknowledging the lived experiences of people whose voices have too often been silenced.

Our journal aims to be a meeting place for scholars and practitioners who recognize that new and creative approaches are needed to address today's challenges. Throughout this issue and those to come, readers will find work that crosses disciplinary borders and explores the social world in all its complexity. Our contributors embrace empirical research as well as theoretical exploration, they draw on diverse methods and traditions, and they ask how scholarship can not only critique society, but also contribute to its transformation.

This first issue is an invitation to participate in a dialogue. It reflects our commitment to publish work that is as rigorous as it is provocative, as deeply grounded in evidence as it is driven by bold questions. We encourage readers to approach these articles not as isolated pieces but as contributions to a larger collective project — one that aspires to make sense of an increasingly diffuse world, and to illuminate new paths toward a more just, sustainable, and democratic future.

In the pages that follow, you will encounter a rich range of research, case studies, and theoretical essays that exemplify this vision. Taken together, they illustrate the vitality and necessity of critical, interdisciplinary social research in the present moment. We look forward to engaging with you — our readers — as we grow this journal into a dynamic forum for debate and exchange.

In this first issue, we have assembled a diverse range of contributions that illustrate this commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue and critical insight.

Antonio Alaminos-Fernández's article, *"The Good Old Days Never Die": Nostalgia, Temporality, and Affective Politics in Trump's Musical Populism*, explores the power of sound in shaping political mobilization. Analyzing the playlists used at Donald Trump's campaign rallies, Alaminos-Fernández shows how particular musical choices — mostly tracks from the 1970s and 1980s — evoke nostalgia and establish an emotional climate that resonates with populist appeals to national revival.

In Spanish, Reynier Rodríguez Rico's article, *¿Es Cuba un país de implosión demográfica en la época post-COVID?*, examines the sharp demographic decline Cuba has experienced since 2016 — and especially since the pandemic. By analyzing vital statistics and migration patterns, Rodríguez Rico paints a vivid picture of population implosion driven by excess mortality, economic hardship, and accelerated emigration, raising urgent questions about social sustainability and resilience in contemporary Cuban society.

Ana Belén Soage's contribution, *Evolving Identity in the Face of Imperialism and Colonialism: The Emergence and Development of Political Islam*, adopts a constructivist lens to examine mainstream Islamism in the Sunni Arab world. The article tracks the formation of Islamism as a response to colonial legacies and the search for a non-secular modernity, showing how Islamists draw on an idealized past to craft an alternative vision of the future while defining their own social boundaries.

Udo Usiere Akpan and Imaabasi Aniema's article, *Media Usability and Advancement of Regional Political Agenda in West Africa*, appraises the flow of political information in Ghana and Senegal. Drawing on survey data, they find that radio and indigenous media remain the most influential channels for regional political news — a pattern that reflects enduring inequalities in access to information and shapes political knowledge and engagement across West African societies.

Parshuram Sahoo and Usharani Khuntia's article, *Revitalizing Higher Education through the Indian Knowledge System in the Light of NEP-2020*, discusses how India's new National Education Policy integrates Indigenous knowledge traditions into higher education. The article explores the policy's aim of balancing tradition and modernity and underscores its promise of producing globally competitive graduates grounded in India's own cultural and intellectual heritage.

Tran Tuyen engages with the rapidly evolving landscape of digital innovation in tourism. Set against the backdrop of sweeping technological change, this article explores how virtual reality is reshaping tourist experiences and empowering tourism enterprises to reimagine their business models. Focusing on Ho Chi Minh City, the study surveys local companies and finds not only widespread optimism about virtual reality tourism but also a shared understanding that these tools can enhance promotional strategies, enrich visitor engagement, and diversify tourism offerings.

Donika Bakiu's article, *Language Use in North Macedonia*, looks at the role of multilingualism as both a tool of communication and a marker of identity in a society where Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, and other groups live side by side. The article discusses progress following legal frameworks like the Ohrid Agreement and emphasizes that sustained social change requires more than formal policies — it depends on broad educational and media practices that make diversity a meaningful part of public life.

Finally, Doleh Khan's working paper on an ongoing research, *Empowering Women through Vocational Training: A Case Study from Sujawal, Sindh*, documents how vocational skills development is transforming women's lives in rural Pakistan. The article draws on qualitative research to show how targeted training programs supported by local and international partners enhance women's self-reliance, leadership, and capacity to navigate restrictive gender norms.

At the *Critical Journal of Social Sciences*, we believe that working papers deserve a prominent space in academic publishing. They allow readers to glimpse research at its most dynamic and formative stages — a process that invites constructive critique, sparks dialogue, and keeps us abreast of the questions and methods that are shaping scholarship in real time. By showcasing work in progress, the journal hopes to encourage an academic culture rooted in exchange and collaborative refinement rather than in the mere dissemination of polished final results.

This commitment to openness also extends to emerging scholars and researchers at early career stages. The *Critical Journal of Social Sciences* is committed to making room for doctoral candidates, recent PhDs, and other scholars who are still in the process of forging their academic paths. Providing a welcoming platform for these voices is not only a matter of equity; it also enriches the journal by bringing in new perspectives, bold ideas, and fresh critical approaches to the most pressing social questions of our time.

Finally, we recognize that a truly critical and interdisciplinary journal must transcend linguistic boundaries. In this issue, articles appear in both English and Spanish, a choice that reflects our belief that multilingualism is a vital part of scholarly practice. By embracing multiple languages, we aim to reach diverse audiences and ensure that important research does not remain confined to any single linguistic or national community. This openness is at the heart of our vision for a global, inclusive, and intellectually vibrant academic exchange.

Together, these contributions underscore the complexity of the world we seek to understand — from the cultural politics of music and nostalgia to language rights, gender empowerment, media practices, demographic transformations, and educational reform. Taken as a whole, they highlight the necessity of interdisciplinary and critical approaches to the study of society.

As you read this first issue, we invite you to reflect on the connections and resonances that emerge across these diverse topics. We hope these pages will inspire new questions and productive debates — and that this journal will grow into a collaborative space where critical inquiry can flourish.

We look forward to engaging with you, our readers, and to the many conversations that lie ahead.

ARTICLE

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"THE GOOD OLD DAYS NEVER DIE": NOSTALGIA, TEMPORALITY, AND AFFECTIVE POLITICS IN TRUMP'S MUSICAL POPULISM

"LOS BUENOS TIEMPOS NUNCA MUEREN": NOSTALGIA, TEMPORALIDAD Y POLÍTICA AFECTIVA EN EL POPULISMO MUSICAL DE TRUMP

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Abstract

Donald Trump's campaign playlists function as affective tools of temporal populism. Drawing on a dataset of 225 songs played at rallies between 2015 and 2024, the study combines computational analysis of audio features with cultural interpretation to examine how music shapes political memory and mobilization. Results reveal a marked preference for tracks from the 1970s and 1980s, characterized by high energy, emotional positivity (valence), and moderate acousticness. These sonic choices evoke a nostalgic affective climate aligned with the populist promise of national revival. Boxplots, ANOVA tests, and heatmaps show that genres such as rock, disco, and country dominate this curated soundscape, serving as emotional anchors for a narrative of decline and restoration. In this context, music performs affective temporal governance—organizing emotional experience across time through repetition, resonance, and embodied participation. Songs do not merely entertain; they act as scripts of belonging, instruments of soft power, and infrastructures of sonic memory. By collapsing temporal boundaries between past and present, Trump's playlists orchestrate a politics of feeling in which nostalgia becomes a mobilizing force. The analysis contributes to the emerging field of sonic political analysis and underscores the role of music in shaping affective populism.

Keywords

sonic memory, temporal populism, affective governance, political rallies, soft power

1. INTRODUCTION: TEMPORAL POPULISM AND SONIC MEMORY

In the performative landscape of contemporary politics, populism has emerged not only as a political style but as an affective structure that binds emotional narratives to collective identities. Within this framework, temporal populism plays a pivotal role by constructing idealized versions of the past to be reclaimed in the present. This narrative depends on a sense of loss and grievance, mobilized through the affective repertoire of nostalgia. As Bonikowski (2017) Finchelstein and Urbinati (2018) and Boym (2001) asserts, ethno-nationalist populism flourishes by activating collective resentment, offering a moral contrast between a once-glorious past and a corrupt present dominated by elites and outsiders. Crucially, this strategy is not only rhetorical but also aesthetic—and profoundly sonic. Music, as both cultural artifact and emotional catalyst, plays a central role in the affective politics of populism, particularly in the staging of events such as rallies. Sonic memory—understood as the emotionally charged recollection of past experiences through sound—becomes vital to how political actors mobilize affect. Altavilla (2012) conceptualizes sonic memory as a form of mobile cartography, mapping identities and emotions across space and time.

In the case of Donald Trump's rallies, playlists dominated by classic rock, country, and pop anthems from the 1970s and 1980s serve not simply as entertainment, but as tools of affective governance. These tracks invoke a shared emotional grammar, allowing attendees to inhabit a collective memory characterized by strength, unity, and national pride. As Street (2012) argues, music in political contexts is not merely illustrative; it is constitutive. It shapes the emotional tone, dramatizes political belonging, and enacts a communal identity. This affective power aligns with Nye's (2008) notion of soft power—the capacity to shape preferences through attraction and emotional resonance. Rather than exerting coercive force, soft power works through identification, aesthetic appeal, and emotional contagion. Trump's playlists function as a soft power device, reinforcing ideological alignment through nostalgia and familiarity. Alaminos-Fernández (2023) likewise identifies popular music as a vector of cultural power that populist leaders employ to craft symbolic environments conducive to political messaging.

The strategic clustering of Trump's playlists around the 1970s and 1980s is not coincidental. These decades are invoked as proxies for an imagined era of national greatness. Kékesi (2023) describes this as resonant memory—a mode of affective temporality in which the past resurfaces not as historical knowledge, but as emotional experience. Music becomes a mnemonic device through which grievances are not merely recalled, but re-felt. Sound also mediates spatial and corporeal experiences in populist rallies. The auditory space becomes one of collective embodiment, where listeners enact their affective ties. Drawing on Álvarez (2022), who shows how sound structures collective choreographies in queer nightlife, the rally can be interpreted as a similarly embodied performance of emotional and political alignment. Music enables a sensory politics of belonging, drawing listeners into a community defined not solely by ideology, but by shared affective temporality. Moreover, sonic memory is embedded in broader cultural heritage practices. Chamberlain, Bødker, and Papangelis (2018) argue that personal soundscapes are socially mediated and technologically curated—especially through platforms like Spotify, which inform Trump's playlist curation. Algorithmic reconstruction of sonic archives allows campaigns to curate national nostalgia with precision and emotional intensity. As Cusick (2020) notes, sound can be weaponized—not necessarily in a literal sense, but as a tool of emotional discipline and control. In populist settings, music functions both as a balm for wounded identity and a rallying cry against perceived threats. This dual capacity reflects Bonikowski's (2017) framework, where populist narratives operate by polarizing emotion and fostering exclusionary solidarity.

The materiality of sound also matters. Ernst (2015) emphasizes that sound resonates differently from historical narrative—it loops, haunts, and repeats. These temporal qualities are ideally suited for populist appeals, which thrive on emotional repetition rather than deliberative reason. Music, in this context, becomes a medium through which the past is not explained but relived. It generates affective time loops that reinforce political identity. Velasco-Pufleau and Atlani-Duault (2020) describe such sonic formations as *lieux de mémoire*—emotional infrastructures activated and sustained through repetition. When songs like "Fortunate Son" or "YMCA" are played at Trump rallies, they evoke not only recognition but shared affect. These sonic memory-sites foster continuity and belonging, shaping how supporters feel about their country, their leader, and their historical trajectory. These dynamics are not uniquely American. Alaminos-Fernández (2021) documents similar uses of music in Spain's electoral context, where popular songs are used to build affective bridges between politicians and the electorate. The underlying mechanism remains consistent: music becomes a political tool, activating emotional registers that transcend rational scrutiny and shape political loyalty.

Temporal populism operates through a sonic politics of memory and emotion, wherein the past is not merely evoked but audibly re-enacted—re-sounded—transforming memory into affect and affect into mobilization (Assmann, 2011; Erll, 2011). Rather than appealing solely to historical consciousness, it engages emotional memory through music, producing loops of resonance that intensify political identification. A nuanced understanding of populism thus necessitates a sonic sensibility: an analytical attentiveness to how affective time is structured through sound, and to the ways in which music constructs the emotional architecture of political life.

2. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods design integrates computational techniques with cultural interpretation to investigate the affective role of music in Donald Trump's campaign rallies. The aim is to explore how specific musical attributes—particularly emotional intensity, temporal origin, and genre—shape the affective architecture of populist communication. The methodological process unfolds in three stages: dataset construction, variable selection, and analytical modeling. The corpus includes 225 songs repeatedly used at Trump's rallies between 2015 and 2024. Tracks were initially identified using the Spotify API, which enabled the extraction of standardized audio features and metadata. To ensure empirical consistency, this list was cross-referenced with rally footage, journalistic accounts, and crowd-sourced playlists. A final manual review addressed inconsistencies in genre labels, decade attribution, and artist information.

Musical variables were selected for their emotional and symbolic relevance in populist contexts. Based on Spotify's audio feature taxonomy and previous research (Interiano et al., 2018; Alaminos-Fernández, 2023), the following variables were retained: valence (musical positivity), energy (intensity), danceability (rhythmic movement), acousticness (organic vs. synthetic sound), loudness (perceived volume), tempo (beats per minute), and decade (release period). These variables are linked to the ability of music to induce emotional synchrony, elicit nostalgic memories, or evoke perceptions of authenticity and cultural belonging. To identify patterns across decades, the study employs descriptive statistics, ANOVA testing, boxplots, and heatmaps. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize central tendencies of each feature by decade. One-way ANOVA tests assessed whether these features varied significantly across time. The first round of results showed significant variation in valence ($p = 0.0002$), energy ($p = 0.0011$), danceability ($p = 0.0416$), acousticness ($p = 0.0255$), and loudness ($p = 0.0167$), while tempo ($p = 0.5763$) did not. Boxplots visualize distributions of each musical feature by decade, showing how affective properties like energy and valence peak in the 1970s and 1980s. These decades emerge as emotionally coherent, in contrast to the 1990s and 2000s, which display greater variance and lower mean positivity. Heatmaps cross-tabulate valence and energy by genre and decade. These visualizations reveal that rock and disco dominate the emotional high ground of the 1970s and 1980s, aligning with rally atmospheres centered on optimism and mobilization. Genres like grunge or hip hop are underrepresented, suggesting both ideological incongruence and lower emotional suitability. A second round of ANOVA with confidence intervals nuanced the initial findings. While energy ($p = 0.011$) and acousticness ($p = 0.039$) remained significant, valence ($p = 0.078$) showed a near-significant trend. This suggests that while not all variables reach statistical thresholds, their affective salience may still be politically functional.

Finally, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was applied to explore latent structures in the dataset. The PCA revealed clusters of high-energy, low-acousticness songs typical of Trump's core soundscape. This affective aesthetic centers on emotional arousal and synthetic clarity, evoking excitement and strength while minimizing vulnerability or ambiguity. This methodological framework thus integrates quantitative rigor with qualitative insight, allowing for a comprehensive examination of how music orchestrates political time and affect in populist discourse.

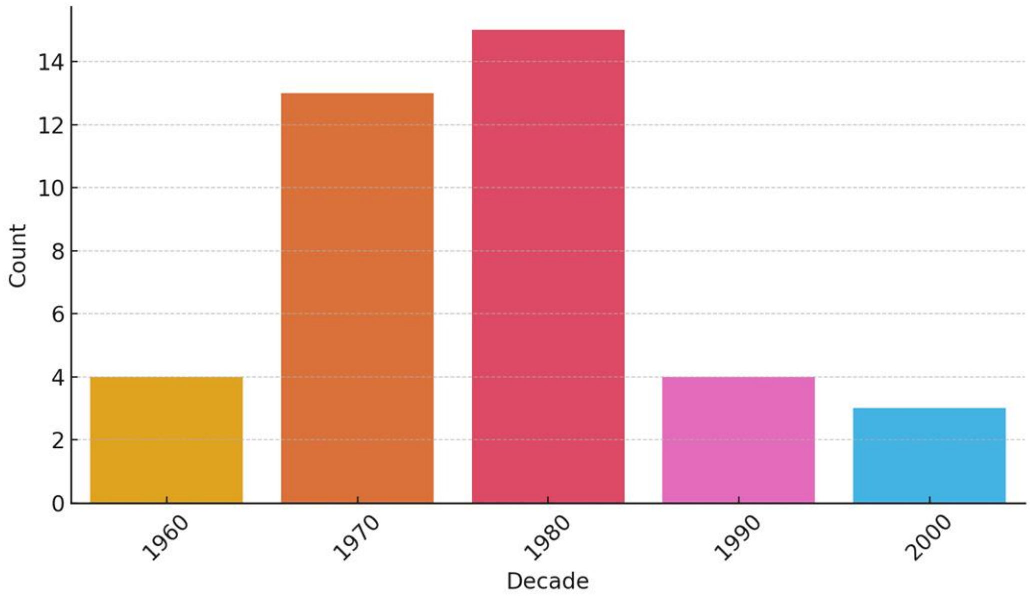
3. EMOTIONAL ANALYSIS OF TRUMP'S RALLY SOUNDSCAPE

The emotional architecture of Donald Trump's rally soundscape is far from incidental. Instead, it reflects a calculated curation of music that reinforces nostalgia, cohesion, and political affect. Through a combined analysis of temporal distribution and emotional variables, this section explores the sonic contours of Trump's playlists, focusing on how specific decades and musical characteristics are disproportionately represented to evoke targeted affective responses. This analysis integrates statistical testing (ANOVA) and visualizations (boxplots and heatmaps) to demonstrate how sound is mobilized as a tool for emotional synchronization and ideological alignment.

3.1. *Temporal Distribution of Songs: A Soundtrack for the "Good Old Days"*

The temporal skew in Trump's musical selections is unmistakable. Songs from the 1970s and 1980s dominate the playlist, while the 1990s and 2000s are notably underrepresented. This aligns with what Bonikowski (2017) describes as temporal populism—a strategy that mobilizes collective resentment by referencing an idealized past. Trump's musical curation participates in this dynamic by sonically staging a return to a "greater" America.

Figure 1 – Number of Songs by Decade



Source: Author

As shown in Figure 1, the 1980s emerge as the most represented decade in Trump's playlists, followed by the 1970s. The scarcity of songs from the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s suggests a deliberate aesthetic alignment with an emotionally resonant period in the cultural imagination of his electorate.

Table 1 – Average and Standard Deviation of Musical Features by Decade

Decade	Valence _mean	Valence _std	Energy _mean	Energy _std	Danceability _mean	Danceability _std	Acousticness _mean	Acousticness _std	Loudness _mean	Loudness _std	Tempo _mean	Tempo _std
1960	67.5	39.79	46.25	19.84	59.0	21.18	46.0	28.3	-12.25	2.36	115.75	10.08
1970	68.62	22.21	70.54	17.0	55.31	14.21	18.69	21.25	-8.92	2.81	122.23	22.31
1980	62.8	19.77	76.07	14.16	56.33	13.5	24.53	25.87	-8.2	2.18	115.93	19.51
1990	30.75	12.07	43.0	36.06	43.5	13.8	58.75	39.56	-11.75	5.56	97.0	15.81
2000	49.67	30.92	73.0	22.34	51.33	14.22	9.67	8.39	-10.0	6.24	118.33	27.75

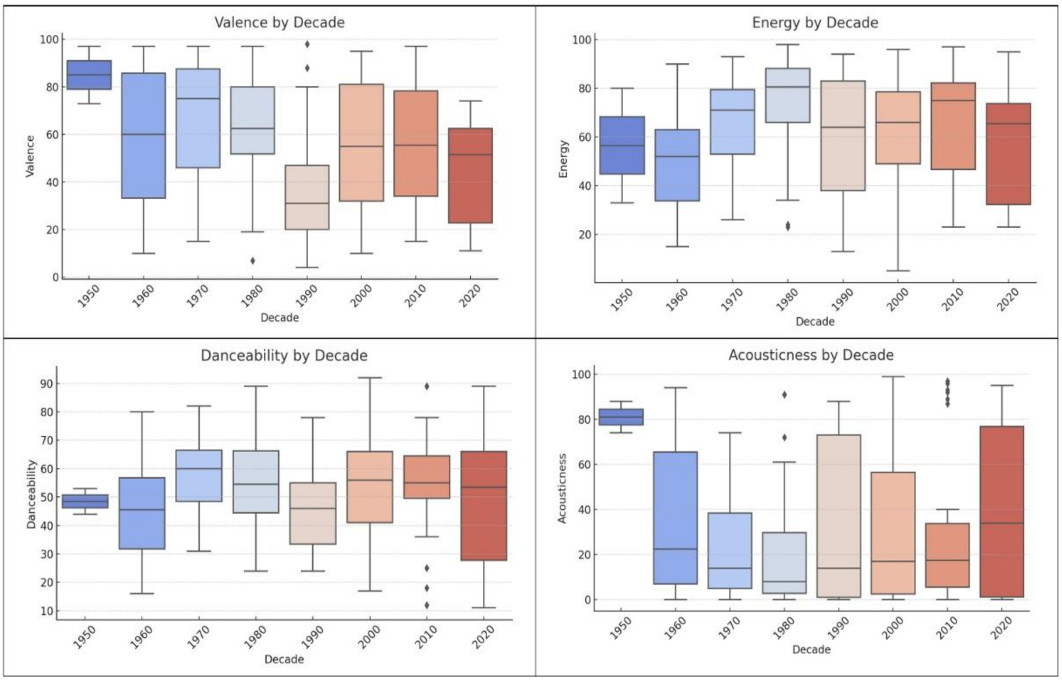
Source: Author

The descriptive statistics reinforce this pattern, revealing emotional peaks in the 1970s and 1980s, with high average values for energy and valence—qualities associated with optimism, confidence, and unity. Conversely, the 1990s show a pronounced decline in both metrics, highlighting their marginal role in the affective economy of the rallies.

3.2. Emotional Landscapes by Decade: Positivity and Power

Boxplots of musical features across decades offer a more granular view of the emotional profiles shaping Trump's soundscape.

Figure 2 Boxplots of Valence, Energy, Danceability, Acousticness, Loudness, Tempo



Source: Author

The valence boxplot indicates that the 1970s and 1980s maintain the highest median positivity with low variability—ideal for projecting emotional consistency and affirmation. In contrast, songs from the 1990s show reduced valence and greater variability, making them less reliable as affective anchors.

Similarly, energy peaks in the 1980s, supporting the hypothesis that rally songs are selected to maximize crowd activation. Danceability and loudness, while showing smaller fluctuations, still conform to the broader pattern: the 1980s songs are rhythmically engaging and sonically forceful. Acousticness trends inversely, peaking in the 1960s and 1990s but dropping in the 2000s, suggesting a preference for electronic production during emotionally charged moments.

Tempo remains relatively consistent across decades, indicating that rhythm speed is not a primary factor in the emotional engineering of the playlist.

Table 2 – ANOVA Results: Significance by Feature

Feature	p-value	Significant ($p < 0.05$)
valence	0.0002	Yes
energy	0.0011	Yes
danceability	0.0416	Yes
acousticness	0.0255	Yes
loudness	0.0167	Yes
tempo	0.5763	No

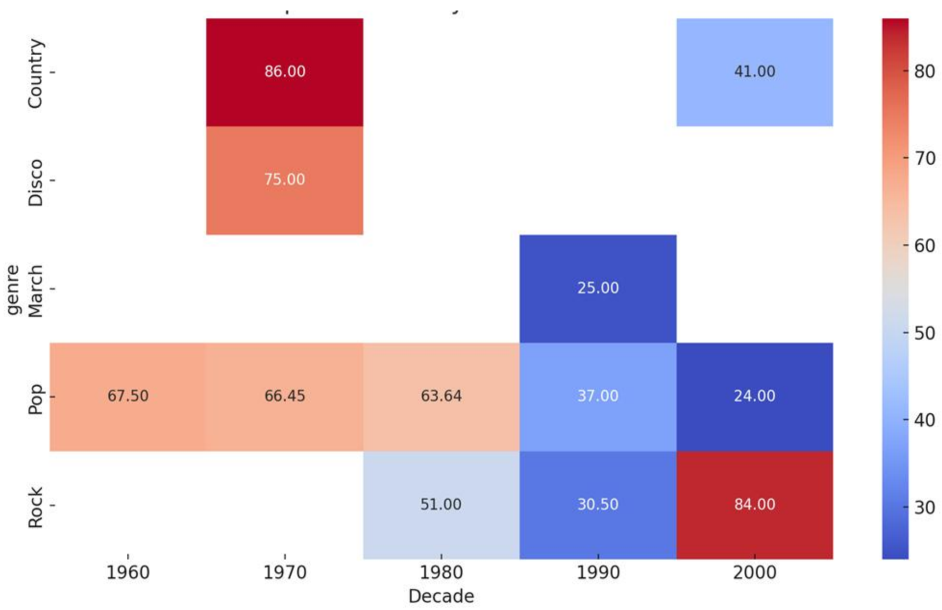
Source: Author

Statistical tests confirm that valence ($p = 0.0002$), energy ($p = 0.0011$), danceability ($p = 0.0416$), acousticness ($p = 0.0255$), and loudness ($p = 0.0167$) vary significantly by decade, validating the emotional selectivity of the soundscape. Tempo, with a p-value of 0.5763, does not show significant variation, further supporting the interpretation that emotional tone—not structural tempo—is the key affective driver.

3.3. *Genre–Decade Emotional Convergences*

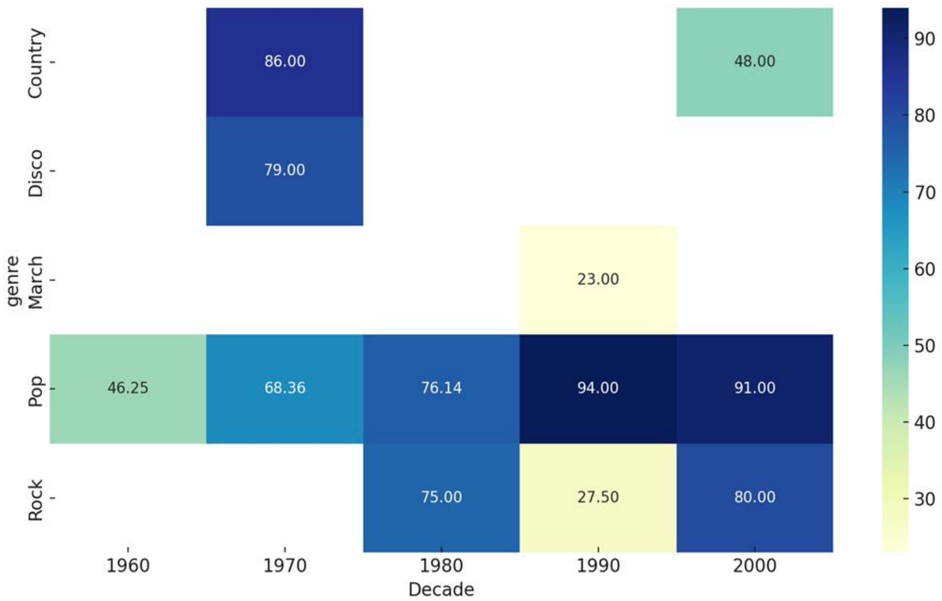
To examine how emotion clusters across genres and eras, we turn to two heatmaps that plot valence and energy by genre and decade.

Figure 3 – Heatmap of Valence by Genre and Decade



Source: Author

Figure 4 – Heatmap of Energy by Genre and Decade



Source: Author

These heatmaps highlight that 1970s and 1980s rock and disco consistently occupy the high valence–high energy quadrant. These genres function as affective amplifiers in rally settings, evoking celebratory nationalism and shared strength. Country-pop, although present across multiple decades, displays more variability in valence, suggesting a dual affective function—

ranging from solemn reflection to jubilant patriotism. Genres emerging in the 1990s, such as grunge and hip hop, are rare in the playlists and tend to cluster in lower valence and energy zones, reflecting ideological dissonance or deliberate exclusion.

3.4. *Affective Significance and Political Function*

From this analysis, a coherent emotional profile emerges: upbeat, high-energy, emotionally vivid songs from a narrow historical window dominate Trump's playlists. These selections serve not just to entertain but to emotionally calibrate the rally environment, constructing a shared affective field that resonates with collective memory and populist identity. As Alaminos-Fernández (2023) emphasizes, this type of musical curation functions strategically, reinforcing ideological messages through soft power mechanisms. Songs evoke affective memories that align listeners with the leader's temporal narrative—an imagined golden age that is not merely remembered, but relived in sound. In this way, Trump's soundscape becomes a performative script, guiding participants not only in what to believe, but in how to feel. Music here functions as both emotional infrastructure and ideological device. It builds affective synchrony among participants, amplifies narratives of decline and restoration, and transforms political memory into a shared sonic experience. In short, it provides the mood for mobilization and the soundtrack for revival.

4. GENRE–ERA CONVERGENCES

The affective architecture of Trump's rally soundscape is not solely shaped by the emotional content of individual tracks or their temporal origins. Equally crucial is the intersection of genre and era—a convergence that reveals how specific musical styles from particular decades are selectively revived to serve contemporary populist narratives. This section examines three interrelated dynamics that structure Trump's sonic populism: the recontextualization of protest songs, the dominance of emotionally potent genres like rock, disco, and country, and the ideological reframing of genre aesthetics. One of the most striking phenomena in Trump's playlist curation is the strategic reappropriation of songs that originally conveyed critique or dissent. Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.", a powerful indictment of post-Vietnam disillusionment and working-class marginalization, is routinely featured in rally soundscapes. Despite its critical lyrics, the song is recast through its anthemic instrumentation and emotive chorus as a celebration of national pride—an example of what Street (2012) calls the "emotional recontextualization" of music. Similarly, Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son," which protested class inequality during the Vietnam War, loses its subversive edge when performed in support of a billionaire-led populist campaign. These sonic acts do not erase political content; rather, they subsume it under affective resonance, privileging emotional impact over ideological coherence.

This affective reframing is further reinforced by the genre-decade matrix, as visualized in the heatmaps of valence and energy (Figures 3 and 4). These visualizations show that 1970s and 1980s classic rock and disco consistently inhabit the upper-right quadrant of high energy and high valence, making them ideal vehicles for populist mobilization. These genres are characterized by soaring melodies, strong beats, and immediate emotional appeal—features that facilitate group cohesion and mood regulation in mass political events. Disco, often associated with liberation and queer identity in its original cultural context, is rearticulated in Trump's rallies as triumphant nostalgia. Tracks like "Y.M.C.A." by the Village People and "Celebration" by Kool & The Gang are stripped of their subcultural meanings and reoriented toward patriotic exuberance. This is an example of what Velasco-Pufleau and Atlani-Duault (2020) describe as the "weaponization of sonic memory"—a process through which affective symbols of difference are incorporated into hegemonic narratives. Within Trump's rallies, these tracks no longer signify cultural resistance but are reframed as sonic affirmations of national unity and moral resurgence. Country and country-pop, genres closely tied to American ideals of tradition, family, and rural life, play an equally prominent role. These songs often convey sentimental themes through acoustic textures and slower tempos. However, their affective resonance shifts across decades. Older country songs in the playlist (e.g., from the 1980s) tend to exhibit high acousticness and emotional sincerity. By contrast, more recent country-pop selections align with the broader affective strategy of the playlist, featuring louder production, increased energy, and pop crossovers. This evolution reflects a recalibration of genre aesthetics to meet the emotional demands of political spectacle—updating sonic markers of authenticity while preserving their nostalgic undertone.

The temporal deployment of genre thus serves not only aesthetic ends but ideological ones. Genres are affective repositories, carrying the emotional residues of their cultural histories. When Trump invokes 1980s rock, he is not just referencing a musical style, but activating an emotional memory of strength, coherence, and triumph. These are not just songs—they are scripts of feeling, tools for staging political belonging. Moreover, genre–era alignments also structure spatial practices within rallies. As Álvarez (2022) notes in her study of embodied choreographies, sound shapes movement and emotional enactment in collective spaces. A disco anthem or classic rock hit triggers applause, synchronized clapping, and chants—turning sound into a medium for corporeal and emotional alignment. These sonic rituals reinforce populist identity by generating what Altavilla (2012) calls "cartographies of affective belonging," in which listeners locate themselves emotionally within a political community. This convergence between genre and era also contributes to the populist narrative's temporal logic. By reviving emotionally charged musical genres from a perceived golden age, the rallies construct a looping temporality—one in which the past is relived in the present and projected into the future. The playlist functions as a sonic time machine, compressing decades of cultural memory into a performative structure of populist revival. Bonikowski's (2017) concept of collective resentment is central here. These genre–era pairings do not merely entertain—they activate grievances, reinforce group identity, and transform personal nostalgia into collective political emotion. Music becomes the medium through which the longing for national rebirth is not only articulated but felt. As Ernst (2015) and Kékesi (2023) suggest, the power of sonic memory lies not in its narrative content but in its resonant emotional form. In Trump's rallies, that resonance becomes a political instrument.

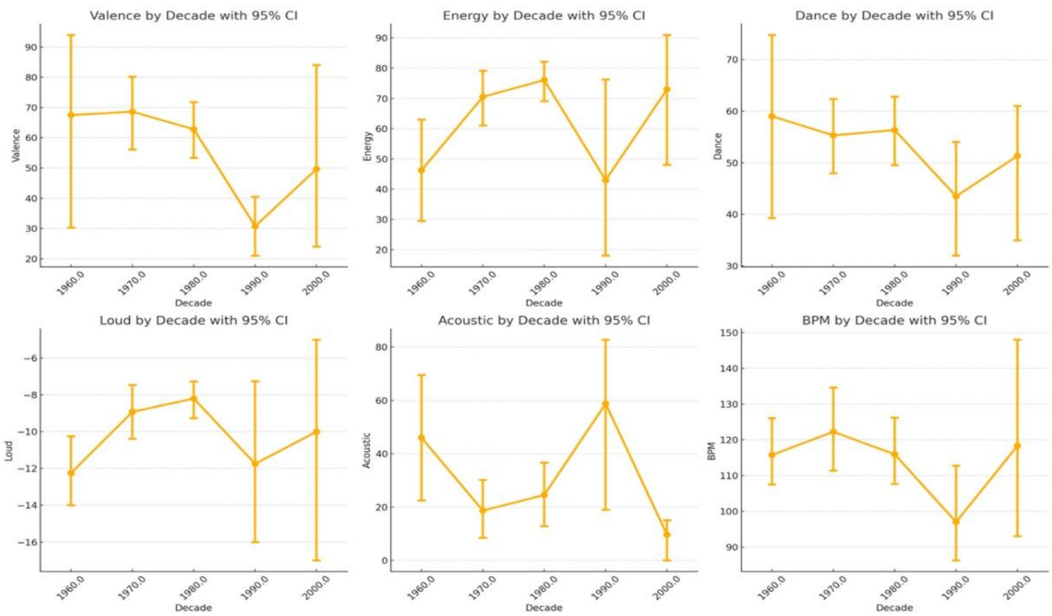
In sum, the affective and ideological power of genre–era convergences in Trump's playlists demonstrates that populist soundscapes are curated with emotional precision. Music is not ancillary to populism—it is infrastructural. It mediates identity, organizes memory, and enacts revival. Through the deliberate alignment of musical genres and historical periods, the rally becomes an affective performance of political time—an experience that merges past and present in a unified emotional script.

5. DISCUSSION: MUSIC AS AFFECTIVE TEMPORAL GOVERNANCE

The preceding analysis reveals that Donald Trump's campaign playlists are not simply entertainment tools, but devices for what may be termed *affective temporal governance*—the structuring of emotional experience and temporal perception through curated sound. This concept encompasses more than the emotional impact of music; it refers to how music actively organizes political time and sentiment, shaping who belongs in the narrative of the nation, which histories are remembered, and which emotions are legitimized in public discourse.

The statistical evidence reinforces this perspective. As seen in the ANOVA results, two musical features—energy ($p = 0.011$) and acousticness ($p = 0.039$)—show significant variation across decades, while valence ($p = 0.078$) displays a near-significant trend. Tempo, loudness, and danceability fall outside conventional significance thresholds, suggesting they play a secondary role. This distribution of significance highlights a key insight: it is not rhythm or volume that determines affective impact, but the emotional expressiveness and perceived authenticity of the music.

Figure 5 – ANOVA Confidence Interval Plots by Decade (Valence, Energy, Danceability, etc.)



Source: Author

The CI plots (Figure 5) visually reinforce this point. Energy peaks in the 1980s and drops in the 1990s, then stabilizes in the 2000s. Acousticness follows an inverse curve, suggesting that decades with high emotional activation tend to favor sonically synthetic, polished production over raw or organic instrumentation. Valence, though statistically marginal, mirrors energy in its general shape, declining in the 1990s and partially recovering afterward. Together, these variables map a soundscape tailored to evoke enthusiasm, unity, and affective intensity. Such curation corresponds to what Nye (2008) defines as soft power: the ability to attract and shape preferences through culture and emotion rather than coercion. In this context, music is not a backdrop but a cultural technology that animates the populist narrative Stanyek and Piekut (2010). Energy rallies the crowd; acousticness creates a sense of rootedness; valence sustains an atmosphere of affirmation. These features act as emotional scripts through which political time is felt.

Crucially, the significance of energy and acousticness also signals their political functionality. Energy corresponds to emotional arousal—a key factor in populist mobilization. Acousticness indexes perceived authenticity, often interpreted as sincerity or tradition. The inverse relationship between the two in Trump's playlists suggests a strategic balance between emotional intensity and nostalgic credibility. Songs with high energy and low acousticness evoke power and modernity, while tracks with higher acousticness signal continuity with past values. Together, they construct a hybrid emotional grammar that appeals to a broad spectrum of affective identifications. This dynamic resonates with Bonikowski's (2017) notion of collective resentment. Populism mobilizes grievances through narratives of decline and revival; music enhances this by embedding those narratives in embodied experience. Sonic cues create temporal loops in which listeners are invited to relive a glorified past while projecting it onto the present. As Velasco-Pufleau and Atlani-Duault (2020) argue, sound serves as a memory infrastructure, sustaining political identities through repetition and resonance. In this view, playlists are not lists—they are scripts. Furthermore, the embodied dimension of music reinforces its affective power. As Álvarez (2022) demonstrates in the context of nightlife, sonic environments orchestrate choreographies of collective feeling. In Trump's rallies, music structures not only emotional responses but bodily movements—applause, chanting, waving—which in turn reinforce belonging and identification. These affective choreographies form a feedback loop, where sound and gesture mutually amplify political emotion. The stability of tempo and loudness across decades further clarifies this point. These structural features are not instrumental in generating affect; rather, it is the expressive elements—energy and valence—that catalyze political emotion. Acousticness adds a layer of sonic credibility, inflecting emotion with authenticity. Together, these elements do not merely entertain—they govern mood, memory, and participation.

This understanding of music as affective temporal governance offers a corrective to accounts that treat populist spectacle as superficial or irrational. Instead, it reveals a complex aesthetic strategy aimed at organizing political feeling through curated sound. Trump's playlists operate as an auditory time machine, transporting listeners into a past that is emotionally vivid and ideologically coherent. They do not just evoke the "good old days"—they make them audible, livable, and emotionally actionable. In short, the affective coherence of Trump's musical populism is built on a subtle manipulation of sonic time. Energy and acousticness become the coordinates of emotional governance, orchestrating how supporters feel their way through political narratives. This is not manipulation in the crude sense of propaganda, but in the aesthetic sense of mood design. The rally becomes a space of emotional calibration, where sound organizes sentiment, and sentiment organizes political time. This reframing invites broader implications for the study of political communication. It suggests that affective alignment is as important as rhetorical content, and that music may be among the most effective tools for synchronizing public emotion. As Cusick (2020) and Ahmed (2004). emphasizes, sound shapes not just the ear but the nervous system. It moves people—literally and figuratively. In populist movements, that movement becomes ideological alignment. To understand populism, then, we must listen—not only to what is said, but to what is played. Musical populism is affective governance at its most immersive: it enacts a politics of revival through resonance, transforming nostalgia into collective motion. And in that motion, the past is not only remembered—it is enacted, again and again, to the sound of a rallying beat.

6. POPULISM AND THE IDEOLOGY OF REVIVAL

At the heart of populist discourse lies an emotionally charged narrative of revival: a desire to restore a time imagined as more unified, prosperous, and morally coherent. This ideology of revival is not merely a political claim—it is an affective project. It appeals to longing, grievance, and hope, constructing a vision of the future rooted in a selective memory of the past. As Bonikowski (2017) and Slaughter (2009) asserts, ethno-nationalist populism mobilizes collective resentment through a moralized contrast between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite." This opposition is temporal as much as moral: the past represents purity, the present corruption, and the future a possible return. Music becomes a key medium for making this ideology emotionally plausible. Trump's campaign soundscape provides a compelling case study in how sonic aesthetics support the ideology of revival. The overwhelming emphasis on tracks from the 1970s and 1980s—decades mythologized as eras of American strength and cultural clarity—constructs a nostalgic affective horizon. These songs do not merely recall the past; they invite listeners to relive it emotionally and imaginatively. High energy and valence values, paired with moderate acousticness, create a mood of optimism and empowerment that blurs historical distance. As Nye (2008) notes, soft power operates through attraction and identification. Here, the identification is with a lost emotional climate, made audible and desirable again through sound.

This aesthetic revival is not politically neutral. Songs like "Born in the U.S.A." and "Fortunate Son," originally critiques of American injustice, are recontextualized within a populist framework. Their lyrical subversion is overshadowed by their sonic power—the anthemic choruses, pounding drums, and emotionally resonant melodies. As Street (2012) and Cusick (2008) observe, music can detach from its original meaning and acquire new functions through repetition and re-framing. These tracks no longer articulate protest; they become patriotic affirmations. This process illustrates how sound can become a medium of ideological flexibility, absorbing contradiction through emotional coherence. The revivalist function of music also depends on its ability to activate both personal and collective memory. For many rally attendees, these songs recall formative experiences—youth, family, community. Simultaneously, they evoke a shared national narrative, often cleansed of complexity or dissent. This dual invocation—individual nostalgia and collective myth—produces what Alaminos-Fernández (2023) calls a "cultural memory infrastructure," a symbolic framework that stabilizes identity and meaning through sound. This infrastructure operates through ritual. Music at rallies is not random; it is ritualized. Songs are played at specific moments to elicit predictable responses—chants, clapping, flags waving. These are not simply affective responses, but embodied enactments of a worldview. As Álvarez (2022) and Voegelin (2010) describes, sonic environments generate collective choreographies—patterns of movement and affect that reinforce group identity. In the populist rally, music stages the performance of ideological belonging. Moreover, the ideology of revival is highly selective. It does not revive the full complexity of the past, but a filtered, emotionally amplified version. This selectivity is evident in the absence of certain genres and decades—such as grunge or hip hop from the 1990s—which are often associated with fragmentation, critique, or postmodern ambiguity. By contrast, the playlist privileges genres associated with celebration, pride, and cohesion. This filtering mechanism transforms history into affective myth: the past becomes what feels good to remember, not what actually happened.

This affective reconstruction has powerful political consequences. It simplifies political identity into an emotional script: those who feel this music, who resonate with its temporal affect, are "us." Those who do not, are "them." Music thus becomes a boundary object, defining inclusion and exclusion through sonic familiarity. As Velasco-Pufleau and Atlani-Duault (2020) argue, sound can function as a site of symbolic violence and affective power, shaping how people experience belonging. This dynamic also reconfigures the future. In populist revivalism, the future is not envisioned as progress or transformation, but as restoration. The ideal society already existed—its return is merely a matter of will. Music accelerates this temporal logic Alaminos-Fernández (2019). By making the past emotionally accessible, it collapses temporal distance, allowing the future to be imagined as a recaptured mood. The sound of the 1980s becomes not just historical, but prescriptive. As Cusick (2020) notes, sound has the capacity to discipline and mobilize—not only through coercion, but through mood. The sonic revival at Trump's rallies is precisely such a project. It disciplines the crowd emotionally, directing affect toward a desired collective orientation. The playlist becomes a score for populist participation, guiding listeners into emotional identification with a leader who promises not innovation, but restoration.

The ideology of revival in populist discourse operates not solely through language and visual imagery, but through the affective medium of sound. As Frith (1996a, 1996b) argues, music serves as a sonic bridge between memory and identity, linking individual and collective temporalities. In this capacity, music filters historical complexity into emotionally legible forms, transforming critique into resonance and ambiguity into coherence. Within Trump's campaign soundscape, the past is not merely referenced—it is reanimated, emotionally re-experienced, and aesthetically repurposed into a structured affective architecture of populist belonging.

7. CONCLUSION

Trump's campaign playlists function as affective engines of temporal populism. Their musical selections are far from incidental; they form a curated sonic infrastructure that organizes memory, emotion, and political identity. Through a synthesis of computational analysis and cultural theory, this study reveals how these soundtracks revive a mythologized national past, aligning listeners emotionally with the populist imaginary. The predominance of tracks from the 1970s and 1980s is not coincidental: these decades carry symbolic weight for the target electorate, evoking familiarity and nostalgic resonance. Statistically, this temporal preference is supported by elevated levels of energy and acousticness, with valence reinforcing the emotionally charged atmosphere. These musical attributes do more than shape the ambience of rallies—they encode the affective grammar of populist nostalgia, translating political longing into an emotionally immersive sonic experience.Tempo and loudness, by contrast, remain relatively stable, suggesting that emotional activation, rather than sonic intensity, drives the playlist's effectiveness.

Through visual tools such as boxplots, confidence intervals, and heatmaps, this study has highlighted how genres like classic rock, disco, and country dominate the emotional high ground of Trump's musical landscape. These genre–era clusters are not accidental. They are deployed to invoke shared memories, mobilize group cohesion, and foster a perception of authenticity, power, and belonging. Protest songs, originally critical in nature, are repurposed into patriotic anthems—revealing music's capacity to detach from origin and acquire new affective meanings through performance. The ideological dimension of this musical strategy centers on a politics of revival. Trump's rallies do not merely reference the past—they perform it. The use of music serves to collapse temporal boundaries, allowing the "good old days" to be felt in the present. This affective collapse facilitates the central populist promise: that what was once lost can be regained. As Nye (2008) conceptualizes soft power as attraction through cultural affinity, Trump's playlists illustrate this attraction through sound. They seduce the audience into a worldview through familiarity, mood, and rhythm—not through argument, but affect. The discussion has emphasized how energy and acousticness act as political functions: energy provides emotional activation, acousticness offers a sense of authenticity. Together, they generate an aesthetic coherence aligned with the ideology of restoration. As Bonikowski (2017) argues, populism mobilizes collective resentment through moralized narratives of loss. Music activates and amplifies this sentiment, offering not only catharsis but identification.

Moreover, the performative and spatial aspects of music transform rallies into rituals of belonging. Drawing on Álvarez's (2022) notion of embodied choreographies, the study highlights how sound organizes not just feeling but movement. Audiences do not only hear music—they enact it. They clap, chant, sway, and synchronize their emotional responses, thereby physically inscribing the political narrative into their experience. In this context, music is not peripheral—it is central to the affective machinery of populism. It functions as a mnemonic device, a mobilizing force, and a boundary marker between in-group and out-group. It turns political communication into an immersive emotional environment. As Cusick (2020) notes, sound can discipline affect. In Trump's rallies, this discipline takes the form of mood management, aesthetic repetition, and the ritualization of nostalgia.

Sound is not ancillary to political expression—it is one of its most powerful architectures. This study reveals how curated musical environments shape the emotional textures of populism, orchestrating moods that transcend speech and image. Campaign playlists, far from being incidental, serve as emotional scripts that activate memory, forge affective unity, and mobilize identity. In the case of Trump's rallies, music operates as a political technology of nostalgia. These playlists assemble a repertoire of grievance, triumph, and restoration, channeling affect through familiar melodies that encode longing for a mythologized past. The songs do not simply accompany political messages; they help construct them, weaving sonic memory into emotional momentum. The repetition of these soundscapes sustains their political charge. "The good old days" endure not because they return, but because they are sonically resurrected—again and again—until they become part of the felt experience of belonging. These are not just anthems; they are instruments of affective alignment. To fully grasp the emotional power of populism, scholars must listen. Comparative analyses of populist soundtracks across regions, genres, and ideologies would further illuminate how music becomes a medium through which political emotions are shaped, amplified, and circulated in the contemporary media landscape.

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ARTICLE

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¿ES CUBA UN PAÍS DE IMPLOSIÓN DEMOGRÁFICA EN LA ÉPOCA POSTCOVID?

IS CUBA A COUNTRY OF DEMOGRAPHIC IMPLOSION IN THE POST-COVID ERA?

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Resumen

Este artículo aborda el fenómeno de implosión demográfica en Cuba a través de la explicación del movimiento decreciente en su población durante el periodo que media entre el año 2016 y el 2024, con énfasis en el intervalo posterior al colapso sanitario provocado por el impacto del coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). Es una propuesta que utiliza la estimación de las tasas de saldos o de comportamiento neto de hechos vitales (natural o migratorio), como miembros de la ecuación compensadora o del balance demográfico, para contrastar aquellos factores que se hallan detrás de la disminución poblacional. Los resultados son conmovedores cuando se verifica una caída estrepitosa del 13% en el número de habitantes a partir del año 2021 por medio del aumento de las defunciones y principalmente, por la expansión o aceleración inmediata de la emigración externa. Ello se acompaña de un deterioro marcado de su trasfondo socioeconómico y permite aseverar sobre la ocurrencia de un severo proceso de implosión en lo que respecta a los habitantes de su sociedad.

Palabras clave

implosión; decrecimiento demográfico; Cuba; saldo natural y migratorio.

Abstract

This article investigates the presence of the demographic implosion phenomenon in Cuba by explaining the downward movement of its population during the period between 2016 and 2024, with an emphasis on the period following the health collapse caused by the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2). This proposal uses the estimation of balance rates or the net behavior of vital events (natural or migratory) as components of the compensating equation or demographic balance, to contrast the factors behind this population decline. The results are shocking when verifying the precipitous drop in the number of inhabitants starting in 2021 due to the increase in deaths and, mainly, due to the immediate acceleration of migration. This is accompanied by a marked deterioration in its socioeconomic background and allows us to assert the occurrence of a severe implosion process regarding the inhabitants of its society.

Keywords
implosion; demographic decrease; Cuba; natural and migratory balance

1. INTRODUCTION

En el campo de grandes logros sociodemográficos, Cuba elevaba sentimientos de orgullo y satisfacción desde el año 1978, cuando experimentaba una contracción a menos de dos hijos por mujer en su tasa global de fecundidad. Lo que evidencia este refinado indicador en materia de conducta reproductiva, no fue sino la culminación de un veloz y corto *Baby Boom* o *explosión de nacimientos*, que en ausencia de desarrollo económico, no solo conseguía contraer su capacidad reproductiva al nivel similar al que mostraban solo los países más industrializados de esa época, sino también, reflejaba un régimen social cuyos derechos reproductivos se ejercían a partir del pleno acceso al aborto y el uso masivo de métodos anticonceptivos (Rodriguez & Albizu-Campos, 2015).

Desde entonces, la dilatación palpable que había experimentado su pirámide por edades durante la década de los sesenta en la centuria XX —consecuencia de grandes volúmenes de nacimientos en esa breve explosión demográfica—, ha transitado hacia las edades más envejecidas. De hecho, los efectivos que integran su cohorte de nacimientos superan hoy los sesenta años y sus descendientes, han optado por reducir el número de hijos condicionando no solo una ralentización en la velocidad con que crecía la población, sino también, el alcance de un movimiento reductor que aparece por primera vez en el año 2006 y que, al parecer, ha sido irreversible desde el 2017. Así, la configuración de un escenario poblacional muy singular caracterizado por una temprana, acelerada, homogénea y completa transición demográfica en ausencia de desarrollo económico (Rodriguez & Albizu-Campos, 2015), hace inscribir a este país, en un contexto de estancamiento y/o retroceso previsible en lo que se refiere a su dinámica demográfica.

Sin embargo, sería absurdo considerar el caso poblacional cubano como un fenómeno inédito en el 2023. Una mirada al interior de las estadísticas divulgadas por el Banco Mundial ha permitido localizar en algunos países, tasas medias anuales de crecimientos negativas, como rasgo demográfico más sobresaliente. Se trata de un conjunto de naciones que no parecieran mostrar relaciones aparentes, pero que han podido ser agrupadas de acuerdo con aquellas características geográficas similares o de localización espacial próximas entre sí. En una primera agrupación se halla Alemania (-0,6%), Rusia (-0.3), y repúblicas exsocialistas de

Europa del este, cuyas cotas se ubican por debajo -2 %, exceptuando Ucrania que, inmensa en la guerra como situación muy excepcional y de adversidad, asiste a un valor elevado de -8,4%. En el segundo grupo, se han colocado dos países mediterráneos Grecia (-0,3%) e Italia (-0,0%), mientras que otros dos países más desarrollados de Asia, como China (-0,1%) y Japón (-0,5%) contrastan con un particular conglomerado de varias islas que integran naciones muy pequeñas localizadas en distintos océanos; para conformar otros dos agrupamientos diferenciados. Por último, destaca el caso de tres países que no han podido ser agrupados. Se trata de Nepal (-0,1%) con una fecundidad muy baja y una galopante migración externa, así como Uruguay (-0,1%) que, al igual que Cuba (-3,57%), son los contextos de más agudo proceso de envejecimiento en su estructura por edades para el continente de las Américas (Banco Mundial, 2025).

De frente a estos desiguales grupos, pero marcadores todos del mismo movimiento, ha sido muy inquietante el conocimiento sobre esa disminución poblacional tan marcada que tiene lugar hoy en el caso cubano y, sobre todo, ha quedado pendiente el análisis de su comportamiento en el contexto postcovid. La crisis sanitaria, el alarmante deterioro constante en las condiciones de vida y la severa contracción económica después del 2020, se ha visto expresado en una capacidad cada vez más reducida del estado cubano para proveer insumos básicos a la población, así como la pérdida de la mayoría de fuentes de ingresos de capitales (Hidalgo, 2022) e incluso, el colapso generalizado de la totalidad de la infraestructura energética y productiva (Colome, 2024); sin que todavía exista un posicionamiento sobre cuál ha sido el movimiento en cada componente de la ecuación compensadora o balance del crecimiento de la población.

Precisamente, la búsqueda de respuesta a estas incógnitas implica reconocer y utilizar a la perspectiva de la implosión demográfica como un enfoque de generalización y sistematización en el proceso de declive del número de habitantes a lo largo del tiempo, especialmente en la fase final de la transición demográfica y además, como un paradigma que permite explicar el conjunto de condiciones muy particulares en las que se establecen vínculos entre los cambios socioeconómicos y los cambios demográficos (Diaz, 2024). Todo ello a fin de coadyuvar una comprensión profunda de ese conjunto de problemáticas y retos sociodemográficos de gran alcance que, de continuar actuando, ha de conllevar a la infrapoblación en su sociedad.

2. CONSIDERACIONES CONCEPTUALES, BREVES ASPECTOS METODOLÓGICOS Y FUENTES DE INFORMACIÓN DE DATOS PARA EL ESTUDIO DE LA IMPLOSIÓN DEMOGRÁFICA EN CUBA.

La implosión demográfica es un enfoque analítico o un término utilizado para describir y explicar fenómenos específicos relacionados con la disminución o contracción de las poblaciones. Su fundamento conceptual responde al debate sobre la interrelación entre aquellas sociedades que han completado su transición demográfica, se habría extinguido el progresismo aritmético de habitantes y luego, con el descenso, es posible verificarse hasta el infausto proceso de exterminio humano (Bourgeois-Pichat, 1998); (Cozzani, 2006). Esta lógica demográfica se opone a la tradicional y muy abordada fase del crecimiento explosivo de la población tras la modernización, urbanización y la producción de bienes y servicios de la sociedad mundial, aun cuando la mayoría de los países, todavía poseen suficiente reemplazo generacional que, a su vez, garantiza ritmos crecientes en sus poblaciones y aportan cuantiosas reservas de efectivos demográficos a la humanidad. En contraste la preocupación histórica por la superpoblación representa un cambio de paradigma y supone un escenario catastrofista donde abundan los vacíos demográficos como resultado de la caída del número de nacimientos, el creciente envejecimiento de las sociedades o el auge de las migraciones (Diaz, 2024).

Sin embargo, se ha comenzado a observar que este régimen demográfico pudiera llegar su final a partir de una velocidad de crecimiento cada vez menor y es entonces cuando comienza a configurarse una proximidad al crecimiento nulo y luego, una caída de las cifras de población atribuible exclusivamente a la conducta humana, ya bien sea por la acción contraída de la natalidad o de la mortalidad infantil, al tiempo que se produce un ligero repunte de la mortalidad general, un aumento de la edad media de la población, o también una prolongación de la esperanza media de vida (Diaz, 2024). Por lo tanto, la implosión demográfica no es más que un estadio muy avanzado del cambio poblacional caracterizado por rescindidos ingresos y el predominio de egresos en las poblaciones humanas que se hace acompañar de un desbalance pronunciado en la estructura de edades a favor de las edades avanzadas de la vida o el proceso de envejecimiento demográfico (Ljunggren, 2024).

Como se ha comentado en la introducción, no son muy abundantes las sociedades portadoras de esta fase del crecimiento, tratándose de un fenómeno reciente y poco conocido e indagado por la Demografía y los Estudios de Población. Aun así, destaca sobremanera cuatro investigaciones que han conformado una bibliografía muy útil en torno a su debate y que se han presentado como antecedentes necesarios en la presente investigación.

En primer lugar, se trata del articulo *Du XXe au XXIe siècle: l´Europe et sa population après l´an 2000* que realiza un análisis demográfico sobre cómo la transición demográfica ha afectado a la población europea y enfatiza la importancia de la imaginación en la previsión demográfica a largo plazo, sugiriendo que las tendencias actuales podrían llevar a cambios significativos en la estructura poblacional de Europa (Bourgeois-Pichat, 1998). En segundo lugar, se consideran los aportes teóricos brindados por un artículo titulado: De la explosión a la implosión demográfica que ha sido publicado en la revista *Papeles de Población* por el investigador Manuel Ordorica Mellado. En este caso se trata de un nuevo análisis dedicado a todo el proceso de transición o evolución que conlleva a una población desde de un crecimiento acelerado hasta una disminución significativa de su tamaño (Ordorica, 1998).

Asimismo, María Rosa Cozzani destaca el cambio de preocupación de la sobrepoblación a la infrapoblación e incursiona en la temática a través del rol que ejercen las políticas demográficas y sus efectos sobre la población mundial (Cozzani, 2006). Por último, no se pueden dejar de mencionar los aportes interpretativos de Ramón Díaz Hernández en sus magistrales reflexiones a raíz de la publicación del libro El Planeta Vacío, de D. Bricker y J. Ibbitson. Su artículo titulado: Del pánico a la superpoblación a la implosión demográfica, advierte sobre las proyecciones de disminución de la población mundial a partir del horizonte 2050, debido a la baja en las tasas de natalidad (Diaz, 2024).

Ahora bien, los desafíos en una aproximación a esta temática, muy particular, para el caso cubano han estado relacionados con la naturaleza de los datos demográficos. Las fuentes de información de materiales estadísticos provenientes de la Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas e Información (ONEI) en La Habana; son escasas, adoptan definiciones que no reflejan verdaderamente el volumen real de la población como es el caso de la categoría *población efectiva* y, además, no manifiestan la forma en que han impactado las variables socioeconómicas a las de tipo demográficas. De esta manera, no ha sido posible el cálculo refinado de indicadores sociodemográficos al interior de cada una de las variables claves como es la mortalidad, fecundidad, migraciones y otros atributos.

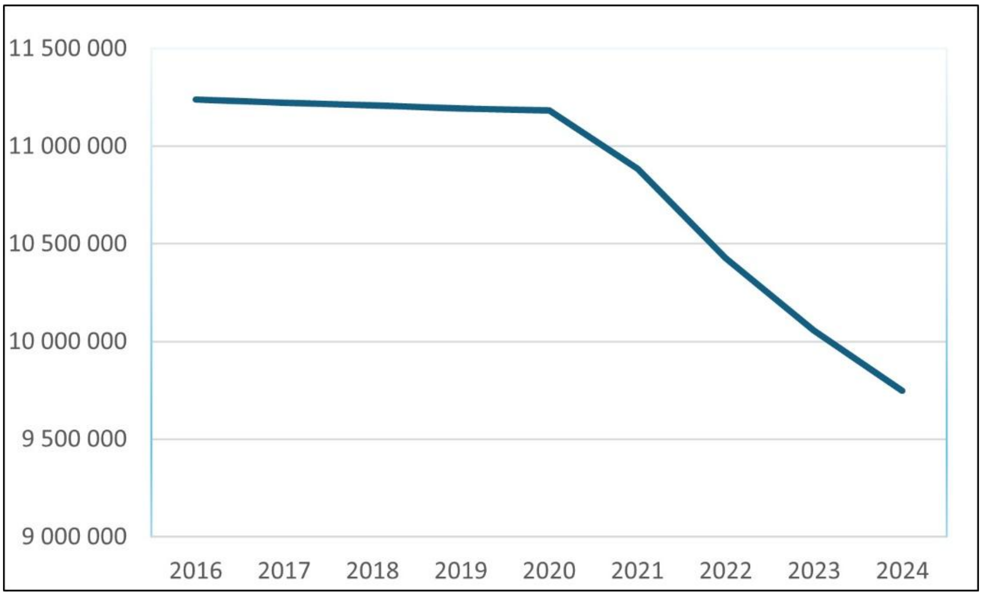
Empero, si es posible cierta disponibilidad de información bruta sobre las cuantías de registros de hechos vitales, así como las poblaciones medias de Cuba durante los años 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 y 2023, lo que ha permitido, apenas, posicionar el análisis estadístico descriptivo a partir de la estimación sobre las tasas de saldos o de comportamiento neto de estos componentes que compensan el movimiento de la población (ONEI, 2024). Tales componentes se subdividen, de un lado, de un miembro vegetativo que es determinado por las diferencias entre nacimientos versus defunciones, y por otra, el integrante mecánico o inducido, que es definido por la diferencia entre inmigración (entradas) versus emigración (salidas) con respecto al territorio nacional.

El balance que existe entre estos ingredientes y su cuantía estimada en el contexto matemático de una población en un momento final y en uno inicial, es lo que se reconoce como otra técnica, en este caso general de análisis demográfico, conocida como ecuación general o compensadora del crecimiento de la población. Dicha técnica permite exponer la influencia de cada uno de estos hechos demográficos en las circunstancias muy propias y recientes de una implosión en la población cubana.

3. BREVE ANÁLISIS DE LA DINÁMICA DEMOGRÁFICA RECIENTE EN LA POBLACIÓN CUBANA (2016-2024).

En el período 2016-2024 que cubre los últimos ocho años, disminuye sustancialmente la población cubana, al pasar de "11 239 224 habitantes" a unos "9 748 532 habitantes" en el año recién concluido. Ello representa una pérdida absoluta de casi un millón y medio de personas, exactamente "1 490 692 pobladores". Sin embargo, la trayectoria que siguen los valores decrecientes en la serie del número de habitantes describe un movimiento con diferentes grados de intensidad en el ritmo medio anual de ese decrecimiento.

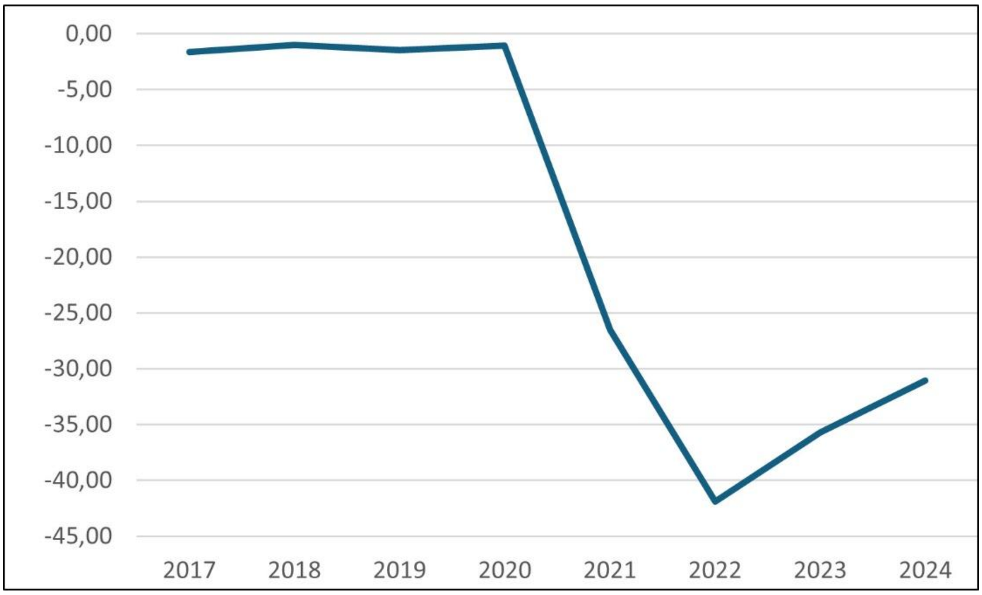
Figura 1.-Poblacion total en Cuba durante el periodo 2016-2024.



FUENTE: Elaborado por el autor a partir de datos tomados de (ONEI, 2024).

En los primeros cuatro años, se observa un descenso muy gradual e intrascendente, expresado en una tasa media anual de crecimiento negativa cuyas cotas no alcanzan a reducir a -2 habitante de cada mil hasta el año 2020. Sin embargo, el año calendario siguiente es un momento a partir del cual, se acelera súbitamente el declive, haciéndose muy palpable ese proceso de rápido incremento en la capacidad reductora. La declinación en la cota que marca el indicador alcanza los -26,5 por mil, logrando cuatriplicar el ritmo de decrecimiento con respecto al año anterior.

Figura 2.-Tasas medias anuales de crecimiento en Cuba (por mil). Periodo 2016-2024



FUENTE: Elaborado por el autor a partir de datos tomados de (ONEI, 2024)

Pero la evolución de este indicador advirtió un nuevo aumento en la velocidad con que pierde efectivos demográficos en el año siguiente. Así, el 2022 exhibe una tasa media anual de crecimiento de -41,90 por cada mil habitantes. Ello significa un incremento de 15,4‰ con respecto a la cota de decrecimiento mostrada en el año anterior y marca el punto crítico o punto de mínimo valor en la curva que describe la trayectoria de la velocidad de crecimiento en la población. Este valor, reviste notable importancia, no solo por la magnitud de tal desplome en la tasa media anual de crecimiento, sino además por el hecho, que no pareciera ser este un fenómeno temporal. Aun cuando se advierte nuevos progresos a partir de desaceleraciones en el 2023 y 2024 a cotas de -35,70 por mil y -31,05 por mil respectivamente, sigue siendo Cuba depositaria de un estado demográfico marcado por una aguda capacidad reductora en su población.

En términos de volúmenes, los déficits demográficos acumulados durante el intervalo de análisis 2016-2024, se estiman en un monto total de 57629 habitantes reducidos para el año 2020 y de "1 433 063" personas menos, al cierre del 2024. Es decir, partiendo de 2016 como momento inicial y por los siguientes cuatro años, el monto de disminución representa solo el 0,5% del volumen, mientras que al 2024 las pérdidas acumuladas habían alcanzado el 13,26% de la población. En fin, no es hasta el 2021 cuando se comienza el vertiginoso y significativo declive de la población en Cuba, perdiéndose más de la decimotercera parte existente de la población que existía al comienzo del periodo de análisis.

4. EL DECLIVE DEMOGRÁFICO RECIENTE DESDE LOS APORTES DEL SALDO VEGETATIVO Y MIGRATORIO COMO TÉRMINOS DE LA ECUACIÓN COMPENSADORA.

Considerando el movimiento de la población como un proceso de entradas y salidas, aún en el año 2019 el crecimiento natural era escasamente positivo con un valor de 636 habitantes finalmente como saldo de ese año calendario. Este valor se verifica en una cota muy estabilizada, positiva y cercana a cero de apenas 0,06‰. Ello da cuenta de un exiguo predominio de llegadas o aportes de efectivos a la población cubana por concepto de la acción de nacimientos como actos vitales todavía ligeramente mayoritarios en comparación a las defunciones. Por ende, desde ese primer momento del tiempo es la emigración (salidas por concepto inducido), aunque con un nivel muy bajo de apenas -1,50 migrantes por mil habitantes, el elemento conductor de esa exigua reducción demográfica.

Tabla 1.- Población total, defunciones, nacimientos, emigración e inmigración, así como saldos y tasas respectivas de la población de Cuba desde 2018 a 2023.

Año	Pob. total	Nacimientos (o, t)	Defunciones (o, t)	Saldo Natural	Tasa Saldo Natural (x1000)	Inmigración (o, t)	Emigración (o, t)	Saldo Migratorio	Tasa Saldo Migratorio (x1000)
2018	11209628	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2019	11193470	109716	109080	636	0.06	10651	27445	-16794	-1.50
2020	11181595	105038	112439	-7401	-0.66	59	233	-4474	-0.40
2021	10885341	99096	167675	-68579	-6.22	1018	228693	-227675	-20.63
2022	10428733	95403	120098	-24695	-2.32	2743	434656	-431913	-40.53
2023	10055968	90392	117739	-27347	-2.67	2502	347920	-345418	-33.72

FUENTE: Elaborado por el autor a partir de datos tomados de Indicadores demográficos por provincias y municipios. Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información, Cuba, años respectivos

Sin embargo, en el año 2020 la diferencia entre hechos biológicos invierte su signo, alcanzándose una cuantía de -7401 habitantes como saldo. Lo que nos muestra esta cifra no es, sino resultado de un incremento de 3359 defunciones más que el año anterior, al tiempo que los nacimientos exhiben un descenso de 4678 actos menos constatados en igual periodo calendario. De esta manera se produce el fin del crecimiento natural de la población en Cuba, las muertes siempre superan al número de nacimientos y se presenta, entonces el decrecimiento biológico como un rasgo reciente que caracteriza la dinámica de su población desde 2020 hasta la actualidad.

Además, este saldo natural es mayor al caso mecánico, que igualmente negativo sigue siendo marcador de salidas, de naturaleza, emigratorio, pero sobre cotas muy cercanas a cero y ligeramente inferiores, por ende, no son significativas en comparación con los aportes provenientes de ese diferencial biológico muy trascendental para ese momento del tiempo. Entonces, ha cambiado la lógica que dirige el movimiento reductor de la población y se presenta el componente vegetativo como aquel de mayor peso en el balance de su decrecimiento.

Luego, el 2021 puede considerarse un momento de decisiva desestabilización tanto del componente natural como aquel que es inducido en la ecuación que describe el crecimiento de la población. La tasa de saldo natural cae a una cota de -6,22‰, reflejo de un saldo de -68579 habitantes. Ello se halla vinculado a la gran diferencia que se produce entre ingresos menos egresos biológicos en la población. Del lado de las salidas es posible notar que la cifra de defunciones se incrementa a más de 167 mil, una cuantía tan elevada que deviene de un valor de 55 mil muertes más con respecto al año anterior y paralelamente del lado de las entradas, se registran apenas 5942 nacimientos menos. Por tanto, se puede afirmar que este es el año calendario donde las diferencias entre procesos vegetativos —m*uertes versus nacimientos*— marca las mayores pérdidas de población del periodo de análisis.

Este valor tan contraído en el indicador de la tasa de saldo natural puede atribuirse, sin dudas, al rotundo impacto que tuvo la expansión global del coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) y la consecuente difusión de la pandemia más letal de los últimos años. El deterioro de condiciones de salud en la población, que también, se hizo acompañar de un aislamiento y de una ruptura en las cadenas de suministros médicos, lograron configurar un escenario muy complejo que elevó el número de muertes en ese contexto de crisis epidemiológica ocasionada por el agente viral (Mesa-Lago, 2020). Adviértase que, en ese mismo año, Cuba se presentó como uno de los ejemplos más aterradores y epidemiológicamente fracasado del conjunto de sociedades virtualmente quebrantadas por la propagación de la pandemia. Este país reportó en el intervalo acumulado desde marzo del 2020 hasta junio del 2022 un total de 1105461 contagiados, de los cuales se produjeron 8529 muertes, lo que significa solo el 0,77% (OPS, 2022) de los montantes netos de habitantes infectados que han sido registrados en las fuentes de información continuas que, como expresión poco refinada según la estadística ofrecida por las instituciones del gobierno cubano, no refleja verdaderamente el nivel de morbilidad y mortalidad que ha acontecido en ese país. Sin embargo, lo cierto es que el excepcional estadio sanitario si fue capaz de desestabilizar el equilibrio y el curso lógico del desarrollo de la sociedad, imponiéndose políticas de aislamiento social y un riguroso encierro domiciliario que se acompañaron de un conjunto de consecuencias que excedieron la capacidad de los procedimientos de decisión y gestión política para aminorarlos. Las dificultades fueron tan severas y de tanto impacto, que reunieron inéditamente: rápidos y desorganizados enterramientos de cadáveres, incapacidad para ofrecer una información certera de los decesos según causas de muertes, la saturación y fragilidad de los servicios de salud públicos, así como la ineficacia en los sistemas de gestión de riesgos y en los procesos de administración en los recursos sanitarios disponibles de esta época.

Sin embargo, esta amenaza viral pareciera disminuir sus aportes dentro del conjunto de saldos naturales en los años sucesivos. En el 2022 y 2023, este indicador evidencia cierto progreso a cotas que alcanzan -2,32‰ y -2,67‰ respetivamente. Aunque siguen siendo negativos, comparativamente al año 2021, exhiben nuevos niveles de saldo que expresan menor cuantía de habitantes perdidos por este concepto. Y ello no es, sino el logro de una mayor capacidad de sobrevivencia de la población como componente que desempeñó un papel importante en la configuración de tal progreso biológico frente a esa tendencia continua a la reducción en la natalidad.

Nótese una continuidad en la contracción de los natalicios desde niveles de 99096 actos vitales en el 2019 hasta un monto de 90392 en el 2023, lo que representa una disminución de su peso relativo que alcanza un aproximado del 8%. Es decir, existe una continuidad en el movimiento propio de la fecundidad cubana del pasado y no parece ser un ejercicio de ajuste temporal que ha limitado estrategias reproductivas en las parejas cubanas en ese momento de crisis. La conducta reproductiva de Cuba se ha mantenido por más cuarenta años sin reemplazo generacional, con un nivel muy descendido y cada vez, con menores reservas de población femenina en edades fértiles por esa preferencia al limitado número de hijos que ha tenido la mujer cubana desde el siglo XX (Rodriguez & Albizu-Campos, 2015).

Por tanto, el avance en el saldo biológico de estos dos últimos años se debe atribuir, precisamente, a esa influencia que ejerce el número de fallecimientos. En el 2022 y 2023 se comprueba sendas reducciones de 47577 y 49936 actos vitales "*últimos*" en la población con respecto a las cifras constatadas en el año 2021. No obstante, se evidencian cuantías de fallecimientos todavía muy altas, cuyos montantes absolutos alcanzan 120098 y 117739 respectivamente y quizá, corresponden con ese estadio muy avanzado en la transición demográfica.

Ahora bien, si se compara este crecimiento natural con el término migratorio, se aprecian contribuciones al desequilibrio poblacional a partir de reducciones netas de la población por medio de ambos componentes. Es decir, el sentido del movimiento que experimentaron ambos integrantes de la ecuación compensadora en periodo posterior a la pandemia coincidió con el signo negativo y de esta manera exhibe cuanto pesan los componentes de salidas de la población sin importar al término de la ecuación al que pertenecen. Sin embargo, el grado o magnitud de tales salidas está muy bien delimitado por esos aportes que realizan cada termino en la configuración del desbalance total del crecimiento interno: Mientras las tasas de saldo vegetativo se sitúan en el orden de las unidades, el saldo migratorio alcanza hasta un nivel que corresponde al orden de las decenas.

Entonces, en lo adelante no habrá dudas que ese decrecimiento de la población cubana es claramente conducido por el término migratorio. Retomando del año 2021 la tasa de saldo para este componente indica cuantiosas fugas de población cuando alcanza los -20,63 habitantes de cada mil. Ello corresponde a un saldo total negativo cuyo nivel muy elevado alcanza los -227675 pobladores. Por tanto, no solo supera en -14,41‰ a la reducción que marca esa tasa de saldo biológico en ese año, sino también exhibe una diferencia que reduce 20 habitantes de cada mil más que el año anterior cuando la tasa de saldo migratorio fue solo de apenas 0,40‰. Es de destacar que en los dos años anteriores el valor del saldo migratorio positivo fue muy reducido e insignificante por el hecho que, durante el impacto del coronavirus, Cuba como el resto de las naciones, había restringido las salidas y entradas al territorio nacional, instaurándose una política de aislamiento y confinamiento en la población.

Pero esta tendencia de flujos emigratorios abundantes para momentos posteriores a la crisis pandémica se refuerza en el 2022, cuando el saldo por este concepto duplica su nivel constatando y marca un diferencial entre inmigración y emigración de -431913 habitantes. Ello representa un incremento de su valor relativo en un 50%. Es decir, este indicador duplica el nivel en el contexto de cotas negativas y ahora existen -40 habitantes finalmente como saldo. Lo que corrobora una vez más, que es la migración el factor conductor de esa capacidad reductora de la población cubana. Incluso, obsérvese en la misma tabla anterior, que aun cuando sus cotas tienen una caída hasta el -33‰ en el 2023, y que, por tanto, quedan finalmente como saldo un total de -345418 habitantes por cada mil; todavía es portador, en este momento más reciente, de un valor elevado y persistente de salidas en el componente migratorio.

Aun así, del lado biológico todavía en el 2023 se acusaba un nivel muy inferior que era excedido en 31,05‰ con respecto al gran nivel que expresaba el saldo inducido para ese mismo momento. De repetida cuenta en este último año se mantiene un enorme flujo de migrantes hacia el exterior y ello da cuenta, indefectiblemente, que los cubanos continúan encontrando en el trazado de estrategias migratorias, un mecanismo de escape frente a la contracción económica, fragilidad social y ese perenne estado de contingencia que después de la pandemia, no parece acabar en el caso cubano.

La fuerza que han ejercido procesos de recesión económica global a partir de este momento (todavía no superada en el caso cubano) y sus efectos consiguientes sobre las restricciones de viajes, los ingresos muy bajos por un turismo escaso, el aumento del precio de las importaciones y la inestabilidad de las exportaciones, cuya tendencia decreciente hasta un nivel muy bajo en los productos tangibles como níquel, desechos de metales, tabaco, azúcar y bebidas (Hidalgo, 2022); condicionaron un escenario de enorme colapso financiero que imposibilitó la adquisición y/o disponibilidad de capitales tanto para la importación de combustibles, alimentos e insumos de cualquier índole.

La magnitud indivisible entre la eliminación de subsidios en los alimentos que se mantienen solo para algunos productos de la canasta básica y otros destinados a niños, embarazadas y dietas médicas, unido a un contexto en el que hizo más heterogéneo la capacidad de ingreso de la población; imposibilitan un nivel, apenas *básico o de sobrevivencia*, en el acceso de sus habitantes a productos alimenticios que son considerados indispensables (Hidalgo, 2022). Asimismo, la imposibilidad de estado en la distribución de otros bienes y servicios como medicamentos, transportación pública, servicios de electricidad, agua potable y otros de carácter muy necesarios, se han acompañado de un deterioro de la infraestructura existente para configurar un escenario muy adverso de precariedad económica, social y urbana.

Lo cierto es que, aunque la prolongación del estadio sanitario por el impacto del coronavirus fue coyuntural en el tiempo; no se retornó ni tan siquiera a las condiciones económicas y sociales previas antes de la crisis, sino por el contrario, se configuró un persistente conjunto de restricciones, debilidades y limitaciones en la sociedad cubana que han afectado, de forma profunda, la calidad de la supervivencia, el bienestar y la permanencia de la propia población. De esta manera, lo ocurrido en términos de relaciones impacto viral-crisis económica-condiciones de vida ha acentuado la impronta al descenso o el vaciado de su sistema demográfico, por esa fuerza que ha tenido la emigración como ningún otro componente del crecimiento de la población.

5. A MODO DE CONCLUSIÓN: ¿FINALMENTE, ES CUBA UN ESCENARIO DE IMPLOSIÓN DEMOGRÁFICA?

No hay dudas que la nación cubana lleva contrayendo abruptamente el número de habitantes en los últimos ocho años desde un comportamiento persistente de saldos negativos en ambos componentes del crecimiento de la población, así como la observación de un trasfondo socioeconómico que muestra signos de recesión perenne y que no pareciera mostrar recuperación. En adición, aunque el fenómeno reductor ya era verificado antes del primer caso detectado con coronavirus, no fue hasta el estallido de la pandemia que se aceleró y agudizó, descontroladamente, esa tendencia propia al declive. Incluso la reacción fue inmediata, súbita y radical en las variaciones negativas de los movimientos vegetativos e inducidos en la población.

Sin embargo, es verificado con mayor fuerza el caso de la migración, pues se convirtió en el mecanismo conductor del despoblamiento a partir de tasas de saldos negativos que descendieron como ningún otro hecho vital, logrando duplicar su nivel en el 2022 que ya era considerado muy alto en el 2021 e incluso mantener un estado elevado hasta la actualidad. Este hecho confirma esa tendencia de la población a continuar ampliando sus acciones migratorias como parte de reajustes de la población frente al difícil momento socioeconómico que atraviesa.

En contraste, destaca el componente natural cuando sitúa a los nacimientos como el ingrediente de más prolongada tendencia a la contracción, evidente latencia frente a la crisis, sin ningún signo de retroceso en su tendencia menguante y dando cuenta de un nivel tan bajo que incapaz de superar el número de muertes y, por ende, el resultado es la supresión sistemática de habitantes a partir del 2020. De esta manera, habría que calcular indicadores muy refinados para fecundidad a fin de poder observar si fue el colapso pandémico un mecanismo de sus variaciones y así, obtener una comprensión íntegra de su comportamiento. Pero en este mismo término de la ecuación compensadora se le presta notable importancia a los fallecimientos como acontecimientos que aumentan de forma apresurada, mantienen un alto nivel y refieren una respuesta de ajuste inmediato muy asociado a la secuela de adversidad pandémica. Quizá, por tratarse de afectaciones a la salud que se hallan ligadas a la exposición a un agente biológico (SARS-CoV-2), se produce un agravamiento de las causas y también de las consecuencias, en el conjunto de sinergias que se establecen entre la enfermedad, una mayor propensión en su población a la morbilidad por el gran número de población envejecida y finalmente, la muerte.

En fin, todo ello hace apuntar la configuración de un escenario adverso que, cada vez más, redundara en un menor tamaño de su población, debido al ritmo elevado en su nivel de despoblamiento. Este fenómeno hace aseverar la ocurrencia de una implosión demográfica y se puede considerar de gran magnitud cuando en apenas en un breve intervalo de 8 años se ha perdido más de la décimo tercera parte, lo que expresa el vertiginoso desplome en el número de habitantes. Incluso, en términos perspectivos muy pesimistas, de continuar esta misma propensión de forma ininterrumpida hacia el futuro, no queda otro escenario catastrófico que aquel determinado por el exterminio del poblamiento para un lapsus no más de noventa años.

Los retos son colosales, tanto en materia sociodemográfica como en aquellos condicionamientos internos. Se sabe que las fuerzas demográficas son claramente dependientes de las condiciones o eventos que tienen lugar en la sociedad y su complejidad. Dicho de otra manera, los comportamientos de la población son elementos causales del desarrollo social, económico y territorial, al tiempo que en sí mismos son estructurados e intervenidos por el resto de los componentes del desarrollo que los contiene. Por ende, solo el trazado de estrategias sistémicas que logren verdaderas soluciones de los conflictos y restricciones de esa crisis en la que Cuba está inmersa, pudieran iniciar la corrección de esas tendencias adversas en su población.

En cualquier caso, lo cierto que el empleo de tasas medias anuales de crecimiento, así como aquellas calculadas para los saldos natural y migratorio, constituyen medidas sociodemográficas suficientes para aseverar que, efectivamente, la implosión estaría provocando efectos indeseados y/o desajustes en el sistema demográfico y su trasfondo socioeconómico. Es entonces, cuando se arriba a un proceso dinámico y continuo, en el que las conclusiones aquí descritas, no son un punto final, sino un paso intermedio que abre nuevas preguntas y perspectivas para indagar en futuras investigaciones.

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ARTICLE

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EVOLVING IDENTITY IN THE FACE OF IMPERIALISM AND COLONIALISM: THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL ISLAM

LA EVOLUCIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD FRENTE AL IMPERIALISMO Y EL COLONIALISMO: EL SURGIMIENTO Y DESARROLLO DEL ISLAM POLÍTICO

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Abstract

This paper applies the Constructivist approach to analyse the role of identity in Islamism, or political Islam, in order to complement and, in some cases, problematise the theories that have sought to explain that ideology. It focuses on mainstream Islamism in the Sunni Arab world and references the work of prominent scholars and theorists to illustrate their thought. The core of the paper is divided into five sections: The first considers the genesis of Islamism as a response to the ontological threat posed by the West. The second explains how Islamists relate to an idealised past which they also see as a model for the future. The third section argues that the project to create an Islamic state reflects a desire to produce a non-secular modernity. The fourth dwells on the reinvention of tradition by Islamist thinkers to legitimise their interpretation of Islam and their wide-reaching programme of social transformation. The fifth and last section discusses how Islamists "Other" members of the community who are reluctant to embrace their project.

Keywords

Islamism, Ontological security, Deterministic historism, Islamic state, Multiple modernities, Secularisation

1. INTRODUCTION

The term Islamism, or political Islam, designates a broad ideology based on the belief that Islam provides a comprehensive social, political and economic model. Beyond that core belief, Islamists do not agree on a blueprint for that model nor on the means to make it a reality. On the extremist fringe, groups like al-Qaeda and Islamic State conduct violent jihad to install a universal caliphate. For their part, mainstream Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood shun violence and work within the boundaries of modern nation-states, combining grassroots activism, welfare provision and electoral politics[1].

Islamists claim that theirs is the correct interpretation of Islam, despite the diversity in the practice of Islam across different periods and geographies and the plurality of projects within the Islamist movement itself. This suggests that Islamism is, in reality, a set of related interpretations of Islam which arose from particular circumstances. Indeed, Islamists identify as forerunners a number of figures who lived in the late XIX and early XX centuries[2].

This paper seeks to understand Islamism by delving into the life and work of those key thinkers in order to explore how Islamist identity emerged and developed. It starts off in the late XIX century, when Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ʿAbduh set out to reform Islam to resist European cultural and military encroachment, but also to embrace European scientific and political advancements. Their groundbreaking efforts galvanised subsequent generations of Muslim intellectuals.

Islamism itself appeared in the first decades of the XX century. Much of the Muslim world was then under colonial rule, its territories divided into proto-states that would need to evolve under colonial stewardship to be regarded as worthy members of the Western-dominated international order. It was then that Rashid Rida theorised the Islamic state as a mirror-image of the modern nation-state but with an Islamic twist: he identified religion, not nationality, as the appropriate source of identity and legitimacy.

Rida had a strong influence on Hasan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood who turned Islamism into a transnational mass movement. Two of the organisation's thinkers are among the most famous Muslim intellectuals of the last century: Sayyid Qutb developed the revolutionary potential of Islam and went on to inspire the international Jihadist movement[3]. For his part, Yusuf al-Qaradawi put forward the notion of *wasatiyya* ("moderation", or "leniency"), which aimed at reaching a balance between Islam's eternal principles and the need to adapt to different periods and geographies[4].

For decades Islamism had to compete with the nationalist and leftist ideologies that were popular during the anticolonial struggle and the post-independence period. However, the

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[1] With some exceptions. In the 1930s and 1940s the Muslim Brotherhood resorted to assassinations and terrorist attacks against individuals and groups it considered legitimate targets, such as British soldiers, Egyptian public figures and the Jewish community in Egypt. More recently, al-Qaradawi repeatedly expressed support for "martyrdom operations" against Israelis, reasoning that Israel is a militarised state in which there are no civilians (al-Qaradawi on Al-Jazeera 2004a, 2004b).

[2] In this paper the term "Muslim world" is used to refer to regions of the globe where the majority of the population identify as followers of Islam.

[3] In spite of this radical reputation, Qutb did not represent a radical substantial departure from al-Banna's, as we have argued elsewhere (Work by the author), and he continues to be praised by Brotherhood figures like al-Qaradawi (see below).

[4] For more on al-Qaradawi's thought beyond the contents of this paper, see Work by the author, Work by the author.

postcolonial state did not live up to its development promises and was unable to defeat Israel and restore the rights of the Palestinians. Those failures contributed to the revival of Islamism, which has become the dominant narrative to articulate feelings of discontent among Muslims.

Islamism has attracted considerable scholarly attention and different explanations have been put forward to explain for its rise and success. They have mostly focused on historical, political and socioeconomic factors, but over the last three decades the phenomenon has also been approached from a Constructivist perspective. The present paper follows in this trend and seeks to analyse Islamism as an identitarian response to the often-traumatic historical events the Muslim world has lived over the past century and a half.

2. EXPLAINING ISLAMISM

There are various competing or complementary explanations to account for the rise of Islamism. Western such as Samuel Huntington, Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes assert that Islam is intrinsically political due to its beginnings: Muhammad was both a prophet and the founder of a state. The Islamists themselves agree; according to the Muslim Brotherhood's foremost contemporary scholar, Yusuf al-Qaradawi: "True Islam – as formulated by God – can only be political" (al-Qaradawi, n.d.1). However, this has been questioned by non-Islamist Muslims and by academics. For instance, Talal Asad argues that it is based on an anachronistic projection of the modern categories of "religion" and "state" by XIX-century Orientalists. He points out that the fact that it has been embraced by contemporary Islamists "does not make it *essential to Islam*" (Asad 1997: 190-91, emphasis in the original).

Other authors emphasise the politico-historical context in which Islamism appeared. Charismatic precursor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani was known for his denunciation of British colonialism. Hasan al-Banna claimed that he had been inspired to establish the Muslim Brotherhood while he was a teacher in Ismailia, site of a large British garrison (al-Banna 2012: 82-83). Leading Muslim Brother Sayyid Qutb was radicalised in the prisons of Gamal Abdel Nasser's secularist regime. Shortly afterwards, the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War was widely interpreted as a divine punishment against the postcolonial secular state[5]. As Fattah and Fierke have contended (2009), widespread feelings of injustice, humiliation and betrayal have furthered the success of Islamism.

Some scholars highlight socioeconomic dynamics. In the 1950s Saudi Arabia started financing Islamist groups to offset the ascendancy of leftist forces. The 1970s oil boom attracted to the Gulf large numbers of foreign workers who were influenced by its ultraconservative ethos. Concurrently, resource-poor countries saw rapidly expanding populations flocking to urban areas and experiencing overcrowding, poor employment prospects and a lack of basic services. Islamist organisations stepped in, setting up dispensaries, schools, food banks, etc. and framing popular discontent in politico-religious

[5] Gamal Abdel Nasser himself characterised the defeat as a lesson sent by God (Zeghal 1999: 381).

terms. Around the same time, Anwar al-Sadat decided on the geopolitical realignment of Egypt and leaned on the Islamists to undermine his Nasserist rivals (Gerges 2018, esp. chapter 11)[6]. This combination of factors led to the proliferation of radical Islamist factions (Kepel 1985) as well as to a conspicuous re-Islamisation of society (Wickham 2002).

Beyond those traditional explanations, some scholars have expanded the Constructivist research agenda to Islamism. Adamson (2005) has traced the patterns of norm diffusion and norm promotion by Western-style and Islamist NGOs in Central Asia after the end of the Cold War. Pfeifer (2018) has looked into the alleged Islamist challenge to the world order, comparing the West's discourse on sovereignty to that of Hezbollah's. Bettiza and Dionigi (2014) have studied how the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has lobbied the United Nations to try to implement an international normative agenda informed by Islam, with mixed results: It accomplished the institutionalisation of inter-civilisational dialogue but failed to outlaw the defamation of religion.

For the sake of exhaustiveness, and given that a small extremist fringe within Islamism advocates violent jihad, it should be mentioned that since 9/11 there have been several studies looking at "Islamic" terrorism from a Constructivist perspective. They have aimed at problematising the dominant interpretation of jihadi terrorism (Krishnaswamy 2012) or at exploring how the figure of the terrorist has been constructed in Western discourse (for a survey of that research, see Hülsse & Spencer 2008).

This paper aims at contributing to that growing body of scholarship by applying Constructivism to the analysis of Islamism. It focuses on the Sunni Arab world due to space constraints but also to the outsized weight of the region across the Muslim world and beyond. The authors studied here have been widely translated and read in other Muslim-majority countries and there has been regular contact between Islamists across regions and branches of Islam. Therefore, much of what is said of Arab Sunni Islamism can be extended to non-Arab and non-Sunni varieties of political Islam[7].

3. A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS OF ISLAMISM

There is always an internal-external dynamic to identity formation. Communal identity is fluid and shaped by the behaviour of significant others, i.e. actors with whom the community in question has some kind of power and/or dependency relationship. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said posited that the Christian West defined itself in opposition to the Islamic "Orient", a once threatening entity eventually colonised by Western armies and essentialised by Western scholars as decadent, hedonistic, irrational… (Said 1978). More

[6] This coincided with a number of high-profile former socialist intellectuals turning to Islamism, e.g. Hasan Hanafi, Tariq al-Bishri, 'Adil Husayn, Khalid Muhammad Khalid (Hatina 2000: 52). Another example if Muhammad 'Imara, whose works are cited in this paper.

[7] An example would be the ideological influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Work by the author).

recently, Zehfuss (2002), Uemura (2013) and Gabilondo (2016) have explored the role of significant others in the identities of the Federal Republic of Germany, the People's Republic of China and the Basque region, respectively.

Unsurprisingly, the XIX-century Muslim world also construed the West as its significant other. Faced by the military challenge posed by Western powers, Muslim rulers embarked on comprehensive processes of reform – e.g. the Ottoman *Tanzimat* – to modernise the armed forces, the civil service, the administration of justice, the economic and financial sectors, infrastructures… They borrowed heavily from Western banks and gradually fell under the control of foreign creditors. Their states were integrated into the world economy, mainly as providers of raw materials and captive markets. A prominent example was Egypt: Cotton was introduced in the 1820s and within a century it represented over 90 percent of the country's total value of exports (Toledano 1998).

Western-style public schools were set up to provide the knowledge and skills demanded by the expanding state bureaucracies. Western missions were allowed to establish schools to educate – and evangelise – Eastern Christians and attracted increasing numbers of non-Christian pupils. A social cleavage emerged between a minority with the financial and educational resources to take advantage of the new opportunities and a majority who feared for their economic prospects and social status: landless peasants forced to move to the cities, artisans undercut but cheap foreign goods, ulema deprived of their teaching and judicial positions… The rapid pace of change felt destabilising and led to uncertainty, confusion and anxiety. Many felt threatened in their "ontological security", i.e. the sense of stability in their collective self-understanding and self-esteem (Giddens, 1991)[8].

3.1. *Ontological insecurity and evolving identities*

Those emotions are tangible in some of the articles written by Muhammad 'Abduh during the 'Urabi revolt (1879-82), a popular nationalist movement against both British and French interference and the Ottoman elites that ruled Egypt. A member of the emerging indigenous intelligentsia, 'Abduh was an inquisitive and talented young man who had managed to transcend his peasant origins and the rather limited education he had received at al-Azhar. Over the previous decade he had fallen under the sway of Iranian revolutionary scholar Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who encouraged his followers to become involved in politics and write in the bourgeoning Egyptian print media. By the time of the 'Urbai revolt al-Afghani had been expelled for his subversive activities, but 'Abduh had managed to be appointed editor of *Al-Waqa'i' al-Misriyya*, Egypt's official gazette.

An advocate of reform, 'Abduh believed that Muslims should learn from the West in the fields of science and technology as well as political organisation and he vocally supported

[8] For examples of the application of Giddens's concept of "ontological security" in International Relations see Kinnvall (2004), Zarakol (2010), Croft (2012), Mitzen (2018).

constitutional government for Egypt. Nonetheless, he worried that traditional institutions were being eroded without being replaced by anything steady and felt that Egyptians did not respect Western-inspired laws (ʿAbduh 1881a, 1881b). He favoured gradualism so that the people could assimilate the changes taking place and, given the importance of religion in Muslim societies, he insisted that those changes should be grounded on Islam:

> For to attempt reform by means of a culture or philosophy that is not religious in character, would require the erection of a new structure, for which neither materials nor workmen are available. If the religion of Muslims can work these ends and has their confidence, why seek for other means? (Cited in Adams 2000: 110)

When the British invaded Egypt with the pretext of restoring order, public figures associated to the ʿUrabi revolt were sent into exile and ʿAbduh moved to Beirut. In 1884 al-Afghani asked him to join him in Paris and together they launched *Al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqà* (The Firmest Bond), a weekly journal which appealed for Islamic unity in the face of Western colonialism – especially Britain's, due to the two men's personal experience. It also promoted Islamic reform, or rather the idea that Muslims should return to the truth of their religion, which urged them to pursue knowledge. The journal's circulation was hindered by its banning in the territories controlled by the British and it discontinued publication after only 18 issues, but it had considerable impact on the Muslim world in ensuing decades.

Al-Afghani and ʿAbduh were quick to react to Orientalist attacks against Islam. During his stay in France, al-Afghani wrote a "Réponse" to a lecture in which French philosopher Ernest Renan asserted that Islam is an obstacle to progress and that Semitic peoples are incapable of science and philosophy (reproduced in Capdepuy n.d.). The Iranian reasonably retorted that all religions initially inhibit the development of science and rhetorically asked: "How does the Muslim religion differ on this point from other religions?" (ibid., p. 12).[9] As for ʿAbduh, his polemics with critics of Islam included an exchange with French historian Gabriel Hanotaux, who declared "Arian" Christian civilisation superior to "Semitic" Muslim civilisation. In his rejoinder, he reminded Hanotaux that "[t]he first spark that kindled Western spirits and elevated them to the state of civilisation emanated from the ignited torch whose light spread from al-Andalus" (ʿAbduh 1900: 222).

But despite their condemnation of colonialism and their spirited defence of Islam, al-Afghani and ʿAbduh were not hostile to the West. They had European friends and visited Europe often, and they admired its scientific and technological prowess and its more egalitarian political structures. *Al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqà* repeatedly used the concept of *sunnat Allah* (divine law) to explain the progress of Europeans and the backwardness of Muslims, asserting that God grants success to those who abide by His commandments whatever their

[9] Al-Afghani's "Réponse" fuelled rumours that he was an atheist and his disciples tried to prevent its dissemination in the Arab world. Kedourie reproduces a letter from ʿAbduh reassuring his master that he had managed to avoid, or at least postpone, its translation into Arabic (Kedourie 1966: 44-45).

religion (al-Afghani & ʿAbduh 1884: 139, 156-57, 186, 195-201).[10] On a similar note, ʿAbduh is widely quoted as saying: "I went to the West and found Islam, but I did not find Muslims. I returned to the East and I found Muslims, but I did not find Islam."

ʿAbduh's disciple Rashid Rida had a very different attitude to that hegemonic Other. Born in a village in modern-day Lebanon, he met ʿAbduh in Beirut and upon finishing his studies he moved to Cairo, following in the path of many other Levantine intellectuals who emigrated to Egypt in search of a freer intellectual atmosphere, and persuaded the older man to collaborate with him. He travelled to Europe only once, in 1921, with the Syrian-Palestinian Congress that presented the case for Arab independence before the League of Nations. He subsequently witnessed the imposition of the British and French mandates in the Levant and the consolidation of the Zionist project in Palestine.

Aside from his political grievances, Rida disapproved of the relaxation of mores he perceived around him: the adoption of Western values and practices, the proliferation of bars and cinemas, the growing presence of women in the public sphere... He believed that Western culture was materialistic and immoral due to its having distanced itself from religion (e.g. Rida 2015: 68, 75, 112). In 1933 he published *Al-Wahi al-Muhammadi* as a work of *daʿwa* (invitation to Islam) addressed to "the freethinkers of the materialist civilisation of Europe and Japan" (Rida 2005: 8-9). After expounding his arguments, he urged them:

> Take up the call to this faith and use it to treat the ills of contemporary society, after your vast science and your precise philosophy have proved unable to stop the contagion of depravity, the worship of appetites and the chaos of ideas! (ibid. 259)

Rida spread his thought through *Al-Manar*, the journal he founded in 1898 and he continued editing almost singlehandedly until his death in 1935. One of his readers was the schoolteacher Hasan al-Banna, who established the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Al-Banna shared Rida's negative perception of the West, as he wrote in his memoirs about his life in Cairo as a student:

> During the period I spent in Cairo after the last war (1914-1918), the flow of decomposition intensified in souls, opinions and ideas in the name of intellectual emancipation, and in paths, morals and actions in the name of personal freedom. The wave of atheism and debauchery was mighty, overwhelming, unstoppable [...] I was in great pain to see my beloved Egyptian nation oscillating in its social life between the dear Islam it had inherited and protected, was familiar with and had cherished for fourteen centuries, and this Western onslaught equipped with the lethal weapons of money and prestige, ostentation and hedonism, power and means of propaganda. (Al-Banna 2012: 54, 56)

[10] They would continue repeating this idea after they parted ways, e.g. al-Afghani cited in al-Makhzumi 2002: 71, 86-7, 121, 241-2; ʿAbduh 1897: 464-5; 1902: 302-4.

The veracity of al-Banna's recollections has been questioned; he might have been projecting onto the past his feelings when he was writing these words in the 1940s[11]. Whatever might be the case, Islamist discourse have become characterised by these essentialising portrayals of Western and Islamist civilisations – the former as atheist, materialistic and immoral; the latter as pious, spiritual and righteous.

3.2. The founding myth and the return to an idealised past

Identities are often connected to a founding myth that explains the birth of the community and what makes it distinct from its neighbours. That myth also provides temporal continuity in spite of the vicissitudes of history and the actions of the community's enemies and adversaries. Constructivist literature abounds in examples of founding myths and their political use, e.g. the battle of Kosovo in Serbian nationalism (Labarre 2007: 40-2), the Long March in CCP symbology (Forsby 2015: 186-91), or the "Basque matter" (*materia vasconica*) that distinguishes Basque people (Gabilondo 2016).

For Islamists, the founding myth is the establishment of the first Islamic community in Yathrib/Medina after prophet Muhammad's Hijra (emigration from Mecca) in 622, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Since then, the character of the Umma (Islamic community) may have been adulterated by internal forces such as corrupt rulers or inept ulema, or by external forces such as colonialism, but it was never completely lost and therefore it can be restored to its pristine essence.

As mentioned above, al-Afghani and 'Abduh contended that the problems afflicting Muslims were largely due to their deviating from the true teachings of Islam. Armed with this argument, they circumvented the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) developed by Islamic scholars over the centuries and went straight to the sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunna. They demanded "the reopening of the door of *ijtihad*[12]", which according to (disputed[13]) tradition had been closed to protect Islamic orthodoxy. In the words of al-Afghani:

> What does it mean, that the gate of *ijtihad* is closed? By what text was it closed? Which imam said that after him no Muslim should use his personal judgment to delve into religion, guided by the Qur'an and the authentic Sunna, and devote himself to enlarging his understanding by deducing, through *qiyas* [analogy], what is appropriate in the light of contemporary knowledge and needs. (Al-Afghani in al-Makhzumi 2002: 151)

[11] Al-Banna's memoirs are contradicted by other sources, such as his letters to his father and a report written by a group that split from the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1930s (Lia 2015).

[12] *Ijtihad* is the "effort" of interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna by an ulema.

[13] The date traditionally given for that closure was the X century C.E., but according to Hallaq there was no talk of closing the door of *ijtihad* until the XII century, and even after that date *ijtihad* continued without being identified as such (Hallaq 1984).

'Abduh wrote in his autobiography that his main aim in life was to restore the original message of Islam, which in his view was compatible with reason and encouraged the pursuit of science:

> The first issue [I focused on] was on liberating thought from the chains of *taqlid* ["imitation", but also "tradition"] to understand Islam as *salaf al-umma* [the pious ancestors] did before discrepancies emerged. In order to do that it is essential to go back to the original sources and to weigh religion in the balance that God placed in human reason to avoid its excesses and reduce its errors, thus preserving the human order prescribed by divine wisdom. In this light, Islam is a friend of science that impels to explore the secrets of Creation, admonishes to respect the immutable truths, and demands that they be relied on to educate the spirit and amend behaviours. ('Abduh in 'Imara 1993b: 310)

Rida also supported reform but he was more conservative and given to literalism in the interpretation of the texts, which would eventually lead him to embrace the Hanbali school of *fiqh*[14]. He increasingly quoted Hanbali scholars, especially Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292-1350), and became a vocal champion of 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Saud, who in his eyes personified the renewal the Islamic world so desperately needed. In an editorial published in *Al-Manar* in 1926 Rida celebrated Ibn Saud's conquest of the Hejaz, declaring that his victory heralded "a new and long-awaited phase for Islam, the time to reinvigorate its guidance and restore its glory" (*Al-Manar* XVII: 11).

Al-Banna also looked to the past to revive the fortunes of the Umma but as the leader of a sociopolitical movement he was mostly concerned with practicalities. He recommended his followers:

> Strive to revive Islamic customs and to eradicate foreign customs in all aspects of life! This includes greetings, language, the calendar, dress, furniture, times of work and rest, food and drink, arriving and departing, expressing sadness and joy, and so on. To this end, inquire into the Pure Sunna. (Al-Banna 1943)

More recently, al-Qaradawi has written about the sources of the so-called *Sahwa Islamiyya* (Islamic Awakening) that began in the 1970s. He rejected conventional explanations such as economic factors, the psychological effects of the 1967 defeat and Sadat's policies (al-Qaradawi 2016a: 110ff), insisting on the inevitability of such an awakening:

> It is the nature of the Umma not to be estranged from its consciousness for long. This is because of the nature of what it believes in, Islam; because it listens to the Qur'an all day long; and because the lives of its Messenger, peace be upon him, and of its

[14] The Hanbali school is one of the four extant *madhahib* (pl. of *mahdab*, school of Islamic jurisprudence) of Sunni jurisprudence. They are eponymously named after the ulema that established them between the beginning of the VIII and the end of the IX century of the Common Era: Abu Hanifa, Malik bin Anas, al-Shafi'i and Ibn Hanbal.

> heroes are never absent from its memory. It is in the nature of Islam to wake [the Umma] from slumber and revive it from lifelessness. (ibid.: 113)

Al-Azmeh uses the term "deterministic historism" to denote the belief that the underlying nature of a culture or people does not change and will eventually reaffirm itself:

> [T]he passage of history amounts to so many conjunctural bumps that leave the underlying essence whole. Neither conjuncture nor future, in this register, are history; they are rather redactions of ethnological destiny. Secularisation and modernisation, not to speak of secularism and modernism, are in effect pronounced illusory because they do not form part of the narrative of destiny. (Al-Azmeh 2020: 13)

For his part, Jung talks of an "inversed version of teleology" to refer to the "[h]istorical narratives of decay and the restoration of an ideal past" that characterise Islamism (Jung 2021: 6). He points out that such narratives were shaped by XIX-century European critiques of liberal modernity, and he specifically mentions Hungarian Orientalist Ignaz Goldziher, who joined al-Afghani's study circle during his stay in Cairo, describing Goldziher's mid-1870s tour of the Middle East as "a perfect example of the factual entanglement of Muslim and European intellectuals in the construction of modern images of Islam" (ibid.).

3.3. *Identity as the basis for interests and behaviour*

In a much-cited paper published in 2004, Smith drew attention to the value of identity analysis in political science. Reflecting on the link between identities, interests and behaviours, he wrote:

> People's beliefs that they owe primary allegiance to some political memberships, along with the conviction of others that they are likely to hold such beliefs, have major consequences for how people understand their political interests, how they act, and how others act toward them on a range of politically significant matters. (Smith 2004: 304)

Within the broad ideology of Islamism, individuals and groups identify a variety of objectives and use differing strategies to achieve them. Radicals such as al-Qaeda and Daesh strive to establish a global caliphate and deem violence a legitimate tool to bring it about. However, most Islamists wish to create an Islamic state within current state borders. In pursuit of that goal, they work both from below, proselytising and offering services to the needy, and from above, taking part in elections to influence the political agenda and eventually be elected to form a government.

The first efforts to formulate a modern theory of the Islamic state go back to the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I. Rashid Rida, who had become disenchanted with the Empire due to the nationalist and secularist policies of the ruling Committee of Union and

Progress, saw this as an opportunity for a sweeping overhaul of the caliphate. In 1922 he published a series of articles in Al-Manar which would subsequently appear separately as *Al-khilafa, aw al-imama al-uzmà* (The caliphate, or great imamate). This work repeatedly cited the authority of medieval jurists such as al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali while placing at the core of the caliphal institution the concept of *shurà*, the process of consultation recommended in the Qur'an and practised by prophet Muhammad and his four immediate successors, the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.

Rida had in the past conceded that in spite all its drawbacks, the European presence had at least helped Muslims rediscover consultative government (Al-Manar X: 282-283). In *Al-khilafa* he went further and argued that the classical theory of the caliphate already contained the main elements of Western democracy, with sovereignty residing in the Muslim community and the caliph's advisors, *ahl al-ḥall wa-l-'aqd* ("those who bind and loose"), being the equivalent of a parliament:

> In Islam there is a legislative power, authorised by God and delegated by the Umma, which resides in the people of knowledge, opinion and leadership sitting in *shurà*. Sovereign power actually resides in the Umma [...]. The caliph has no right to invalidate or contradict its consensus or to oppose its representatives, *ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd*. (Rida 2015: 89-90)

The difference between this version of the caliphate and the Western parliamentary system was the rejection of secularism, understood as the confinement of religion to the private sphere. As Rida explains, the representatives of the people, *ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd*, should be experts in the Qur'an and the Sunna and their decisions would have to abide by the boundaries set by those texts (ibid. 90)[15].

Rida was eager to prove that Islam could provide the comprehensive legal system a modern state demanded. He argued that the ruler of an Islamic state should use the instruments of *fiqh* – notably *ijtihad* and *maslaha*[16] – to extend the rulings of the Qur'an and the Sunna to new domains (Dallal 2000: 357). That way, the modern caliphate would become a *nizam tamm* (complete system, Rida 2015: 77-78). This was a departure from Islamic history, in which there were two types of law: *fiqh* (jurisprudence), which Islamic scholars derived from

[15] Mahmoud Haddad contends that Hamid Enayat is wrong to say that Rida deemed the ulema the most suitable representatives of the people, citing a volume of *Tafsir al-Manar* published years earlier in which Rida wrote that contemporary *ahl al-hall wa-l-'aqd* should belong to different professions (Haddad 1997: 274). Nonetheless, in Rida's project for the caliphate religious knowledge is an explicit requirement for those representatives. He even envisioned a special college to form legislators alongside future candidates to the imamate and their advisors, ulema, judges, muftis, preachers, etc. (Rida 2015: 77). Tellingly, Yasushi describes Rida's model of Islamic state as a forerunner to Khomeini's *Wilayat-e faqih* (Yasushi 2006: 27).

[16] *Maslaha* ("common good") denotes permitting or prohibiting something in the light of the circumstances if it is in the interest of the Muslim community.

the sacred sources; and *siyasa* (administration, policy), drafted by the rulers to manage the affairs of the state[17].

Al-Banna picked up Rida's idea and spoke of *shumuliyyat al-Islam* (the 'totality' or 'comprehensiveness' of Islam):

> Islam is a comprehensive system concerned with all aspects of life. It is state and homeland, government and Umma. It is morality and strength, mercy and justice. It is culture and law, science and jurisprudence. It is substance and wealth, profit and prosperity. It is jihad and *da'wa*, army and idea. It is true creed and correct worship, indistinctively. (Al-Banna 1943)

Modern mainstream Islamists have given up on the caliphate, at most paying lip service to its restoration[18]. Meanwhile, the notion of Islam as a comprehensive system has become one of the pillars of Islamist thought, as exemplified by the words of Yusuf al-Qaradawi:

> We believe in the *shumuliyyat al-Islam*. Islam is not just spirituality. Islam is religion and worldly life, da'wa and state, belief and law, truth and strength. Islam is industry and agriculture. Islam is art. Islam is in everything. We don't believe in the fragmentation implied in calling this *da'wa shumuliyya* ['comprehensive' call] to Islam, 'political Islam.' (Al-Qaradawi on Al-Jazeera 2004a).

On the other hand, the process of identifying Islamic precursors to (desirable) modern Western institutions has continued, with the purpose of legitimising the adoption of those institutions while stressing the relevance of the Islamic heritage. For instance, al-Banna's reference to social contract theory:

> When Abu Bakr[19], may God be pleased with him, first took command and ascended the pulpit, he said: 'Oh, people, I used to work for my family and I gained strength from them. Now I work for you, so assign [payment] for me from your treasury.' He thus provided the best explanation for the theory of the social contract. Indeed, he laid its foundation, for it is nothing but a contract between the nation and the ruler to take care of the public interest. If he does well, he is rewarded; if he does wrong, he is punished. (Al-Banna 1947)

Similarly, al-Qaradawi depicted the Constitution of Medina (in Arabic, *Sahifat al-Madina*) – a pact signed by the town's different communities, Muslims, Jews and polytheists, after the

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[17] As Quraishi-Landes explains: "Siyasa laws were typically pragmatic, governance-related laws, covering topics like taxes, security, marketplace regulation, and public safety – i.e., things necessary for public order, but about which the scripture says little" (Quraishi-Landes 2015: 557).

[18] The notable exception being Hizb ut-Tahrir, which aims at reestablishing the caliphate through nonviolent means.

[19] Abu Bakr was one of prophet Muhammad's closest Companions and became the first caliph after his death.

Hijra (prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca) – as a precursor to the modern concept of citizenship:

> The Messenger, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, organised relations in Medina with a constitution that brought together its residents, Muslims and non-Muslims, to assure them that the divine law protected everyone's freedoms and beliefs. The constitution was a guaranteed of the rights of all, tantamount to a citizenship contract between the people of the city (al-Qaradawi 2016b).

This willingness to embrace Western institutions and ideas shows that Islamism is not a rejection of modernity per se, but of a certain version of it: the European variety, according to which modernity dictates secularisation (Pasha 2012: 1965). The imposition of such a model, first by colonial administrations and later by postcolonial authoritarian regimes, provoked a backlash in the form of an attempt to turn Islam into the source of political authority and legitimacy. Concurrently, the depiction of Islam as a comprehensive sociopolitical system was a response to the unprecedented expansion in the power of the modern state, which provided such a framework (Asad 1997, 190-91).

3.4. The reinvention of tradition

As the previous section illustrates, Islamism is similar to other identitarian movements such as nationalisms in that it seeks legitimation in elements of the past and sometimes reinvents them to reinforce its narrative. Referring to the phenomenon of reinventing customs and rituals to legitimise modern political agendas, Hobsbawm has written:

> [W]e should expect [the invention of tradition] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable or flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or the supply side. (Hobsbawm 1983: 4-5)

The Muslim world was undergoing changes both in the supply and the demand side, to use Hobsbawm expression: On the one hand, the old institutions were no longer suited to a political, economic and cultural environment disturbed by Western expansionism and modern scientific and political ideas. Conversely, many Muslims felt attracted to those ideas. In this context, traditions were rediscovered or even invented aiming to offer supposedly culturally authentic answers and solutions for a changing world.

In the previous section we saw some manifestations of that phenomenon, namely Rida's reinvention of the caliphate as a modern (Islamic) state and al-Banna's and al-Qaradawi's reinterpretation of episodes of Islamic history. However, it arguably reached its peak with

Abu-l-A'la Maududi (1903-79). Maududi established Jamaat-e-Islami in British India in 1941 to oppose Muhammad Ali Jinah's secularist Muslim League. He invented a new usage for the term *Jahiliyya* (the pre-Islamic period of "ignorance" of the one, true God): he applied it to describe contemporary Muslim societies, which he accused of deviating from Islam[20]. Egyptian Muslim Brother Sayyid Qutb adopted the neologism, which he explained as follows:

> A Jahiliyya society is any society other than a Muslim society. If we wanted to define it objectively, we would say that it is every society that does not worship God alone. [...] According to this objective definition, all existing societies on Earth are, in reality, Jahiliyya societies! (1979: 88-9)

Maududi worked tirelessly to turn Pakistan into an Islamic state, which he legitimised by coining another neologism which was also popularised by Qutb: *hakimiyya*. Qutb explained its meaning as follows:

> The basis upon which the Islamic system is based is different from the rules upon which all human systems are based. It is based on the premise that *hakimiyya* is God's alone, for He is the only one who legislates. All other systems are based on human *hakimiyya*; humans are the ones who legislate for themselves (Qutb 1995: 76).

Some promoters of the concept – presumably non-speakers of Arabic – cite the Qur'an to justify its validity:

> Islam is fully endowed with sovereignty (*hakimiyyah* in Arabic), which is clearly stated in the Qur'an: 'O Allah, Lord of Sovereignty! Thou givest sovereignty to whom thou pleases, and takest away sovereignty from whom thou pleases. Thou exaltest whom thou pleases, and basest whom thou pleases. In thy hand is all good for thou hast power over all thing.' (Adiong 2019: 47).

Bizarrely, the word in the Qur'anic verse translated as "sovereignty" is not *hakimiyya*, but *mulk* (power, ownership). In fact, *hakimiyya* was a neologism built on the root of the modern word for "government" (*hukm*, which in the Qur'an is only used to allude to divine judgement).

Beyond politics, there have been attempts to extend the idea of Islam as a "complete" system to all facets of life, e.g. the field of science. Initially many Muslims, like many Christians before them, felt uneasy about modern science, which seemed to clash with central dogmas of their faith. They responded by reinterpreting the Qur'an in the light of modern science to counter allegations that it contradicted some tenets of Islam.

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[20] For a discussion of perceptions of the Jahiliyya period throughout Islamic history and of how the Islamists' conception constitutes "a figment of their imagination, based rather on their own ignorance of the intellectual history of Islam," see Asfaruddin (2006: 167-69).

Al-Afghani and ʿAbduh were part of that trend. The Iranian stated that if there appeared to be a contradiction between science and a Qur'anic verse, the latter should be understood allegorically (al-Afghani in al-Makhzumi 2002: 138). As an example, he construed the verse "and after that He spread out the Earth" (Qur'an 79:30) as an allusion to the Earth's roundness, because it uses the word *daha*, which means "egg" in the dialect of the Bedouins (ibid. 141).

For his part, ʿAbduh linked the punishment to usurers mentioned in the Qur'an ("the touch of Satan") to epilepsy (cited in Adams 1968: 137)[21] and identified *jinn* (demons) with microbes (ibid.)[22]. He also referred to the laws of natural selection and survival of the fittest in his exegesis of Qur'an 2:251, "Had God not repelled some of the people by means of others, the Earth would have been corrupted" (cited in Kerr 1966: 130).

Over time, the efforts to reconcile scripture and modern science evolved into a discipline to prove the "scientific miracle" (*al-i'jaz al-ʿilmi*) of the Qur'an, i.e. to demonstrate that the holy book contains scientific knowledge (e.g. on embryology, astronomy, relativity and quantum mechanics) that was not obvious to its original recipients but has been corroborated by modern science. This type of exegesis is promoted and financed by institutions like the Muslim World League, which in 1984 set up the Commission on Scientific Signs in the Quran and Sunnah, and has gained some popularity among Muslims. Others – such as Pakistani nuclear physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy – dismiss it as "obscurantist nonsense" (Hoodbhoy 1987: 153).

In fact, since the 1970s there has been a movement advocating the "Islamisation of knowledge" to bring an end to the "educational dualism (secular-religious) in the Muslim societies that has resulted in its [*sic*] economic backwardness, political regression and intellectual retardation" (Obaidullah 2010). The project was launched by Palestinian-American philosopher Ismail al-Faruqi (1921-1986), who became an Islamist in the US after joining the Muslim Students Association (Siddiqui 1999: 15). Al-Faruqi established the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, Virginia, in 1981.

Likewise, Islamism has shaped perceptions on human rights. It was behind the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) issued by Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 1990 as a response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The Islamic Republic of Iran, which has denounced the UDHR as "a collection of secularized ideas informed by Judeo-Christian traditions incompatible with Sharia" (cited in Kayaoglu 2020), had a crucial role in the drafting of the CDHRI, which has been criticised for discriminating

[21] ʿAbduh's exegesis of Qur'an 2:275 (Adams misidentifies it as 2:276), in which he explained that Arabs used to believe that epileptics had been touched by Satan (Adams 1968: 138).

[22] For more such interpretations, see Adams 1968: 134-43.

against women and religious and sexual minorities and for failing to protect fundamental rights such as freedom of religion and expression[23].

Maybe the most remarkable example of Islamist success in reinventing tradition has been the so-called *zi islami* (Islamic dress). It began to be adopted by Muslim women in Egypt in the 1970s, starting with those within the orbit of Islamist organisations, to symbolise their commitment to traditional values and the rejection of "secular" norms like gender mixing. Those garments, including the now ubiquitous hijab, were "not styles that the women's mothers or grandmothers had ever donned [...] [It] was unmistakably *modern* dress" (Ahmed 2011: 83; emphasis in the original). Narratives evolve, of course, and the hijab is now worn by many Muslim women as a symbol of identity, especially in the West (ibid. chapters 9 to 11).

Staying on the subject of rights, Islamist feminists assert that Islam granted women equality long before the West did – although "her domestic and social function calls her to duties different from those of a man" –, and that their current subordinate status in Muslim societies is a deviation from Muhammad's example and Qur'anic teachings (Yassine 2003: 377ff). It is unclear how these assertions can be reconciled with Qur'anic injunctions proclaiming that men have authority over women and can take up to four wives, or that women should only receive half as much in inheritance as their male relatives[24] – injunctions explicitly endorsed by male Islamists like al-Qaradawi[25].

3.5. *The exclusion of the internal Other*

Identities are defined against an external Other, but they can also be deployed against those within the confines of the imagined community. For example, the French Third Republic asserted itself by separating from the Catholic Church and curtailing its power, and henceforth *laicité* became one of the central features of "Frenchness". For its supporters, secularism makes all citizens equal by giving them a common identity based on national belonging, but it has been increasingly criticised in the light of policies like the hijab ban in state schools, which was widely perceived as targeting the Muslim community. Mabilon-Bonfils and Zoia have deconstructed *laicité* by casting doubt over its alleged neutrality and drawing attention to the experience of young people of foreign extraction, for whom the

[23] Kayaoglu (2020) provides a helpful overview of the origins and provisions of the CDHRI and recent developments, including a new draft of the document.

[24] See Qur'an 4:34 and 4:11. Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud (2008) have engaged in the process of reinterpreting the most controversial verses of the Qur'an. However, their efforts have failed to gain much traction and they have accused of taking too many liberties with the Qur'anic text. For a sympathetic critique, see Hidayatullah 2014.

[25] Al-Qaradawi justifies those injunctions by claiming that men are more rational than women, that they bear more responsibilities, and that there is a natural surplus of women and some would be left without a husband if polygamy did not exist (al-Qaradawi in Al-Jazeera 2005a, 2005b; al-Qaradawi 2000c: 65).

imposition of secularism is "a weapon of denial, even contempt, for [their] daily, distinct experiences of relegation and humiliation" (Mabilon-Bonfils & Zoïa 2014: 16).

In the case of Islamism, the internal Others are Muslims who reject the Islamist project, particularly those who champion the separation of religion and politics. An early example was al-Azhar educated Egyptian *qadi*[26] 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, who published *Al-Islam wa-usul al-hukm* (Islam and the foundations of rule) in 1925. Writing shortly after the abolition of the caliphate, 'Abd al-Raziq asserted that this was not to be lamented because in reality Islam does not provide a framework for government, and that the link between religion and politics had damaged both domains and led to stagnation and decadence. His work was well received by intellectuals and reformists but it was harshly criticised by conservatives and by the palace, which was hoping to claim the title of caliph for King Fuad I.

Al-Azhar led a virulent campaign against 'Abd al-Raziq which resulted in him being stripped of his position and of his right to practise law. Rida contributed to the controversy, publishing a scathing review of *Al-Islam wa-usul al-hukm* which started with these words:

> The enemies of Islam continue to endeavour to topple its throne, destroy its dominion, invalidate its laws and enslave the peoples that worship God through its teachings. They resort to fire and the sword, cunning and deceit, ideas and attitudes. They pervert doctrines and morals, attack the essence and character of the Muslim community, sever all the ties that bind together individuals and peoples so that they become easier for the covetous to devour, prey to the beasts of colonialism. (*Al-Manar* XXVI: 100)

The establishment of secular nation-states in the Muslim world after the colonial period was vehemently rejected by the Islamist movement. As we have seen, in Qutb's eyes, the choice was stark and unambiguous:

> There are only two choices. Either responding to God and the Messenger or following [human] whims. Either divine rule or Jahiliyya rule. Either rule by all that was revealed by God or rebellion against what was revealed by God. (ibid. 150)

This quote comes from Qutb's last and most notorious work, *Ma'alim fi-l-tariq* (Milestones), in which he brandished the weapon of *takfir* (excommunication) against contemporary Muslim societies for not abiding by the precepts of Islam. He was embittered by what he saw as the betrayal of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had supported the 1952 Free Officers' Revolution only to be pushed aside, and was radicalised by years of mistreatment in the Nasserist prisons. Shortly afterwards he was put on trial for his participation in a coup plot and was executed. The Brotherhood's leadership publicly distanced itself from Qutb's most radical ideas in the late 1970s but he continues to be well regarded within the organisation

[26] A *qadi* is a judge in a Sharia court.

and in mainstream Islamist circles (e.g. Ikhwan Online 2021, al-Qaradawi n.d.2, 1994: 188-9, 2016c)[27].

Qutb called for violent jihad to realise the Islamic order he advocated, but he argued that the objective of that jihad was not be to impose such an order but to remove the obstacles in its way. Once the people were free to know Islam, they would inevitably choose to submit to it (Qutb 1979, esp. 55-82). Interestingly, al-Qaradawi used similar reasoning to explain the first Islamic conquests:

> Even in the countries where the Islamic armies entered as conquerors, their intention was to remove the material obstacles from the path of Islam so that its call would reach the people and they could choose for themselves. And the people chose this religion willingly. The Umayyad governors in Egypt even imposed the *jizya* [tax paid by non-Muslims] on those who converted to Islam due to the large number of converts, until [caliph] 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz abolished that practice with his famous assertion to his governor: 'God sent Muhammad as a guide, not as a tax collector.' (Al-Qaradawi 2001: 34)

This telling anecdote shows that far from embarking on the conquests to facilitate the spread Islam, the Muslim conquerors were not always keen for the population of the new territories of the Empire to convert. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, who is remembered for his piety, did oppose discrimination against new converts but he only ruled for two and a half years and his efforts were ultimately ineffective (Yahaya 2015: 836). In reality, Islamisation was a long-drawn process driven by factors like avoidance of the *jizya* (which was often high and accompanied by humiliating rituals), the pursuit of social mobility and the Arabicisation of the bureaucracy (Wood 2016).

More recently, al-Qaradawi penned a work titled *Our slandered history* to respond to the secularists "who are hostile to the Sharia and want us to import our values, ideas, laws and traditions from the West" (al-Qaradawi 2006: 5). He added:

> The enemies of the Umma [Muslim community] want to erase our historical memory so that we become disconnected from our past, forget our glories, lay dust on our heritage and civilization and start from scratch, like a nation with no history. And if they prove unable to erase our memory, they seek to corrupt it, filling it with false, deceptive or forged information about the Umma's message, civilization, history, men and heritage. (ibid. 6)

Al-Qaradawi is here referring to Muslims who do not see a contradiction between their religious identity and a critical perspective on Islamic history, but the Islamist project is also opposed by those who do not wish to live in a state dominated by a group of self-appointed

[27] Al-Qaradawi wrote warmly of Qutb, dubbing him a "martyr", and attributed his abuse of *takfir* to the repression he suffered (al-Qaradawi n.d.2, 2016c).

guardians of the faith, resist the homogenising impulse towards this particular understanding of Islam, and/ or reject compulsory belonging to an ascriptive community determined by religion of birth. They are prime targets of Islamist hostility because they shake the illusion of ontological security provided by the Islamist narrative[28].

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has used Constructivism to analyse the genesis and evolution of Islamism. It has traced the phenomenon back to the second half of the XIX century, when much of the Muslim world was occupied or threatened by European armies and Islam came under the intense scrutiny of European Orientalists. These circumstances posed a threat to Muslims' ontological security just as they were developing their own version of modernity. Scholars like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad ʿAbduh reacted by calling for Muslim unity and positing that Muslims should rediscover the true teachings of Islam and selectively adopt Western advances in science, technology and politics.

Rashid Rida lived through the imposition of the British and French mandates in his native Levant after World War I and the accelerated spread of Western ideas and mores in the Muslim world. Keen to prove that Muslim countries could become successful members of the Western-dominated international order, he reformulated the classical theory of the caliphate to show that the latter contained all the institutions required by a modern state.

Rida inspired Hasan al-Banna, who rejected Western values and practices, encouraged the revival of Islamic traditions and promoted a "comprehensive" Islam with directives and rulings for every aspect of existence. Such version of Islam, which is at the core of Islamism, is thoroughly modern in that it represents a response to the all-encompassing nature of the modern nation state and it has often involved the (re)invention of traditions.

Islamism entails two essentialisations: that of the West, characterised as materialistic, immoral and decadent; and that of the Islamic Umma, depicted as devout, honourable and righteous. This is, of course, a reflection of and a reaction to the Orientalist essentialisation of Muslim civilisation that came to dominate, and still influences, European discourse on Islam. Moreover, the Islamist narrative portrays history as a process of decay from an idealised past and holds the deterministic conviction that a return to that past is possible, even inevitable.

At this point it should be reiterated that this paper has focused on mainstream Sunni Islamism in the Arab world, especially in Egypt. Its outsize impact should not make us overlook the diversity within political Islam; even among the organisations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood there are substantial differences in attitude, behaviour and rhetoric due to local conditions. For instance, after the Arab Spring the Tunisian Ennahda Movement proved to be substantially more open to cooperation with other political forces than the

[28] Bennoune (2013) has written on the climate of fear in communities threatened by Islamist extremists from Lahore to Algiers to Minneapolis, and on community efforts to resist their impositions.

Egyptian Brotherhood. Therefore, analyses of the construction of Islamist identity in other countries and regions would be needed for a more nuanced picture.

Another line for future enquiry could be comparing Islamism to other identitarian ideologies like Hindutva nationalism, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism or religious Zionism. Despite their traditionalist rhetoric they are all eminently modern projects, seek a symbiosis of religion and politics, exalt a particular religious community, reject Enlightenment notions of progress, liberalism and universal human rights and aspire to return to a romanticised past. Nonetheless, they all have their own peculiarities derived from their historical, geographical and cultural context, and comparative case studies can throw some light on their similarities and differences.

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ARTICLE

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MEDIA USABILITY AND ADVANCEMENT OF REGIONAL POLITICAL AGENDA IN WEST AFRICA: APPRAISING KNOWLEDGE GAP AMONG RESIDENTS OF GHANA AND SENEGAL

USABILIDAD DE LOS MEDIOS Y AVANCE DE LA AGENDA POLÍTICA REGIONAL EN ÁFRICA OCCIDENTAL: EVALUACIÓN DE LA BRECHA DE CONOCIMIENTO ENTRE LOS RESIDENTES DE GHANA Y SENEGAL

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Abstract

This work was on "Media usability and advancement of regional political administration: An appraisal of the knowledge gap on regional political agenda among residents of Ghana and Senegal". The objectives were to find out the common medium of communication; how often do information about regional politics reach residents; what has been the major barrier of getting information about regional politics to residents of West African Countries. The scope was limited to Ghana and Senegal. The theoretical framework was on the agenda setting and the Social Responsibility theories. It adopted the online survey method on a population of 52,929,398 million persons. The sample size was 384 persons while the instrument was a structured questionnaire. Findings showed that information reach peoples by radio at 196 or 51%, indigenous media 22 or 6%. It showed that verbal form of communication thrives more than the print and social media for information in African countries.

Keywords

Advancement, Ecowas, Governance, Media, Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

The Golden book has it that no man is an island. So also are the communities, the states and the countries. Each country though with elements of independence has some areas of reliance on other countries. On regular basis, countries enter into negotiations, seek assistance on security, financing of education, health, housing environmental control and very many other matters. This activity of seeking reliance by countries cover the advanced nations, the developed countries and the developing countries. Countries and countries interact to aid one another even on the resolution of political quagmire. This is usually a product of communication by the effective use of a specific channel of communication from the fold of the media. Hence, it is through the aid of the media that problems and achievements of countries are made known to one another to substantiate demands of assistance needed for development and growth (Deane, 2016). The media plays a dire role in determining public opinion, influencing policy, and nurturing democratic governance. Dagron (2001) compared the mass media, particularly radio networks as the most influential communication to nation building, the voice of planning, teacher of new skills, and extender of effective markets. Mass media could be connected to inspire the independent states of Africa into development, rapid economic growth, efficiency, and literacy (Waisbord, 2001). In West Africa, a region considered with political instability, socio-economic challenges, and ethnic diversity, the media's duty remain boundless. Grounded in the contexts of the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Social Responsibility Theory, this work explores how the media in West Africa influences regional politics while navigating its obligations to society.

1.1. *Statement of the Problem*

In the 70s, about 17 countries in the West African region entered into mutual understanding which covered political growth, economic progress and social interest. This agreement was signed on the platform of an organization christened, Economic Community of West African States, (ECOWAS). For many years, the respective countries have made valuable contributions to the existence of the organization with milestones in the political survival of some of the countries despite ideological differences in the region. Prior to independence, some of the countries like Ghana and Nigeria were under colonial administration of the British government, whereas others like Cameroons Togo, as well as Senegal, Liberia, Benin Republic were under the regime of the French government. The influences of the colonial governments has not ceased despite independence from colonial administrations but often and often fall to military coups and military administration. The non- separation from the umbilical cord of the colonial masters often cause disloyalty to the missions and directives of the ECOWAS. The non- adherence and implementation of ECOWAS policies by certain countries weaken the political collective powers of the member states or countries. For instance, in 2024, three independent member countries, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali announced their withdrawal from the ECOWAS. This means that the mandate, economic contributions and the promotion of all social affairs by the three countries were no longer binding and had ended. The exit of the three countries came when ECOWA attained 49 and had already laid the foundation for the establishment of an Economic, Social and Cultural Council in West Africa with a regional consultative meeting of civil society organisations, to re-awaken and leverage citizens' inclusion in governance.

The ECOWAS Commission's on Political Affairs, Peace and Security had equally outlined the focus of the regional organization in a consultative phase for a sustainable citizens' council and forestall existential threat with strategic communication. It had hoped to deal with the issues of gaps in the relations between the governing elite and the people, using inclusive citizens' representatives' platforms, the traditional institutions, religious and community leaders, to organize the ECOWAS Sustainable Energy Forum and a Committee for Recognition of the Community Origin before the end of 2024. Perhaps, it had known that the laudable strides were overshadowed by contemporary political developments and banked on the media institutions to feed the public. Hence, it launched an innovative media engagement of a weekly media briefing to address the gap in the dissemination of information on achievements of the region. For consolidation of results, ECOWAS thanked the media for its previous support and assured of availability to respond promptly to media inquiries on weekly media briefing. The statement of the problem lies whether the ECOWAS and media new partnership have live to expectations in the interest of people in the region particularly on issues of democracy and politics in the region.

1.2. *Objectives of the study*

Which medium of communication has been effectively utilized in making information available about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African States?

How often do information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African Countries?

What has been the major barrier of getting information about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African Countries?

1.3. *Scope*

The scope of this study was limited to only two countries of Ghana and Senegal. It was meant to cover the countries earlier governed under the British and the French colonial masters.

While English remain the major language in Ghana, French dominates the language sphere in Senegal.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Media and Democracy

In precise perspectives, it is an uphill task to separate media and democracy. Curran & Seaton (2018) says that the relationship between media and democracy cannot be discussed in isolation because the media serves as a cornerstone for democratic principles. It is the medium through which information flows, public discourse takes place, and accountability is enforced. The obvious reason is that media as channels of communication are operated by human beings to serve social interest of people and democracy from its common definition is a system of government operated by people and for the people. The focus or end point of the media lie to serve the people and democracy is also operated to serve the people. Hence, the interest of two concepts remain people centric in all ramifications. Media institutions may find it difficult to be in existence without the existence of the people whose activities turn out the raw material of processing for news, features, editorials, letters and photographs that form contents of media institutions. The media rely on the people to conduct events and the people live in places that also create news. On the other side of democracy, as a system of government, whatever is regarded as the tenets are only made known to people through the media. Nobody would know anything about democracy from origin, concepts, founding fathers, operations, acceptance, rejection, achievements or failures where the media does not exist. Therefore, the existence of the media and the existence of democracy cannot be discussed at the exclusion of one another.

2.2. Media and Challenges of West African Regional Politics

The relationship between media and politics in West Africa is symbiotic yet fraught with tension. Across the West African countries there is no country without a reasonable number of radio stations, television houses, and newspaper industries. There is no country also where the social media is not allowed to operate. The availability of these main-steam media of communication are supported by the unrestricted access to indigenous sources of communication. There are informal communication outlets as schools, churches, peer associations and groups as well as pressure groups. There are town hall meetings, folk tale groups, dance and theatres. All these add to cause the free flow of information on many aspects including politics and democratic institutions. Some of the organized and registered media outlets serve as watchdogs, exposing corruption, human rights abuses, and electoral malpractices. At the same time, they are instrumental in fostering political dialogue and educating the masses.

Before and during elections, these media institutions and the informal groups serve as channel for voter education and political campaigns as well as in the assessment of socio-political organizations. However, biased reporting and the dissemination of fake news exacerbate political tensions. For example, during the various presidential elections, the media's role in highlighting the peaceful transition of power underscored its potential as a tool for democratization (Darboe & Sowe, 2017).

In political conflicts and political unrest, including the civil wars in Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the negative roles of the media highlight the need for responsible media and peace journalism, which emphasizes reconciliation and de-escalation, has been working to foster unity (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). However, the challenges include:

Censorship and Intimidation: Journalists often face threats, harassment, and imprisonment, limiting their ability to report freely. For instance, the imprisonment of investigative journalist Omoyele Sowore in Nigeria illustrates the suppression of dissenting voices (Amnesty International, 2020). Financial constraints also pose challenges to media in West Africa. The issue is that many media outlets rely on advertising revenue, making them susceptible to commercial and political influences. Digital Disinformation has also come to join the list of challenges facing media institutions. The proliferation of social media has introduced new challenges, including the spread of fake news and propaganda.

2.3. Review of Related Literature

Jawia, Maksum & Bustami (2024) in a study "Qualitative content analysis of *Point Media* portrayal of ECOWAS military intervention in the Gambia", examined how the *Point News Media* portrayed the ECOWAS military intervention in The Gambia. ECOWAS had intervened when former President Yahya Jammeh refused to step down after losing the 2016 election. The media had discussed the intervention's legality and legitimacy in promoting the democratic transfer of power in the region. Initially, the intervention was praised for successfully promoting democratic change in a region prone to coups. However, the public later requested the withdrawal of the intervention force. The study analyzed 64 news articles published between 2017 and 2023. Ten frames were identified: dissatisfaction, ECOMIG mandate, ECOMIG success, instability, legitimacy, reassurance, social service, support, uncertainty, and confrontation. The Point news media portrayed the intervention negatively, in 45 or 70% news articles characterized by dissatisfaction and confrontation in implementing the intervention's mandate. This negative depiction contributed to the shift in public discourse towards requesting the ECOWAS military withdrawal. The study used qualitative content analysis as a data gathering and analysis method to explore the portrayal of the intervention. This method allowed the researchers to identify the different frames used to depict the intervention. By presenting the findings in simple language, the study recommended increase accessibility and understanding of the democratic political agenda of Ecowas organization in West Africa.

Hamajoda (2016) in the research "Informing and interacting with citizens: A strategic communication review of the websites of the ECOWAS parliaments" evaluates the ECOWAS members' websites based on a modified version of the guidelines recommended by Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2009. The appraisal under several headings, suggested to help parliaments plan and oversee their websites in a modern age where the internet provide a continuously significant platform for interacting and communicating with the general public. The study finds out that while 11 or 73% of the member States websites score well on general information about their parliaments, they lacked updates in making their websites a one-stop point for political information about their countries, and a fulcrum for interaction between legislators and citizens and a real time deliberation on burning national and regional issues despite the current availability of suitable interactive tools on the internet.

These reviews are important to this current work as it had centered on content analysis of media service rather than the aim of this work to explore the perception of the people rather than content analysis of media service and the instruments of communicating with the public.

2.4. *Theoretical framework*

Two theories applied are: the Agenda setting theory and the Social responsibility theory. On one hand, the Agenda-setting theory posits that the media does not tell people what to think but rather what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In West Africa, this theory becomes pertinent as media outlets often highlight issues such as governance, corruption, and electoral integrity. For instance, during the 2019 Nigerian presidential elections, media coverage played a significant role in prioritizing discussions around economic policies and national security (Ojebode & Adesina, 2021). However, media ownership and political affiliations frequently skew the agenda. Private media, controlled by influential political figures, often prioritize stories that favour the proprietors, thereby undermining objective reporting (Oso, 2020). In contrast, state-owned media tends to emphasize government achievements, sidelining dissenting voices.

On the other hand, the Social Responsibility Theory advocates that media organizations must balance freedom of expression with societal obligations. This theory, developed in response to libertarian media systems, emphasizes ethical reporting, accuracy, and the need to serve the public interest (Hutchins Commission, 1947).

In West Africa, the application of this theory is often hindered by financial constraints, limited access to information, and political interference. Despite these challenges, initiatives like investigative journalism in Ghana and Nigeria have demonstrated the media's commitment to accountability in revealing high-level corruption in administration, leading to significant reforms (Alabi, 2018). In the context of the study titled "Media Usability and Advancement of Regional Political Agenda in West Africa: Appraising Knowledge Gap among Residents of Ghana and Senegal," both Agenda Setting Theory and Social Responsibility Theory play important but distinct roles in shaping the analysis. On the importance of Agenda Setting Theory, this theory explains how the media shapes what people think about rather than what to think. In this study, it helps to explore how the media in Ghana and Senegal highlight (or downplay) regional political issues, which can influence public awareness and concern. The theory helps to examine why some topics within regional politics become prominent among certain segments of the population, leading to differences in knowledge levels across groups. By setting the media agenda, news outlets may indirectly support or resist regional political agendas (like ECOWAS integration or regional security), affecting public engagement and understanding. It allows a comparative analysis of how Ghanaian and Senegalese media prioritize political content, potentially reflecting different national interests or levels of freedom and access.

Concerning the importance of Social Responsibility Theory, this theory emphasizes the duty of the media to inform, educate, and serve the public good. In this context, it evaluates whether the media in Ghana and Senegal are responsibly informing citizens about regional political developments. Social responsibility underscores the media’s role in reducing inequalities in access to information, thus directly addressing the knowledge gaps your study is appraising. It stresses that media institutions should be accountable to the public, which is essential when assessing whether the media act as effective channels for promoting regional political agendas. A socially responsible media system enhances trust and encourages civic participation, which are vital for advancing regional integration and political unity in West Africa.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the online survey method since it provided a scientific approach of measuring the opinion and perception or attitude of people on the workability of a process or phenomena. The estimated population of the study 52,929,398 million persons drawn from 34,427,414 people in Ghana and 18,501,984 people from Senegal. A sample size of 384 was adopted as recommended by Kreejie & Morgan (1970) for populations above 75,000. Akpan (2022) also harps on restricting the sampling size not above 1000 persons in large scopes while in very small population, the number can be kept at not less than 50 for reliability and convenience of data collection. A simplified questionnaire containing 10 questions was raised to cover objectives and proportionately distributed online to respondents in four countries through electronic (email) data base of major mobile telecommunication network providers.

The proportionate calculation and distribution of questionnaire showed that Ghana had 250 copies and Senegal 134 copies. The answers provided through returned emails sent on Google forms were analyzed by the use of simple frequency tables and supported by pie chart diagrams to ascertain the results and findings.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

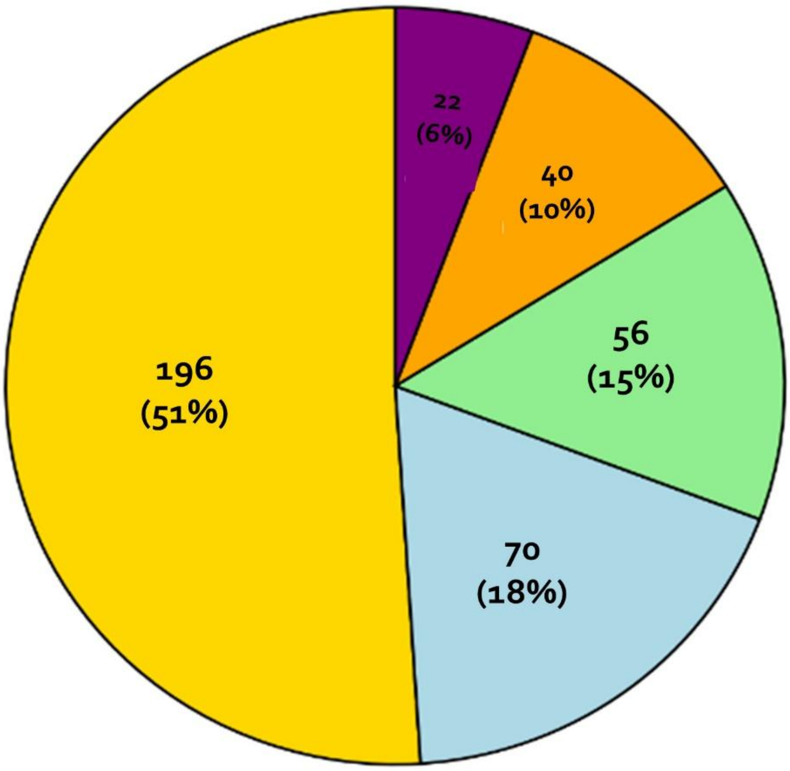
Table 1 and pie chart 1 shows that in the medium which information reach people is by radio at 196 or 51% out of 384 while the least score was recorded by other forms of communication classified under indigenous at 22 or 6% persons. The implication is that oral form of mainstream communication thrives more than the print or technology based social media.

Table 1. Most used means of communication

Medium	Response	%
Radio	196	51
Television	70	18
Newspapers	56	15
Social Media	40	10
Others (indigenous)	22	6
Total	384	100

Source: the authors

Figure 1 – Distribution of Media Usage



Source: the authors

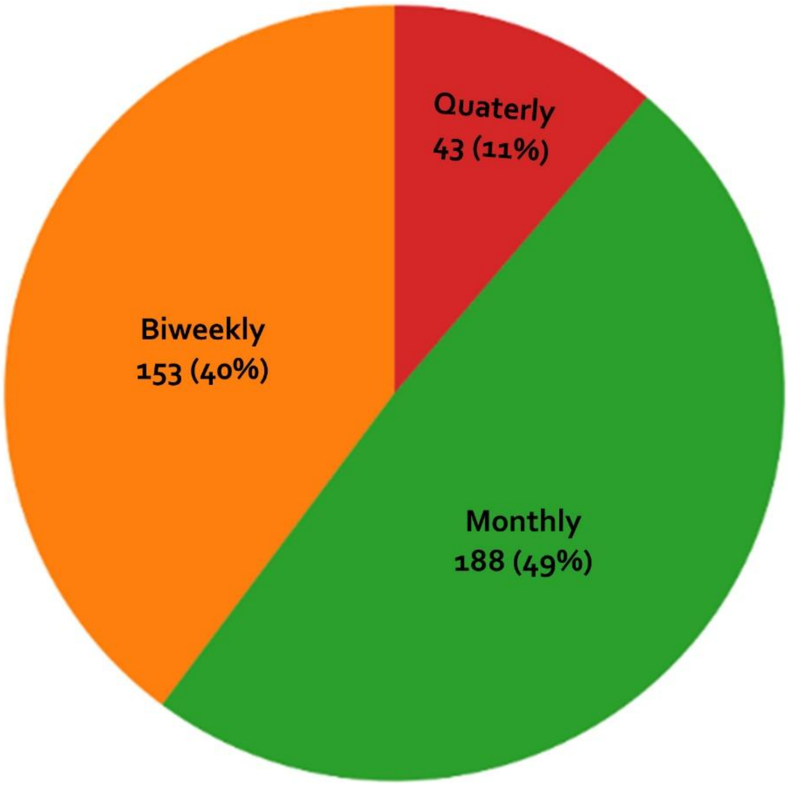
Table 2 and pie chart 2 shows an analysis of the frequency which information reaches the people. This shows that on Weekly frequency, there was zero response and a nil percentage. This was also the response of person to the variable of Not at all. There was zero response and a nil percentage. It clearly means that on weekly basis persons do get information about ECOWAS while there also existed no persons that do not get information entirely about ECOWAS. Rather the analysis indicates highest scored frequency on Monthly frequency at 188 or 49 persons out of 384 while the least went to Quarterly at 43 or 11%. Biweekly had a score of 153 or 40%. The result is that information about regional political organization rarely reaches the people. The lack of weekly updates and dominance of monthly/biweekly frequencies show that ECOWAS information does not permeate daily or weekly discourse. The people are not consistently exposed to ECOWAS initiatives unless there is a trigger event, such as a coup, sanction, or peacekeeping deployment.

Table 2 - Frequency which information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African countries

Frequency	Response	%
Weekly	0	0
Biweekly	153	40
Monthly	188	49
Quarterly	43	11
Not at all	0	0
Total	384	100

Source: the authors

Figure 2 – Frequency which information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African countries



Source: the authors

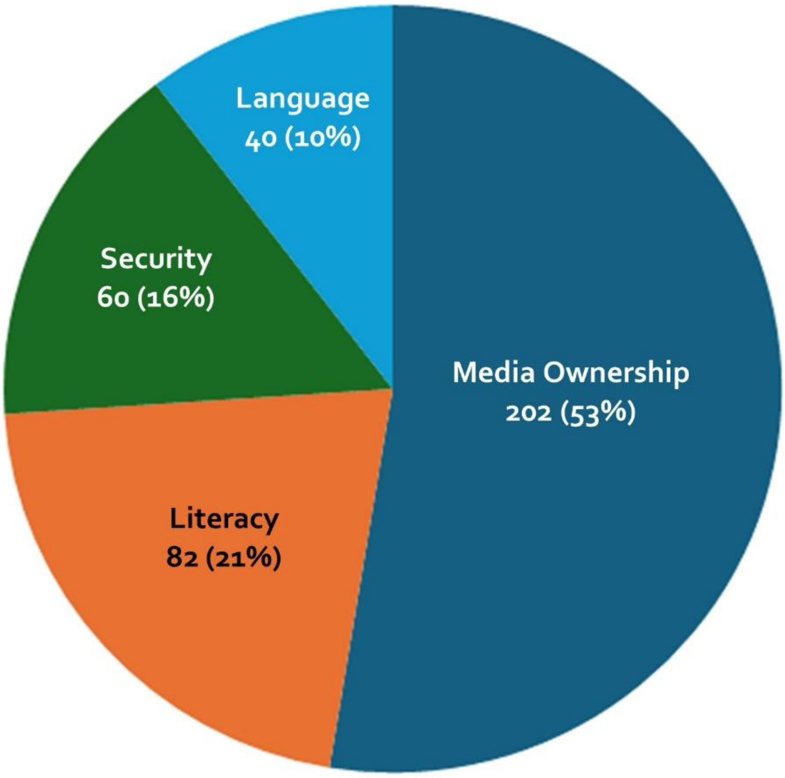
Table 3 was on the barriers that stop regional information from getting to the people. The analysis indicated that media ownership top the list with 202 or 53% while language had 40 or 10%. The implication is that the media has not been accessible to the people to get information.

Table 3 - The major barrier of getting information about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African Countries

Barrier	Response	%
Media Ownership	202	53
Literacy	82	21
Security	60	16
Language	40	10
Total	384	100

Source: the authors

Figure 3 – Barrier Response Distribution



Source: the authors

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings emerged from this research based on the questions raised:

Which medium of communication has been effectively utilized in making information available about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African States?

From data analysis in Table 1 and pie chart 1, it shows that in the medium which information reach people is by radio at 196 or 51% out of 384 while the least score was recorded by other forms of communication classified under indigenous at 22 or 6% persons. The implication is that oral form of mainstream communication thrives more than the print or technology based social media. This work agrees with what Okeke, Nwosu, & Ono (2021) that radio has remained a dominant medium of communication and this is due to the fact that its communication contents can be acknowledged at distant homes as a result of its extensive coverage and its permeating nature. It has the ability to reach large audiences because it is relatively inexpensive and can function devoid of electricity. Therefore, it is regarded as the most reachable technology for information dissemination.

How often does information about ECOWAS regional politics get to residents of West African Countries?

Table 2 shows an analysis of the frequency which information reaches the people. No Respondent received Weekly updates as 0% of respondents get weekly information about ECOWAS regional politics. This is a strong indicator of low immediacy and irregular media coverage, even for a regional bloc tasked with major political and security roles. Monthly is the Most Common Frequency with 188 or (49%) of respondents who receive ECOWAS-related information on a monthly basis. This suggests a delayed or periodic awareness, often tied to major events, policy announcements, or regional crises. Biweekly information had 153 or (40%) responses. It showed that a considerable portion receive information every two weeks, suggesting a moderate engagement level, likely influenced by media cycles or institutional updates. Quarterly frequency attracted 43 or (11%). This showed that only few persons hear about ECOWAS once every 3 months, reinforcing that while infrequent, there is still some minimum exposure. On persons who have no information about Ecowas (Not at all), interestingly, there was zero response and zero 0% of respondents who claimed to never receive information.

This implied that basic awareness exists, but the consistency and depth of information was lacking. It indicates that information about regional political organization of ECOWAS rarely reaches the people. This supports the position of Ero (2010) that ECOWAS has communication and outreach deficits, limiting its impact on the everyday consciousness of West African citizens. This means that information on how frequently West African residents obtain information about the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is limited. It further revealed that many citizens are unaware of ECOWAS protocols and decisions related to the free movement of persons and goods. This lack of awareness suggests that information dissemination about ECOWAS may not be reaching all residents effectively. This shows in West Africa, the importance of creating public awareness that ECOWAS initiatives rely on effective communication strategies to inform the public. These findings imply that while ECOWAS undertakes various initiatives, the frequency and effectiveness of information dissemination to West African residents vary, affecting public awareness and engagements with ECOWAS policies and programs.

What has been the major barrier of getting information about ECOWAS regional politics to residents of West African Countries?

Table 3 and pie chart 3 was on the barriers that stop regional information from getting to the people. The analysis indicated that media ownership top the list with 202 or 53% while language had 40 or 10%. The implication is that the media has not been accessible to the people to get information. It is a confirmation that media ownership plays a critical role in shaping the dissemination of information about ECOWAS in West Africa. Media ownership patterns significantly influence the framing, coverage, and accessibility of ECOWAS-related news, often limiting the public's understanding of regional integration efforts. Adedayo (2021) had earlier supported those journalists working for media outlets controlled by influential owners often face restrictions, leading to censorship or self-censorship. This prevents objective reporting on ECOWAS's challenges and achievements, creating gaps in public knowledge. In addition, this research findings agree with the position of Ojo (2019) that many media outlets in West Africa are owned or influenced by political elites who use these platforms to advance their agendas. Coverage of ECOWAS activities is often skewed to align with national or personal political interests. For instance, reports critical of ECOWAS's interventions in political crises might be underreported or misrepresented by politically-owned media outlets.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The media in West Africa operates within a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors. By adhering to the principles of agenda-setting and social responsibility, media outlets have significantly contributed to democratic governance and regional stability. In spite of existing challenges, media in West Africa require concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and the general public to excel. The public and the private media institutions appear ready to build regional politics provided the political institutions act based on policies of seeing the media as partners in progress. Media expect the regional political institutions to encourage policies that support the establishment and sustainability of independent media outlets as alternative voices to the people. A conclusion can also be arrived that radio is the dominant channel. With 51% (196 people) indicating radio as their source of information, it is clear that radio remains a powerful medium for reaching the public. This is especially significant in areas with limited internet or literacy access, where audio content can transcend language and literacy barriers.

It also can be concluded that there is limited impact of indigenous media: Only 6% (22 people) reported receiving information via indigenous media. This might imply that traditional forms of communication (like town criers, community elders, or local drama) are either not being effectively utilized or are being overshadowed by modern technology. For governments, NGOs, or health campaigns aiming to spread messages quickly and widely, prioritizing radio as a communication channel could yield better outreach. This might include investing in radio advertisements, talk shows, and jingles in local languages. There is a strong need for diversification. Despite radio's dominance, there is a risk in over-relying on a single medium. Exploring ways to integrate indigenous media—possibly through community engagement or localized storytelling—could improve reach and cultural resonance, especially in rural or tightly-knit communities. In all it showed gaps in accessibility or trust on information channels and policy makers in the region. The low numbers for indigenous media might also signal challenges like accessibility, relevance, or trust. Investigating why people aren't tuning into or trusting these channels could help revive their role in community education.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional political institutions should establish independent media and media regulatory bodies to ensure media freedom and accountability outside the media of the respective member countries

The regional political organizations should engage in the capacity building of its media unit employees to relate and be training journalists of frequent ethical reporting and investigative skills.

The governments and NGOs should provide funding for public-interest journalism with editorial independence of reporting political matters across the West African region unbias.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Some thoughtful suggestions for future research are raised to build on the current study. These are that future studies should examine the role of individual media platforms such as television, social media, mobile phones, newspapers, and community meetings to get a fuller picture of information dissemination. Second, incorporating interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey questions to deeper insights into why people prefer certain media, how they perceive messages, and barriers to accessing information. Third, analyze media usage patterns by age, gender, education level, occupation, and geographic location (urban versus rural). This can help in tailoring communication strategies to specific groups. Fourth, consider tracking changes in media consumption over time to understand evolving trends, especially with increasing access to digital technology and go beyond to investigate the effectiveness of different media in changing knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors related to the information being shared.

Future research could also explore how to integrate indigenous and modern media effectively—for example, blending storytelling traditions with radio programming or podcasts.

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ARTICLE

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REVITALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN THE LIGHT OF NEP-2020

REVITALIZANDO LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR A TRAVÉS DEL SISTEMA DE CONOCIMIENTO DE LA INDIA A LA LUZ DE LA NEP-2020

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a revolutionary turning point to the educational practices in the country, with a special focus on higher education and use of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). IKS is built on the existing cultural, philosophical and intellectual heritage of India and is all encompassing in nature targeting education, empowerment, development, leadership, and public service with infusing critical thinking, ethics and sustainable development. The purpose of the policy is to bridge the gap between the ancient teachings and modern requirements and develop an education system that is globally competitive and yet ethnocentric taking the best of teachings from the two systems. The National Education Policy 2020 within higher education institutions envisions integrating IKS, promoting research, cultural exchanges, and restructuring of teaching where traditional knowledge goes hand in hand with scientific knowledge as it exists. The attempt has been made in this article to describe the contribution of NEP 2020 to the improvement of higher education in India through incorporation of the Indian Knowledge System with a particular focus on the aspects of pedagogy, research and positioning of India in the knowledge economy. Such a policy which seeks to incorporate Indian knowledge systems IKS can bring about a cultural and educational renaissance and produce holistic graduates capable of dealing with the complexities of the 21st century while preserving the cultural ethos of India.

Keywords
Higher Education, Indian Knowledge System, Holistic Education, NEP-2020

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational system of India has evolved considerably at various points in time in its past, starting with the Gurukul system, to colonialism, and now to the aims articulated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. One of the concerns articulated in the NEP is on the rejuvenation of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in higher education. The Indian Knowledge System is based on the ancient epics like the Vedas, Upanishads, Ayurveda and many classical arts and covers various subjects aimed at the art of living, preserving nature and producing ethical leader (Rishi, 2023). Such knowledge has promoted several academic disciplines including science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, architecture, and philosophy. However, it is regrettable that such knowledge has been comparatively neglected, concentrating on Western forms of education mostly over time. The Western education system took over traditional Indian knowledge systems mostly as a result of colonial influence, which favoured Western methods and curricula to coincide with administrative and commercial needs under British control. The National Education Policy 2020 identifies cultural practices and systems as the Indian knowledge systems that can enrich modern education as well as increase affinity to the rich Indian heritage (Das, 2024). Additionally, NEP-2020 fosters interdisciplinary education, research, and Indian language revitalization, which makes it easier to incorporate IKS. It pushes colleges and universities to develop into inclusive, culturally relevant, and future-ready knowledge hubs. The goal of the policy is to close the gap between conventional and modern learning systems by integrating IKS into research, education, and curricula. Instead, the policy aims to establish a connection between ancient and new knowledge systems by incorporating IKS into higher education. This recovery is also seen as a reaction to contemporary concerns like leadership effectiveness, sustainable growth, and innovation, in addition to being a means of preserving the treasures of the past. In order to promote a more well-rounded and comprehensive educational experience, this research study aims to investigate how IKS might be revived and incorporated into modern higher education institutions.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN EDUCATION

IKS has been enshrined within the Indian culture since earliest times, rightly extending to the Vedic epochs (approximately 1500 BCE) which include the centuries in Chronological order of texts such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, their off-shot texts like the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras among others (Kapoor, et. al.,2021). These are the primaries of Indian metaphysics that goes ahead to inquire into many issues such as existence of beings, the consciousness, and the relationship that exists between individuals and the universe among other things. In addition, ancient Indian literature on subjects like mathematics (like those of Aryabhata), astronomy (for example, Surya Siddhanta), medicine (such as Ayurveda with works like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita) and even building designs (Vastu Shastra) has enhanced the corpus of knowledge available in the world.

Before the advancement of British rule in India, the system of education was based on Gurukula system which was the students lived with the teacher and learnt not only the subjects such as philosophy, logic, mathematics, and sciences but also dealt deeply with the co-curricular activities for nurturing of values through theoretical and practical lessons. The effectiveness of the Gurukul structure relied on the aims of education which was positive, intellectual development and the cultivation of emotional and moral maturity. Knowledge was mainly oral with the ease of absorbing the cost in the day-to-day activities of the individuals to instil the responsibility of taking care of the society and nature in the individuals. Significant changes happened in India's educational system during British colonial administration in the nineteenth century. The colonial state's education policy gained significance, as it was both essential and sufficient for creating an effective command over the colony's administrative machinery and economic resources. This concept attempted to create a class of educated Indians who could help with governance and act as liaisons between British rulers and the Indian population, ensuring that the colonial system ran smoothly. Indian traditions embodied by old languages like Sanskrit and Persian gave way to English with an emphasis in education deviating from education par excellence to training for jobs. This created a situation where local knowledge systems started to be ignored and there – emerged an education system oriented to the needs of the British Empire, specifically for creating clerks and administrators. Over time, this has resulted in a disconnection between modern Indian education and its rich intellectual heritage.

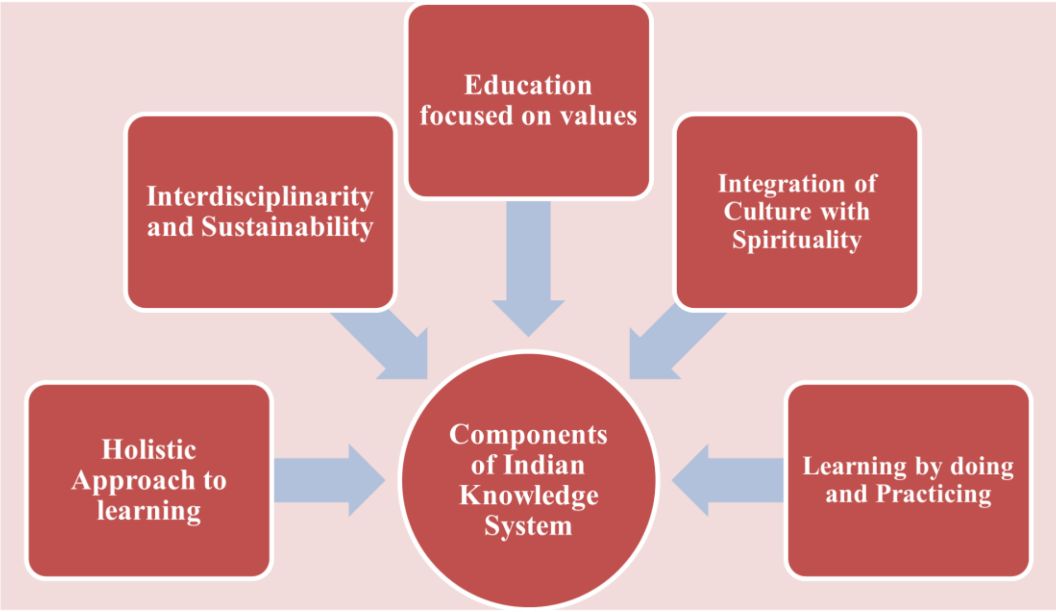
3. METHODOLOGY

In this conceptual review study, secondary data has been collected from already published literature e.g. books, journals, government policy documents and analysed for deeper understanding of Indian Knowledge System and its incorporation into higher education system.

3.1. Components of Indian Knowledge System

The key components of Indian Knowledge System have been described in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Components of Indian Knowledge System



Source: Authors

3.2. Holistic Approach to learning

IKS considers knowledge as an integral part of life with no boundaries. While in modern education the subjects are often viewed in silos, IKS stretches the frontiers to incorporate understanding of science, philosophy, art, and ethics among many. This approach makes it possible to build not only the mind but the heart and the body as one whole unit.

3.3. Interdisciplinary and Sustainability

The most interesting aspect of IKS is that it is multi-dimensional. In the ancient Indian texts, civilization, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and other related fields of study were found closely knit and inter-related. Knowledge was not compartmentalized. This interdisciplinary focus is particularly relevant today, as modern problems such as climate change, health crises, and ethical dilemmas require multifaceted solutions (Mandavkar, 2023).

3.4. Education focused on values

Concerning IKS, moral living and character progression is a predominant theme. Knowledge-transmitted institutions like Gurukuls did not only focuses on teaching the pupil, but also on the pupil's growth and development, which includes values such as respect, discipline, empathy and concern for the world. The Gurukul system was a vital component of ancient Indian education, emphasizing holistic human development in a close, caring setting under the supervision of a Guru. Students lived with the Guru in an ashram, which instilled discipline, humility, and mutual respect. This approach extended academic learning to include moral, spiritual, and practical education, emphasizing principles like self-reliance, community living, and mindfulness. The Guru's intimate closeness allowed for specialized attention, mentorship, and the transmission of experiential knowledge, resulting in well-rounded individuals who excelled in the personal, social, and intellectual spheres.

3.5. Integration of Culture with Spirituality

IKS also forms a considerable part of the spiritual and cultural life in India. It stresses on the need for people to relate with their culture on a deeper level, spiritually. As the current world is increasingly globalized and there is danger of cultural imperialism and erosion of cultures, IKS becomes useful since it seeks to uphold cultural richness and diversity as well as promote spirituality (Mahadevan et al., 2022).

3.6. Learning by doing and Practicing

Ancient Indian education was mostly practice oriented and very little of theory. It did also not matter if it was Ayurveda or Yogic or Architectural studies, the knowledge was put into practice, encouraging practical intelligence. For example, disciplines such as Ayurveda, architecture (Vastu Shastra), metallurgy, and agriculture were taught using apprenticeship models, in which students learned by seeing, practicing, and perfecting techniques under the supervision of experienced mentors. Similarly, artistic traditions such as music, dancing, and crafts were passed down via diligent practice and embodied learning. This system also ensured that knowledge was not only memorized, but profoundly understood and implemented, resulting in the development of expertise, inventiveness, and problem-solving skills that are critical for personal and societal advancement.

4. INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM (IKS)

The National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 which has been initiated by the Government of India is a paradigm shift in the education system of the country. NEP 2020 seeks to break the barriers of compartmentalized education and broadens the scope of learning, and therefore, gives utmost importance to the embedding of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in today s education framework (Gaur, 2024). This has been prompted by the increasing realization that Indian culture, traditions, and ethos have high potentialities to contribute towards the contemporary education system, especially with regards to the processes of curriculum design and the ways teaching and learning take place (Kumar, 2023, 2024).

Some important aspects of NEP 2020 concerning IKS are:

4.1. *Curriculum Integration*

Integration of IKS in Higher Education Curriculum is one of the major pursuits of NEP 2020 and covers also the areas such as:

- Ancient Indian Sciences: Familiarizing students with aspects of the ancient Indian Sciences like Ayurvedic medicine, Yoga, mathematics (Vedic math), Jyotisha (astrology), and metallurgy.
- Philosophy and Ethics: Teaching the Ethics and Philosophy of Indian religions by studying the great Indian classics such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Buddhist scriptures, etc. designed to build one's self individualistic yet ethical critical morality beyond cultural norms.
- Art, Music, and Culture: Preserving and propagating Indian art music dance culture etc. to enhance innovation and creativity and help respect the rich culture of India.
- Environmental Sustainability: 'Green' practices and respect for nature through the lens of Indian texts like Vrikshayurveda which describes ancient Indian tree and plant sciences.

Figure 2 – Integration of IKS in Higher Education

Source: Authors

4.2. Multilingualism and Classical Languages

In the context of NEP 2020, advocates classical heritage languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil and Pali to be taught. It also calls for multilingual education right from early childhood since language is central for every culture and every way of knowledge. There is particular emphasis on 'Sanskrit' in NEP where it states that Sanskrit will be the key to a vast treasury of knowledge where collected works on philosophy, sciences and literature will be found. Thus, as a way of allowing students engage with classical languages, foundational premise of Indian Knowledge System in NEP 2020 enables them to engage with works that bear primary sources of information, which helps in understanding the traditional knowledge in a more comprehensive and best way possible.

4.3. Emerging Trends in Research and Development in IKS

In accordance with the provisions of NEP 2020, there have been calls for the establishment of research centres and institutes whose primary focus is IKS. It further underlines the importance of conducting research on Indian knowledge systems as well as modern science and technology. In this regard, there is a need to bridge the gap between the modern scientific discourse and the traditional Indian concept of knowledge dissemination. IKS and its practical usage in sectors like health care, eco-friendly agribusiness, building designs (Vastu Shastra), etc. is encouraged. It also aims at promotion of Indocentric studies and encourages scholars both Indian and abroad to interact on the role of IKS in innovation and knowledge creation.

4.4. Education with Integration of Values

As one of the elements of NEP 2020, is the aspect of value-based education which is drawn from the Indian ethos of values and moral teachings. The ancient Indian knowledge systems have been compatible with the concept of development in its entirety—physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. NEP 2020 hopes to do this by improving modern education through the incorporation of values like character building, ethical leadership, appreciation of differences, and social accountability.

4.5. Removal of Colonization in Education

The National Education Policy 2020 is also an expression of a wish to decolonise education by restoring the pride in India's intellectual tradition. For many years now, the education system in India has mainly been based on Western ways resulting in little or no emphasis on local content. NEP 2020 seeks to limit or rather reverse this approach by revitalizing traditional Indian subjects, reintroducing ancient Indian texts and methodologies into mainstream education, and balancing modern scientific knowledge with traditional teachings.

Thus, the policy has the objective of improving the education system in such a way that it is more cultural and traditional to the people of India, without necessarily compromising on the global advancement.

5. INCORPORATION OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN PRESENT DAY HIGHER EDUCATION

India's traditional wisdom, practices, and principles are unique and rich. Therefore, it can be rightly said that, native knowledge systems have received acceptance for use in modern educational systems. The increasing trend can be attributed to the growing awareness of the weaknesses that accompany the 'One-Size-Fits-All' West-based systems of education where focus is mostly placed on technological advancements and economic growth, while human beings and the environment are often overlooked. In India, the National Education Policy, NEP 2020 calls for the need to move back to IKS and putting it back into the system. The figure-2 depicts the different areas for Incorporation of Indian Knowledge System in present day higher education system in India.

Figure 3 - Areas of Incorporation of Indian Knowledge System in Present Day Higher Education

Source: Authors

5.1. *Curricular Reforms*

This is one of the most obvious, clear-cut and practical ways in which the importance of IKS can be incorporated into the education system of the upper universities. In addition, universities can create courses on IKS covering its historical aspects, its applications in such popular forms as Indian Ayurveda or Vedic Math or other arts, and philosophy of India. IKS based science and technology also could be explored in the form of courses. As an example, if it is academia on sustainable living, some references may be taken from ancient Indian literature which stresses on living in harmony with nature.

5.2. *Teacher Training*

The hallmark of enhancing the stature of IKS, within the context of higher education, is a predominance of IKS-trained educators. Such personnel should not only have pedagogical skills but also command the relevant IKS body of knowledge. As part of the process of re-education, teacher improvement activities should aim at providing trainers with both substantial knowledge of IKS and the skills of addressing this knowledge to present generation of students. The modern educators and the custodians of traditional knowledge (such as Sanskrit, Ayurveda or Indian philosophy) should work together in order to make the process richer.

5.3. *Research and Innovation*

Further, the importance of higher education institutions encouraging research in IKS's pragmatic aspects, geared at solving current challenges cannot be overemphasized. For example, Ayurveda studies might help the debate on sustainable healthcare on a global scale. Also, Vastu Shastra could help modern architecture, and even urban structures. Promotion of this kind of research shall not only rejuvenate IKS in India but also enable the country to harness interdisciplinary innovative ideas however.

5.4. *Creation of Centres of Excellence*

The creation of IKS dedicated departments in the universities for the relevant further research and promotion of IKS can work as verticals for knowledge transfer and enhancement. In such centres the holders of traditional knowledge will work hand in hand with practitioners of modern science allowing for the inclusion of IKS in wider educational and research activities.

5.5. Student Engagement

IKS incorporation into students' educational process does not remain a passive activity. Participation in projects aimed at learning IKS, for example, will also include such activities as: active involvement in educational and recreational field trips to culturally and historically relevant sites as well as in practical courses teaching some weighty professions such as crafts, agriculture, medicine etc. will aid a student in bridging the gap between the theory and practice. These 'real world' learning opportunities will enhance their appreciation of IKS and the role it plays in addressing current issues.

6. CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

While the integration of IKS into higher education offers numerous benefits, it is not without challenges. Some of the key challenges include:

6.1. Lack of Awareness

A good number of teachers and students have little or no idea on what IKS is and its importance in the contemporary world. The foregoing ignorance may equally predispose them against the incorporation of IKS in the curriculum. It is therefore important that steps are taken to inform the public on the importance of IKS, and the role it can play in education today.

6.2. Standardization and Authenticity

Because of its rich and geographic bound aspect, integration of IKS in modern educational systems is not easy. Dependency on conventional knowledge systems runs the risk of oversimplifying or misrepresenting culture and its associated knowledge. For this, it is essential that the educational institutions engage the traditional knowledge holders and their respective educators in the teaching and learning of IKS.

6.3. Limited Resources

Incorporating IKS into the syllabus entails a lot of additional heavy expenditure on resources, training and facilities. All concerned level of universities and governments should come up with adequate budgets to fund the program development, teacher training, and research activities on IKS.

6.4. Access and Outreach

Ensuring access to IKS education for all students, particularly those from marginalized communities, is another critical challenge. Digital platforms and outreach programs may play a key role in overcoming this barrier, but equitable access to technology and resources will be essential.

Despite these challenges, the revitalization of higher education through IKS is a promising avenue for creating a more balanced, holistic, and sustainable educational system. By drawing on India's rich intellectual heritage, educational institutions can foster a new generation of thinkers and leaders who are well-equipped to address the complex challenges of the 21st century.

7. CONCLUSION

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is seen as lying in the heart of the intellectual underpinning of Indian history; this gave NEP 2020 a chance to bridge important legacies and transform the academic society into a platform inclusive of different environments and self-sustaining in nature. Although NEP 2020 was meant to offer the most visionary framework, the necessity arising out of its implementation cannot permit curriculum changes only but rather needs a cultural shift within education institutions. It calls on the transformation of approaches to teaching and learning; respect for indigenous knowledge would flow through society alongside systems for assessing the rigor that allowed traditional systems to engage their global counterparts critically. Conversely, the set of genuine enhancement actions in higher education classically tries to fall into the trap of romanticization of the past or simply inserting ancient concepts into modern syllabi. Rather, the realization of the concept should strongly be an impromptu integration of these past insights to complement present-day research and enhance their solutions to the future. The challenge lies here in maintaining a certain academic rigor, offering opportunities for interdisciplinary research and being flexible enough to prevent ideological thinking that could dilute the value or authenticity of traditional knowledge. On this view, institutional commitment, faculty training, and peer-reviewed resources need to be created for the legitimation and delivery of IKS in academic formats-if this revitalization is to succeed. The need is also pressing to bring together the scholars of classical traditions and modern sciences in a co-creation of knowledge that is rooted yet globally pertinent. Implementation of IKS, if carried out with intellectual honesty, academic insistence, and cultural sensitivity, holds the potential to overhaul the higher education landscape of India. It stands such a chance because it can improve activities and the relevance of learning and take India to become a world leader in the creation of knowledge from a position where it can base itself on civilizational wisdom and contribute meaningfully to present-day challenges.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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ARTICLE

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VIRTUAL REALITY TOURISM APPLICATION: INSIGHTS FROM TOURISM ENTERPRISES

APLICACIÓN DE LA REALIDAD VIRTUAL EN TURISMO:
PERSPECTIVAS DE LAS EMPRESAS TURÍSTICAS

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Abstract

In a context of robust digital change within the tourism sector, virtual reality tourism has emerged as a promising trend to augment the tourist experience and facilitate enterprises in innovating their business models. This study seeks to assess the extent of access to and experience with virtual reality tourism among tourism enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City, while also reflecting strategies to enhance the implementation of this technology in the industry. The research employed a quantitative survey involving 100 representatives from tourism enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings demonstrate that businesses view virtual reality tourism favorably and have access to a range of virtual reality tourism options via various platforms. Companies also concur that virtual reality tourism is a useful tool for promoting tourism, improving experiences, and creating new tourism-related products. The study suggests management implications to encourage tourism businesses to increase awareness, access, and application of virtual reality tourism more successfully.

Keywords

Virtual Reality, Virtual Reality Tourism, Tourism Business, Smart Tourism.

Resumen

En un contexto de fuerte transformación digital en el sector turístico, el turismo de realidad virtual se ha convertido en una tendencia prometedora para mejorar la experiencia turística y facilitar la innovación de los modelos de negocio de las empresas. Este estudio busca evaluar el grado de acceso y la experiencia con el turismo de realidad virtual entre las empresas turísticas de Ciudad Ho Chi Minh, a la vez que refleja estrategias para mejorar la implementación de esta tecnología en el sector. La investigación empleó una encuesta cuantitativa a 100 representantes de empresas turísticas de Ciudad Ho Chi Minh. Los resultados demuestran que las empresas valoran positivamente el turismo de realidad virtual y tienen acceso a diversas opciones de turismo de realidad virtual a través de diversas plataformas. Las empresas también coinciden en que el turismo de realidad virtual es una herramienta útil para promover el turismo, mejorar las experiencias y crear nuevos productos relacionados con el turismo. El estudio sugiere implicaciones de gestión para incentivar a las empresas turísticas a aumentar el conocimiento, el acceso y la aplicación del turismo de realidad virtual con mayor éxito.

Palabras clave

Realidad Virtual, Turismo de Realidad Virtual, Negocio Turístico, Turismo Inteligente

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of technology playing an increasingly important role in enhancing the travel experience, virtual reality tourism has become a prominent trend in the world. (Verma et al., 2022). This technology allows users to explore destinations intuitively and vividly through a simulated virtual environment, thereby providing an interactive and realistic emotional experience before taking the actual journey (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020). In many developed countries, virtual reality tourism is not only used as an effective destination promotion tool but also contributes to restructuring traditional tourism products, aiming for sustainable development, and adapting to new trends as digital transformation, smart tourism or post-pandemic tourism (Idris et al., 2021).

In Vietnam, especially in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), virtual reality tourism is considered a digital transformation solution in tourism and promotes the development of smart tourism. Virtual reality tourism has been initially exploited in promotional activities, promotion and enhancing the experience for tourists. Applications include 360° digital tourism maps, solutions to integrate virtual reality technology into museum operations. Hotels and travel businesses also exploit virtual reality tourism to help tourists access products more intuitively. However, in general, the exploitation of virtual reality tourism by businesses is still limited.

Based on the above practical gap, this study was conducted to understand the awareness and views of tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City on the application of virtual reality tourism in business and promotion activities. Through surveying and analyzing opinions from businesses operating in the tourism sector, the study provides useful management implications in promoting digital transformation in the Vietnamese tourism industry. The research results are expected to contribute to the theoretical and practical foundation in developing smart tourism models, in line with the trend of innovation in the era of technology 4.0.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Virtual reality tourism

Virtual reality technology (VR) and virtual reality tourism are becoming increasingly popular in the world thanks to their high applicability and ability to effectively support real tourism (Zhang & Hwang, 2024). The rapid development of digital technology has opened up new opportunities for the tourism industry, in which VR is considered an important tool to help recreate space vividly, bringing rich experiences to visitors (Beck et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2022). In fact, more and more destinations, museums, historical sites and travel companies in the world are applying VR to attract visitors, support promotion and expand access to potential customers.

Virtual reality tourism is a form of tourism that uses VR technology to simulate locations, providing realistic experiences through supporting devices to help visitors visit or experience in a virtual environment (Beck et al., 2019; Verma et al., 2022). Virtual reality tourism is currently implemented in many different forms. One of the most popular forms is 360-degree virtual tours, where visitors can observe the entire view of a destination through images or videos shot using 360-degree technology (Wu & Lai, 2022). In addition, 3D space simulation is also a widely applied method, especially in the field of cultural heritage preservation and reproduction (Huang et al., 2013). These technologies allow for the accurate reproduction of architectural works and historical spaces, helping viewers visualize more clearly the places they want to explore. Some more advanced applications also use comprehensive virtual reality, allowing users to interact directly with the virtual environment through devices such as VR glasses or gesture control.

2.2. Application of virtual reality tourism in tourism businesses

In the business context, virtual reality tourism is studied as a tool to increase marketing effectiveness and enhance competitiveness. According to research by Tussyadiah et al. (2018), businesses can use virtual reality technology to create interactive touchpoints with customers, thereby improving decision-making ability, increasing service booking intention and strengthening brand image (Tussyadiah et al., 2018). The application of virtual reality tourism in destination marketing has been shown to increase customer satisfaction and commitment (Chang & Chiang, 2022). In addition, virtual reality also helps businesses optimize advertising costs, expand markets and increase accessibility to new customer segments, especially the young, tech-savvy generation. (Peštek & Sarvan, 2020).

Virtual reality technology extends beyond the business realm, finding widespread application in the preservation and promotion of cultural and historical heritage. Many museums and relic sites around the world have integrated virtual reality to recreate historical spaces, restore artifacts or facilitate visitors to visit remotely. Studies have also shown that digitizing relics and artifacts using virtual reality technology not only brings educational and conservation value, but also enhances accessibility and attracts international tourists. In the context of sustainable tourism development and adaptation to digital transformation trends, many countries have considered virtual reality an inseparable part of the smart tourism development strategy (Idris et al., 2021). Recent studies show that, when applied properly, virtual reality tourism can enhance the tourist experience, raise awareness of cultural heritage, and promote actual travel behavior after the virtual experience (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019).

3. METHOD

The study used quantitative methods , specifically a questionnaire survey with a convenience sample.

Quantitative data was collected through a survey of tourism business representatives in Ho Chi Minh City to assess the level of preparation in terms of technology, human resources, finance and proposed support policies. The study used a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale to measure business perspectives. The survey sample was selected by a convenience method, focusing on managers at the level of Department Head or higher in the product, marketing or technology department. The survey was conducted online from September to November 2022 via email and the Zalo group connecting tourism businesses.

After checking and cleaning the data, the study obtained 100 valid responses. The data was processed using SPSS 24.0 software to analyze the readiness level and recommendations of businesses for applying virtual reality technology in tourism business activities.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *Sample profile*

The businesses participating in the survey are travel businesses (domestic, international, domestic and international) headquartered in Ho Chi Minh City with a number of 100 businesses. The people who received the survey and responded had positions from Department Head and above. A preliminary descriptive statistic of the businesses participating in the response are shown below.

In terms of enterprise size, the largest number is enterprises with 10 to less than 50 employees, accounting for 50% (50), the lowest number is enterprises with more than 100 employees, 2% (2), enterprises with 50 to less than 100 employees account for 24% (24), similarly, enterprises with less than 10 employees account for 24% (24). In terms of total enterprise capital, enterprises participating in the survey are also mainly concentrated in the type of micro-enterprises and small enterprises with the following charter capital: the largest proportion is under 3 billion VND, 52% (52), followed by from 3 billion to less than 50 billion, 34% (34), from 50 to less than 100 billion, 8% (8), over 100 billion, 6% (6). Combining both capital and labor factors, the survey sample is mainly micro and small enterprises, which is also a characteristic of travel businesses because this group is often young, newly established businesses or has a small staff size.

4.2. Types of virtual reality tourism that have been approached and information channels accessed

Regarding the types of virtual reality tourism that have been approached, the study offers some popular types according to the actual development of virtual reality tourism in the world and in Vietnam for businesses to choose from (table 1).

Table 1 – Types of virtual reality tourism that business representatives have experienced

STT	Concept	Frequency	Frequency (%)
1	Satellite mapping applications can view panoramic views of remote locations.	23	14.6%
2	Search for travel information on websites, with 360 video clips, panoramic photos with sound, ...	31	19.7%
3	Search for travel information on apps, with 360 video clips, panoramic photos with sound, ...	32	20.4%
4	Free online travel through products	21	13.4%
5	Virtual reality experiences at tourist destinations (museums, monuments, ...)	36	22.9%
6	Buy pre-designed virtual reality tour packages through websites	4	2.5%
7	Purchase virtual reality tours with local guides and personalized support devices	9	5.7%
8	Never experienced any of the above products or services	1	0.6%
	Total	157	100.0%

Source: Research results

Among the above types, business representatives have experienced virtual reality at tourist destinations (museums, monuments, ...) the most with 22.9% (36), followed by searching for tourism information on applications, with 360 video clips, panoramic photos with sound, ... with 20.4% (32), searching for tourism information on websites, with 360 video clips, panoramic photos with sound, ... accounting for 19.7% (31). For professional and package virtual reality tourism types, representatives of these businesses have not used them commonly, for example, buying virtual reality tourism programs through local guides and personalized support devices accounts for only 5.7% (9); Buying pre-designed package virtual reality tourism programs through websites accounts for 2.5% (4). This is also the common situation for the development of virtual reality tourism products, mostly experiences at museums, historical and cultural relics.

First, virtual reality experiences at tourist destinations are the most popular type, accounting for 22.9%. This result shows that businesses tend to approach virtual reality through museums, relics or exhibition centers, where this technology is applied to recreate historical spaces or expand the visiting experience. In Ho Chi Minh City, some virtual reality tourism applications have also been exploited, although they are still very basic.

For virtual reality technology experiences in on-site tourism, there are now many units such as museums, monuments, tourism businesses, hotels, etc. that provide virtual reality experience activities for tourists to increase satisfaction and excitement when visiting tourist attractions. For example, the application of Smart Museum 3D/360 technology has been introduced at the Southern Women's Museum to serve virtual reality tours and smart interactions during the tour. Or at the Saigon - Gia Dinh Special Forces Museum, virtual reality technology is also exploited so that visitors can visit many different locations in the city or look back at images of the past in a vivid way. Some hotels also apply virtual reality technology to introduce tourist attractions and tourism programs in the city for visitors to conveniently look up, learn and make a tour schedule.

For more basic versions, Ho Chi Minh City is building a 3D/360 Smart Interactive Tourism Map Application system with the aim of improving the city's tourism promotion work, while affirming the city's development through the application of high technology in tourism promotion and advertising. According to the report of the Department of Tourism in 2023, it attracted 185,000 interactions from tourists from 48 countries and territories. In the near future, this map will connect famous and typical tourist attractions in Ho Chi Minh City with those in 62 provinces and cities across the country, creating virtual reality technology products that help tourists learn about their tour programs before visiting. This is Ho Chi Minh City's virtual reality tourism platform with full range of tourist attractions and related tourism services for tourists to refer to before conducting tourism activities.

In addition, searching for information through online platforms that integrate 360-degree technology is a clear trend, with a rate of 19.7% on websites and 20.4% on mobile applications. This result reflects the fact that businesses mainly approach virtual reality as a tool to support information search instead of experiencing a complete tourism product. Ho

Chi Minh City is a place with a high level of Internet usage, so it is understandable that businesses often look up information through websites or applications. However, this also shows that virtual reality is not yet seen as an independent tourism product, but only plays a supporting role in the tourism planning process.

Furthermore, the proportion of free VR tourism experiences (13.4%) is significantly higher than that of paid programs. This suggests that businesses may have had access to some VR tourism content but are not yet ready to invest in more premium products. Ho Chi Minh City has many technology startups developing free or trial VR content to promote destinations, but the level of application in actual business is still very low. In addition, commercial VR tourism programs are still not popular, with only 2.5% of businesses having purchased a package program and 5.7% having experienced personalized products through tour guides. This result suggests that VR tourism in Ho Chi Minh City has not been exploited as a product with economic value. The current market mainly focuses on free content or experiences at destinations, while professional VR business models have not been widely deployed.

In addition to the types, the study also investigated the sources of information that tourism businesses have accessed virtual reality tourism, thereby assessing the popularity of this technology among tourism businesses. The main objective is to determine which communication channels play an important role in providing information about virtual reality tourism, as well as the level of initiative of businesses in learning and updating the technology.

Table 2 – Sources of information to access virtual reality tourism

STT	Concept	Frequency	Frequency (%)
1	Virtual reality tourism programs and products on the Internet	40	30.1%
2	Conference on tourism and technology	20	15.0%
3	Through other travel businesses	19	14.3%
4	Through social networks, newspapers, ...	31	23.3%
5	Through training programs on tourism	18	13.5%
6	Through foreign partners	5	3.8%
	Total	133	100.0%

Source: Research results

The survey results show that tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City mainly access information about virtual reality tourism through online platforms and digital media, with the Internet (30.1%) and social networks and newspapers (23.3%) being the two most popular channels. Meanwhile, more specialized channels such as tourism-technology seminars

(15.0%), other travel businesses (14.3%), and training and coaching (13.5%) have lower levels of access. Notably, international partners account for only 3.8%, showing limitations in connecting with technology from foreign markets.

First, the Internet and social networks are the most popular sources of information, reflecting the trend of businesses prioritizing online channels to learn about virtual reality tourism technology. Ho Chi Minh City is one of the cities with the highest Internet and social network usage rates in the country, leading to businesses tending to search for information through these platforms. Accessing via the Internet helps businesses quickly update trends and experience VR products on the market. However, this method can also cause information to be scattered, unsystematic, and inaccurate when a business does not have a specific basis for evaluation.

In addition, the rate of accessing information through seminars and training programs is still limited, although Ho Chi Minh City is the center of many major events on technology and tourism. This result shows that virtual reality tourism has not really become a central topic in training programs or specialized seminars. This situation can make it difficult for businesses to clearly understand the potential of applying VR to business operations, as well as limit opportunities to connect with experts in the field. Moreover, the level of connection with international partners is very low, although Ho Chi Minh City has an advantage in attracting foreign investment. The survey results reflect those businesses have not yet proactively sought cooperation with international technology companies . In addition, accessing information through other tourism businesses also accounts for a certain proportion, showing that the tourism industry in Ho Chi Minh City tends to learn and share information internally.

4.3. Business perception of virtual reality tourism applications

Virtual reality tourism can be applied to many functions in the tourism sector: virtual reality tourism planning can be applied to many functions in the tourism sector: trip planning, general management, marketing and PR, information exchange, new ways of entertainment, education and training, access to restricted tourist areas or conservation destinations, either before, during or after the trip (Beck et al., 2019). For travel businesses, in general, virtual reality tourism has 3 main applications: tourism promotion, enhancing the experience at the destination and creating new tourism products.

Table 3 – Business perception of virtual reality tourism applications

STT	Variable	Medium	DLC	References
1	Virtual reality tourism enhances business image to tourists	3.66	0.798	Agree
2	Virtual reality tourism helps businesses reach customers more effectively	3.74	0.828	Agree

3	We use virtual reality tourism as a promotional channel.	3.66	0.848	Agree
4	We apply virtual reality tourism to create more tourism products/services at the destination.	3.62	0.878	Agree
5	Virtual reality tourism creates new tourism products	3.76	0.822	Agree
6	Virtual reality tourism helps businesses operate more effectively	3.64	0.802	Agree
7	We apply virtual reality tourism to create new tourism products/services.	3.68	0.683	Agree

Source: Research results

The research results presented in Table 4 show that tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City have a high level of consensus on the role and effectiveness of virtual reality tourism applications. All survey statements received agreement from businesses, with the average value ranging from 3.62 to 3.76 on a 5-point Likert scale, showing a positive and relatively uniform perception of this technology.

Specifically, the statement "Virtual reality tourism creates new tourism products" received the highest consensus from businesses, with an average value of 3.76 and a standard deviation of 0.822. This reflects businesses' positive assessment of the ability to create added value and diversify tourism products through virtual reality technology.

Next, the statement "Virtual reality tourism helps businesses reach customers more effectively" also recorded a high level of consensus, with a mean value of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 0.828.

This result shows that businesses are clearly aware of the role of virtual reality tourism as a modern marketing tool, helping to expand the reach of potential customers in a more flexible and creative way than traditional methods.

The remaining statements have a relatively even level of consensus. The statement "We apply virtual reality tourism to create new tourism products or services" has a mean value of 3.68 (standard deviation 0.683), reflecting the positive trend of businesses in integrating technology into product development activities.

The two statements "Virtual reality tourism enhances the image of the business to tourists" and "We apply virtual reality tourism as a promotional channel" have a mean value of 3.66, with standard deviations of 0.798 and 0.848, respectively. This shows that virtual reality tourism is not only seen as an effective marketing tool but also a means to contribute to building a more vivid and attractive brand image of the business in the eyes of tourists.

In addition, the statement "Virtual reality tourism helps businesses operate more efficiently" has a mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 0.802, indicating that businesses also highly appreciate the indirect impact of this technology on overall business performance.

Finally, the statement "We apply virtual reality tourism to create more tourism products or services at the destination" has the lowest consensus among the survey statements, with a mean of 3.62 and a standard deviation of 0.878. Although this is the statement with the lowest mean, it is still within the agreement level, reflecting the recognized potential of this technology in enhancing the experience at a real destination.

The research results show that tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City have a positive and relatively uniform perception of the application of virtual reality technology in tourism promotion activities. This shows a certain change in the approach of businesses to digital technology, especially in the context of the tourism industry gradually recovering and restructuring towards sustainability and adapting to the global digitalization trend.

Notably, the statement with the highest mean value was "Virtual reality tourism creates new tourism products" (M = 3.76; SD = 0.822), clearly reflecting the positive perception of businesses towards the innovative role of virtual reality technology in product development. This result is consistent with previous studies emphasized that virtual reality is not only a technological tool but also a platform to restructure tourism services towards personalization, high interaction and flexibility in terms of content (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). Similarly, the statement "Virtual reality tourism helps businesses reach customers more effectively" (M = 3.74; SD = 0.828) also achieved a high level of consensus, showing that businesses are clearly aware of the potential of virtual reality as a modern means of communication and marketing.

Results are also supported by previous studies that suggest that virtual reality technology has the potential to create rich experiential touchpoints between businesses and customers, thereby improving the effectiveness of brand messaging and increasing the conversion rate from inquiry to purchase (Chang & Chiang, 2022; Yung et al., 2021). Virtual reality tourism can help tourists visually review the products and tourism programs that businesses offer, for example, previewing the attractions, hotel rooms or experiences included in the tour program. Through this, the image of the tourist destination is enhanced and the tourism demand of tourists will also increase (Kim & Hall, 2019).

Therefore, these tourists can make the decision to buy a tour program faster and more conveniently than if they could not preview it. The tourism brand of the business is thereby enhanced in the eyes of the buyer through transparency and commitment to the quality of the tour program. From here, businesses can also design virtual reality tour programs to promote instead of just using conventional static images or video clips. These solutions are also effective for tourist accommodation establishments when tourists are completely immersed in the space of the room they intend to book (McLean & Barhorst, 2021; Zeng et al., 2020).

Overall, the results show the readiness and goodwill of businesses in applying virtual reality tourism to their business and promotional activities. This positive perception is an important basis for implementing digital transformation programs in the tourism sector in Vietnam. At the same time, the results also reflect the global trend of integrating technology into tourism products, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of businesses in the context of an increasingly digital market and changing consumer behavior toward visual, fast and highly interactive experiences.

4.4. *Policy implications for promoting tourism businesses to apply virtual reality tourism*

Raising awareness and accessibility of virtual reality tourism among tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City requires appropriate management strategies to take advantage of the potential of this technology in the context of strong digital transformation. To promote this process, there need to be synchronous solutions from management agencies, tourism organizations and businesses themselves.

Firstly, it is necessary to strengthen communication activities and in-depth training on virtual reality tourism to raise business awareness.

Currently, most tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City access information via the Internet and social networks, but lack a solid knowledge base to understand the potential of applying virtual reality to their business models. Therefore, tourism organizations and management agencies need to organize more seminars and workshops on virtual reality technology, inviting technology experts and pioneering businesses to share practical experiences. At the same time, virtual reality training programs in tourism need to be integrated into courses at universities and tourism training centers, helping businesses gain a deeper insight into how to apply this technology to their business operations.

Second, it is necessary to create a mechanism to encourage and support businesses to test virtual reality applications in tourism activities.

One of the barriers that prevent businesses from being interested in virtual reality is the high investment cost and lack of understanding of suitable business models. Solutions should focus on creating breakthroughs in science, technology development, innovation, and national digital transformation while implementing Resolution 57-NQ/TW of the Politburo, issued on December 22, 2024. Therefore , Ho Chi Minh City needs to have policies to support finance or tax incentives for businesses investing in virtual reality technology, especially small and medium enterprises. In addition, Ho Chi Minh City can implement pilot projects on virtual reality tourism, cooperate with technology companies to build free or low-cost VR products for tourism businesses to experience before applying them in practice. Such initiatives will help businesses reduce investment risks and have a practical basis to evaluate the effectiveness of VR technology in business operations.

Third, tourism businesses need to proactively invest in and integrate virtual reality tourism technology into their product and service development strategies, in order to enhance customer experience value and diversify tourism options.

The research results show that businesses appreciate the role of virtual reality tourism in creating new products and increasing services at destinations, reflecting the urgent need to innovate tourism product content to adapt to modern consumption trends. Integrating this technology can help businesses design vivid simulation experiences, allowing customers to " try out " the destination before making a decision, thereby increasing conversion and satisfaction levels.

Fourth, virtual reality tourism should be viewed by businesses as an effective promotional and communication tool, especially in reaching target customer segments in a more intuitive and engaging way.

From the research results, it can be seen that virtual reality tourism is not only a technical support factor, but also has strategic value in branding and connecting with the market. Businesses can take advantage of the virtual reality platform to deploy interactive promotional campaigns, introduce tourism products through 360 ^{o} experiences , or create online tours, helping customers clearly visualize the services they will experience. This approach is especially effective in reaching international customers, young customers, or those who are not ready to pay but are in the stage of learning about the destination. When exploited properly, this technology will not only increase communication effectiveness but also enhance the connection between customers and brands, thereby contributing to boosting revenue and expanding the market for tourism products.

Fifth , it is necessary to strengthen cooperation between tourism businesses and technology units to develop highly commercial virtual reality tourism products.

Currently, most businesses in Ho Chi Minh City are only using virtual reality as a tool to support information lookup, and there are not many truly attractive VR tourism products to generate revenue. To solve this problem, there needs to be a close connection between tourism businesses and technology companies to build virtual reality tourism models with economic value, such as themed virtual tours, personalized VR tourism experiences according to customer preferences, or virtual tour guide programs combined with real services. Ho Chi Minh City is a center of startups and innovation, so promoting cooperation between the tourism industry and the technology sector will create a strong driving force for the development of competitive VR products.

5. CONCLUSION

The research results show that tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City have a clear awareness and approach to virtual reality tourism, but most of them only use tools to support information search such as satellite maps, tourism websites with 360° content or mobile applications with integrated panoramic photos and sound. Meanwhile, more in-depth experiences, such as complete virtual reality tours, are still limited. In particular, the rate of businesses that have purchased or provided full virtual reality tourism services through websites or tour guides is still very low, reflecting the lack of readiness in terms of business models. In addition, the research also shows that the Internet and social networks are the most popular information channels for businesses to approach virtual reality tourism, while specialized seminars, training programs and international cooperation have not been fully utilized.

The research results show that tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City have a positive perception of the application of virtual reality tourism in promotional activities. Virtual reality tourism is considered an effective tool for creating new tourism products, reaching customers, enhancing the business image, and supporting business activities. This shows the potential and feasibility of this technology in the development and communication strategies of tourism businesses.

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ARTICLE

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LANGUAGE USE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

USO DEL LENGUAJE EN MACEDONIA DEL NORTE

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Abstract

This study examines the role of language policies and practices in the multiethnic context of North Macedonia, with a particular focus on the Albanian language. In a society where Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, and other ethnic groups coexist, language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a crucial marker of cultural identity and social inclusion. Using a qualitative sociolinguistic approach, the study analyzes the historical and legal framework (e.g., the Ohrid Framework Agreement and the Law on the Use of Languages), as well as language use in education, public administration, and the media. Preliminary findings indicate significant progress in the institutionalization of multilingualism, especially the use of Albanian in public life, while also highlighting persistent challenges in implementation and equity. Multilingual education and media have improved minority representation and participation, yet resource disparities and ethnic tensions remain. The paper argues that building a more integrated and equitable society requires not only legal provisions for language rights but also societal change through inclusive education and balanced media representation. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the impact of language on social cohesion in multiethnic states.

Keywords

North Macedonia, language use, multilingualism, sociolinguistics, identity, interethnic relations

1. INTRODUCTION

North Macedonia is home to a diverse ethnic population, including Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Roma, and others. In such a multi-ethnic context, language is more than a means of communication—it is a key element of cultural identity and social inclusion. As Risteska (2018a) notes, "language use influences not only representation in society but also the perceptions different groups have of one another" (p. 74). This study aims to examine how language policies and practices shape the experiences of different communities in North Macedonia, with particular attention to the Albanian language.

Multilingualism is a fundamental characteristic of the country, and the use of languages plays an important role in shaping inter-ethnic and social relations. Language is not only a communicative tool but also a sign of identity and cultural belonging, as well as a key factor for the integration of different ethnic groups. Sociolinguistics, as a discipline that examines the relationship between language and society, can provide a deep understanding of the impact of language use in North Macedonia. This study explores the multifaceted aspects of language use, analyzing the historical and legal context, the role of language in education and public administration, and the influence of media. A particular focus is placed on clarifying the impact of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001), which granted official status to the Albanian language in municipalities where Albanians constitute at least 20% of the population—not just in those where they are the majority. Through this analysis, the study seeks to offer insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with fostering a cohesive multilingual society (Cakaj, 2020b).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative sociolinguistic approach aimed at understanding how language policy is implemented and experienced by different ethnic groups in North Macedonia. The methodology includes:

- **Document analysis**: Examination of key legal documents such as the Constitution, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001), the Law on the Use of Languages (2019), and the Law on Primary Education (2019).
- **Literature review**: Analysis of scholarly work on language policy, multilingual education, and interethnic relations.
- **Preliminary field observations**: Conducted in Tetovo and Skopje, focusing on language use in public spaces, education, and administration.
- **Informal interviews**: Carried out with educators, civil servants, and citizens from various ethnic backgrounds to understand their experiences and perspectives on language use in everyday life.

This mixed-methods qualitative framework aims to identify key trends, persistent challenges, and progress made in promoting inclusive language use in public life.

3. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

3.1. Historical and legal context of language use

Following independence in 1991, Macedonian was declared the sole official language. This led to tensions among ethnic minorities, especially the Albanian community. The 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement marked a turning point by recognizing Albanian as an official language in municipalities where Albanians comprise at least 20% of the population. This paved the way for greater linguistic rights and institutional reform.

Building on the OFA, the Law on the Use of Languages (2019) further extended the official use of Albanian throughout the country, including in public administration, courts, and national institutions. Despite progress, implementation challenges remain, particularly regarding clarity in judicial contexts and the inclusion of other minority languages like Turkish, Romani, and Serbian (Cakaj, 2020a).

3.2. Historical background

The linguistic dynamics of North Macedonia have been influenced by its complex history, marked by periods of Ottoman rule, Yugoslav federation, and eventual independence in 1991. During the Yugoslav era, Macedonian was established as the official language, while minority languages were recognized to varying degrees. Post-independence, the 1991 Constitution designated Macedonian as the sole official language, which led to tensions among ethnic minorities, particularly the Albanian community. The lack of official recognition for minority languages contributed to feelings of marginalization and sparked demands for greater linguistic rights.

3.3. The Ohrid Framework Agreement

In response to the 2001 conflict between ethnic Albanian insurgents and Macedonian security forces, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was signed, aiming to enhance the rights of ethnic minorities. A key provision of the OFA was the recognition of Albanian as an official language in municipalities where Albanians constituted at least 20% of the population.This agreement marked a significant shift in language policy, promoting bilingualism in public administration, education, and other sectors. The OFA laid the groundwork for subsequent legal reforms aimed at institutionalizing multilingualism and ensuring equitable language rights (Cakaj, 2020b).

3.4. The Law and the Use of Languages

Building upon the OFA, the Law on the Use of Languages was enacted in 2019, further expanding the official use of Albanian across the country. The law stipulates that Albanian is to be used in all public institutions, including government agencies, courts, and municipalities, regardless of the local ethnic composition. However, the law has faced criticism for its ambiguous provisions and challenges in implementation. Concerns have been raised regarding the law's clarity, particularly in judicial proceedings, and its applicability to other minority languages such as Turkish, Roma, and Serbian (AP News, 2024).

Despite these challenges, the law represents a significant step toward institutionalizing multilingualism and promoting linguistic equality in North Macedonia.

3.5. *Language Use in Education and Public Administration*

In education in North Macedonia, the use of Macedonian and Albanian is important to ensure equality of educational opportunities for all ethnic groups. In recent years, schools have started to offer more opportunities for instruction in Albanian, thus ensuring that children of ethnic Albanian groups can pursue their education in their mother tongue. According to Nikola Kolarov (2019a), "Efforts to integrate the two languages into the education system are a step forward for the development of an equal and integrated society." On the other hand, the public administration in North Macedonia has become more multilingual, ensuring that citizens can use their mother tongue in conversations and official documents. This change has contributed to strengthening trust between ethnic groups and promoting a sense of belonging. Education and Public Administration.Education is a key domain where language policy affects daily life. Albanian-language instruction has increased, allowing ethnic Albanian students to receive education in their mother tongue. However, Macedonian remains dominant in higher education, limiting access for non-native speakers.In public administration, progress toward bilingualism is visible in several municipalities. Citizens are increasingly able to access services in both Macedonian and Albanian. Still, implementation is uneven, particularly in rural areas and in smaller administrative offices (Cakaj, 2020b).

3.6. *Education*

The education sector now offers instruction in multiple languages, particularly Macedonian and Albanian. While primary and secondary education has become more inclusive, disparities remain in higher education, where Macedonian is still dominant. According to Kolarov (2019a), efforts to integrate the two languages into the education system are a step forward for the development of an equal and integrated society. In public administration, services are increasingly provided in both Macedonian and Albanian, improving access and representation. However, issues such as lack of bilingual staff and inconsistent policy enforcement, especially in rural areas, continue to pose challenges (Cakaj, 2020a; Eurydice, 2023; Kolarov, 2019b; OECD, 2024).

3.7. *Public Administration*

The integration of minority languages into public administration has been a focal point of language policy reforms. Following the OFA and the 2019 language law, public institutions are required to provide services in both Macedonian and Albanian, with provisions for other minority languages where applicable.Implementation of bilingualism in public administration has led to increased accessibility of services for minority communities and has fostered greater participation in public life. However, practical challenges remain, including the need for qualified bilingual staff, translation of official documents, and consistent application of language policies across institutions (OECD, 2024). Continued investment in capacity building and monitoring mechanisms is essential to ensure the effective implementation of multilingual public administration (Cakaj, 2020b).

4. MEDIA AND LANGUAGE USE

Media in North Macedonia plays a critical role in shaping public perception and interethnic dialogue. Outlets exist in multiple languages—Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Romani—contributing to cultural visibility. MRT2, for example, offers programming in Albanian, Turkish, and Romani. Private channels like Alsat-M broadcast bilingually and aim to foster interethnic understanding.

However, representation is still uneven, and minority language media often suffer from underfunding and political pressure. Online platforms such as *Portalb.mk* and *Shenja TV* provide valuable Albanian-language content, while grassroots groups like *Romalitico* use social media to amplify Roma voices.

Despite their potential to bridge divides, media platforms can also perpetuate stereotypes. Ethical journalism and inclusive editorial policies are needed to mitigate the risks of hate speech and disinformation (Reporting Diversity Network, 2024).

4.1. Television and Radio

One of the most prominent examples of bilingual broadcasting is Macedonian Radio Television (MRT), the public broadcaster, which offers programming in multiple languages. MRT1 primarily broadcasts in Macedonian, while MRT2 is dedicated to minority languages. MRT2's schedule includes:

- Albanian-language programming throughout most of the day, including news, cultural shows, talk shows, and children's programming.
- Turkish-language shows such as "Merhaba Hayat" and news segments produced in cooperation with the Turkish community.

- Romani-language programs like "Roma Avazi", which highlight Roma culture and social issues.

Local and private broadcasters also contribute to this multilingual environment. *TV Koha*, based in Tetovo, broadcasts exclusively in Albanian, serving the western part of the country, while *Alsat-M*, a national private TV channel, operates bilingually in Macedonian and Albanian, aiming to promote interethnic understanding. Its slogan "Bringing People Together" reflects this mission. According to Risteska (2018a), "The presence of Albanian in private and public television has increased the visibility of the Albanian community, but also introduced linguistic diversity into the homes of Macedonian viewers".

4.2. Print and Online Media

The print media in North Macedonia includes newslts and magazines in several languages. For example: "Koha" is a leading Albanian-language daily newslt that provides news, political analysis, and cultural content. "Nova Makedonija", published in Macedonian, is one of the oldest newslts in the country. "Lobi" is a weekly magazine published in Albanian, known for its focus on politics and social issues affecting the Albanian community.

Online media has grown significantly in recent years, creating more space for minority language content. Portalb.mk, an Albanian-language online news portal based in Skopje, provides independent reporting on national and regional issues, often with a focus on minority rights, governance, and education. Its work is often cited by international human rights organizations for its role in strengthening media pluralism. Another example is *Shenja TV*, an Albanian-language online and cable broadcaster, which produces political debates, documentaries, and religious programming targeting the Albanian Muslim population.

4.3. Social Media and Minority Voices

Social media platforms have enabled minority communities to bypass traditional media barriers and express themselves directly. Activist groups, such as *Romalitico*, use Facebook and YouTube to share content in Romani and advocate for Roma rights and political participation. However, the digital space also poses risks. Instances of hate speech and nationalist rhetoric have emerged on social media platforms, especially during periods of political instability. A 2023 report by the Reporting Diversity Network highlighted how some Macedonian-language online forums spread disinformation and ethnic stereotypes, particularly during election cycles.

4.4. Challenges and Opportunities

While the diversity of language use in media has increased representation and access to information, challenges remain:

- Funding: Minority-language media outlets often face financial instability and rely on donor support, which affects their sustainability.
- Political pressure: Some outlets are subject to editorial control or influence from political parties, reducing journalistic independence.
- Limited coverage of minority issues in Macedonian-language media: Topics affecting ethnic Albanians, Roma, or Turks are often underrepresented or framed from a majority perspective.

Yet, the growth of bilingual and minority-language media has had a significant positive impact on interethnic dialogue. According to Katerina Risteska (2018b), "The use of multiple languages in media serves not only the function of representation, but also that of bridging the gap between communities".

5. DISCUSSION

Language policy in North Macedonia has undergone significant transformation since the Ohrid Agreement, with notable advancements in institutionalizing bilingualism and promoting minority rights. The legal recognition of the Albanian language has enhanced the participation of ethnic Albanians in public life and improved access to education and services. Nevertheless, full implementation remains uneven. While urban centers show more progress, rural and monoethnic areas lag behind. Public attitudes toward bilingualism also vary, influencing how laws are enforced and respected.

Beyond legal reforms, societal change is needed—particularly in attitudes, education, and media—to promote genuine inclusion and interethnic understanding. Language should be seen not as a dividing line, but as a bridge toward a more cohesive, respectful, and democratic society.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Language use in North Macedonia is a critical issue that intertwines with identity, social equity, and interethnic relations. The country has made significant progress, particularly after the 2001 Ohrid Agreement, but ongoing challenges remain in achieving consistent, fair, and meaningful multilingual inclusion. Future research will focus on collecting more systematic data from multiple municipalities and conducting structured interviews with public officials and media professionals. Continued efforts are needed to foster inclusive language practices, ensure fair representation, and create opportunities for dialogue through education, administration, and media. The use of languages in North Macedonia is a multidimensional issue and extremely important for the development of a stable and equal society. In a country with different ethnic groups, where Macedonians, Albanians and other ethnic groups share a common space, language is a key factor related not only to communication, but also to the identity, integration and coexistence of different groups. Consequently, the use of languages is not only a means to carry out daily functions, but also a means to preserve and promote the cultures and identities of different ethnic groups.

In recent years, North Macedonia has achieved significant progress in the integration of different languages, focusing particularly on the use of Albanian in public administration and education. The Ohrid Agreement (2001) has had a significant impact, enabling Albanians, as the largest ethnic group after Macedonians, to use their language officially in many areas, such as public administration, education, healthcare and media. This has improved the opportunities for social inclusion of ethnic groups, giving them the opportunity to participate in public life and contribute to the development of the country on an equal footing. However, the use of languages in North Macedonia still faces several challenges. While Albanian has gained a higher status in some areas, disparities still remain in some aspects of social and professional life. In many cases, Albanian citizens and those of other ethnicities still face difficulties in using their language in public administration and higher education, where Macedonian remains the main dominant language. This has caused tensions and perceptions of inequality, especially when it comes to opportunities for professional and educational advancement. To minimize these differences, it is necessary for the government to invest more in providing equal opportunities for all its citizens, ensuring that the use of languages does not become an obstacle to the integration and personal and professional development of individuals.

Another aspect that has an important impact is the use of languages in the media. The media has a powerful role in shaping social opinions and attitudes. The use of multiple languages in the media has contributed to the dissemination of information and the promotion of dialogue between ethnic groups. However, the media has often played a divisive role, reinforcing stereotypes and negative perceptions about different groups. The use of language in the media should be careful and promote inter-ethnic understanding rather than division.(Cakaj, 2020a)

Furthermore, one of the main challenges is to create a more integrated and equitable society, where all ethnic groups feel represented and equal. This integration requires more than just the use of languages in administration and public education; it requires a profound change in mentalities and social attitudes towards the rights and opportunities of ethnic groups. Language, as an important element of identity, should be used as a tool to create opportunities for cooperation and to help transcend ethnic and cultural differences, thus strengthening coexistence and social cohesion. In conclusion, the use of languages in North Macedonia is a key aspect for inter-ethnic development and understanding in this rich and diverse society. This issue is complex and requires a balanced approach, where respect for the linguistic rights of different ethnic groups is essential for building a just and equal society.

While the country has made significant progress in this area, it is necessary to continue investing in multilingual education, administration and media, as well as in changing social attitudes to ensure a fuller integration of all ethnic groups.

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WORKING PAPER

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EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH VOCATIONAL TRAINING: A CASE STUDY FROM SUJAWAL, SINDH

EMPODERAMIENTO DE LAS MUJERES A TRAVÉS DE LA FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE SUJAWAL, SINDH

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PROJECT: Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience (Project Code: PAK 1118)

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of vocational training on women's empowerment in rural Sindh, focusing on the district of Sujawal. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted under the project titled *Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience* (Project Code: PAK 1118), implemented by the Pakistan Research and Development Foundation (hereafter, RDF) with the support of the non-profit German agency for development aid and cooperation Welthungerhilfe (hereafter, WHH), and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (hereafter, BMZ), the article documents how skill development in trades such as tailoring and beautician services has transformed the lives of marginalized women. As the individual researcher for the Gender Studies trainees, I led this research, focusing on case studies that highlight how economic independence fosters social mobility, self-confidence, and leadership among women.

Gender equality and community development. In rural areas of Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, patriarchal structures and socio-economic barriers often hinder women's access to education, employment, and leadership. However, targeted vocational training programs have emerged as a transformative tool to empower women economically and socially.

Keywords

Women's Empowerment, Vocational Training, Gender Equality, Rural Development, Socioeconomic Inclusion, Skill Development, Community Transformation

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the capability approach (Sen, 1999), which argues that development should expand individuals' freedoms and choices. Women's empowerment is understood as a multidimensional process that involves increasing access to resources, decision-making power, and agency. The intersectional feminist perspective is also adopted to understand how gender, poverty, geography, and education intersect to shape women's empowerment pathways.

Vocational training is conceptualized as a means of achieving economic independence while challenging gendered occupational segregation. The empowerment process is examined across personal, relational, and societal dimensions.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative case study methodology, drawing on field visits, direct observations, and semi-structured interviews conducted between March and July 2024. The research was part of the project *Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience* (Project Code: PAK 1118), where I, as the individual researcher under the Gender Studies trainees, focused on women beneficiaries from various villages in Sujawal, including Fateh Muhammad Soomro. Data sources include project reports, student success stories, post-training satisfaction surveys, and monitoring data collected through RDF's CRM system.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socioeconomic background

This study investigates the impact of vocational training on the empowerment of women in rural Sindh, particularly in the district of Sujawal. The research was conducted as part of the *Strengthening the Socio-Economic Reliance of Youth by Promoting Their Economic Self-Resilience* project (Project Code: PAK 1118), implemented by RDF and supported by WHH, funded by BMZ. As the individual researcher in the Gender Studies trainees program, I conducted qualitative research with women beneficiaries of the training program, focusing on how vocational skills in trades like tailoring and beautician services have enhanced their socio-economic status.

3.2. Impact on economic independence

Graduates of the tailoring and beautician programs began earning through home- based services. For example, Safia from Fateh Muhammad Soomro village earns a regular income from bridal makeup and tailoring, enabling her to contribute to household expenses and support her siblings' education. These microenterprises offer a sustainable model of home-based employment.

3.3. Psychological and Social Empowerment

Participants reported increased confidence, decision-making ability, and social recognition. Many women began mentoring others in their villages, creating a ripple effect. Their mobility increased as they began interacting with markets, NGOs, and training centers.

3.4. Gender Norms and Community Perceptions

While some initial resistance was reported from male family members, community attitudes gradually shifted. The visibility of women's economic contributions helped reshape perceptions around women's roles.

3.5. Limitations and Challenges

Challenges include limited access to raw materials, marketing networks, and financial services. Infrastructural barriers, such as lack of dedicated workspaces or transport, were also noted. The need for follow-up mentoring, business incubation, and linking with microfinance institutions was emphasized.

4. CONCLUSSIONS

Vocational training has proven to be a catalyst for women's empowerment in Sujawal, Sindh. By equipping women with practical, market-relevant skills, the RDF-led program contributed not only to poverty reduction but also to broader social change. Economic independence enabled women to challenge traditional gender roles, improve household well-being, and support others in their communities.

Future programs should focus on sustainability by offering entrepreneurship support, digital literacy, and market linkages. Policymakers must prioritize investments in localized vocational programs that integrate gender-sensitive approaches.

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