

From Media, Demographics to Encounters: Factors Shaping Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in New Zealand

*Shaista Malikⁱ
Abdul Wajid Khanⁱⁱ
Haneen Allataifehⁱⁱⁱ*

ABSTRACT

The Christchurch Mosque attack in March 2019, in which 51 Muslims were killed, marked a rare reversal in dominant media framings, positioning victims in ways that challenge stereotypical narratives. The intersection between media discourses and audience perceptions is the major focus of this study, which examines the relationship between interpretative discourses, particularly media exposure and personal or mediated encounters with Muslims, and attitudes towards Islam and Muslims among New Zealand residents.

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- i Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Media Communication, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.
 - ii Former Chairman, Department of Media Communication, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.
 - iii Business Lecturer, Higher Colleges of Technologies Chairman, Department of Media Communication, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

In line with the focus of this study, an online survey was executed; a quantitative method was employed and informed by the encoding/decoding model. The result shows that quantitative analysis reinforces existing scholarship, indicating a significant association between attitudes and demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, political affiliation, socioeconomic position). Quantitative findings highlight media consumption as influential factors in shaping attitudes. Regarding the role of interpersonal relations, the results indicated that there is statistically no significant variation in attitudes towards Islam and Muslims on the basis of various interpersonal sources of information, i.e. family, friends, work colleagues, neighbours, educational institutions, local community, political and religious leaders. One result shows statistically significant differences in mean attitudes towards Islam/Muslims in relation to visiting a Muslim-majority country as a source of knowledge about Islam/Muslims. The study also offers policy implications for Asians particularly from Pakistan intending to pursue education or set up a business in New Zealand.

Introduction: Muslim Population Overview

A notable level of ambiguity and inconsistency exists in scholarly literature regarding the arrival of Muslims in New Zealand. Drury and Pratt report that the origin of Islam in New Zealand can be traced back in December 1769, when the first Muslim emissaries, South Asian sailor, arrived in Northland.¹ In contrast, Albayrak identifies the presence of Muslims to an Indian trader family who arrived in Christchurch in the 1850, New Zealand.² Albayrak reported 17 Muslims were counted in the 1874 Census.³ Meanwhile,

1 Abdullah Drury and Douglas Pratt, "Islam in New Zealand – A Mixed Reception: Historical Overview and Contemporary Challenges," *Journal of College of Sharia & Islamic Studies* 39, No. 1 (2021): 152.

2 Aysenur Albayrak, "New Zealand Muslims," *INSAMER*, 2021, 1.

3 Douglas Pratt, "Antipodean Angst: Encountering Islam in New Zealand," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, No. 4 (2010): 398.

Pratt describes Muslim arriving in New Zealand in 1874 as goldmine workers who settled on the South Island, as recorded by New Zealand Census of April 1874. Kolig records Sheikh Mohamed Din from Punjab, India, was the first to arrive in New Zealand with a group of other Punjabi immigrants.⁴

Various studies⁵ unanimously stated that until the First World War, Muslim immigration to New Zealand was limited. Drury & Pratt note that the colonial era provides evidence of notable migration of Muslims settlers, particularly from South Asia. Only a few Muslims, primarily from India, along with some immigrants from Fiji and Turkey, comprised these early groups. These initial settlements contributed a small proportion of the Muslim community in New Zealand's population, but over the 20th Century, they grew significantly. A major influx came from Fiji Indian in 1960s and 1970s, followed by immigrants from 'Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria'.⁶ According to the most recent 2023 Census, the Muslim population in New Zealand increased by 44 percent, rising from 52,276 in 2018 to 75,138⁷ in 2023.

Significance of the Research Project

A comprehensive review indicates that relevant scholarly literature has addressed the representation of Islam and Muslims in the media in New Zealand.⁸ The Public attitudes

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2010.527107>

4 Erich Kolig, "Community, Identity, Diversity," In *New Zealand's Muslims and Multiculturalism*, vol. 9 (Boston: Brill, 2010), 23.

5 Kolig, "Community, Identity, Diversity," 23; Pratt, "Antipodean Angst: Encountering Islam in New Zealand," 744.

6 Editorial Team, "Islam in New Zealand," *Tazkiyah*, 2024;

<https://kharchoufa.com/en/islam-in-new-zealand/>

7 <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-dwelling-and-housing-highlights/>

8 Khairiah A. Rahman and Azadeh Emadi, "Representations of Islam and Muslims in New Zealand Media," *Pacific Journalism Review*, 2018; Ewart, et. al., "Journalists' and Educators' Perspectives on News Media Reporting of Islam and Muslim Communities in

towards Islam and Muslims in the West have been the subject of much debate among academics and scholars.⁹ The past studies have analysed attitudes towards Muslims in relation to other ethnic minority groups.¹⁰ However, no prior research work has specifically attempted to map variations in attitudes of New Zealand residents as explained by patterns of interpretative resources, including media consumption, interpersonal contacts, and demographic attributes. The current study filled this gap by linking media content studies on Islamic representation with audience studies to understand the role of media in shaping attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

Research Objectives:

The study aims:

1. to explore the media coverage relates to building attitudes of New Zealand residents towards Islam and Muslims.
2. to investigate the role of various interpretative resources/mechanism in the form of interpersonal relations available that resists the negative

Australia and New Zealand," *Journal of Media and Religion* 15, No. 3(2016): 136–45; Khairiah A. Rahman, "News Media and the Muslim Identity after the Christchurch Mosque Massacres," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 15, No. 2 (2020): 360–84;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2020.1747503>

- 9 Afzali Usman, et al., *A National Longitudinal Study of Muslim Diversity and Flourishing*;

<https://osf.io/75snb/wiki/home/>

Zan Strabac and Toril Aalberg, "Attitudes towards Muslim Immigrants: Evidence from Survey Experiments across Four Countries," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, No. 1 (2014): 100–118;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.831542>

- 10 Lara M. Greaves, et al., "Comparative Study of Attitudes to Religious Groups in New Zealand Reveals Muslim-Specific Prejudice," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 2020;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2020.1733032>

construction of Islam and Muslims and help in building positive/alternative attitudes/views towards Islam and Muslims.

3. to study the demographic characteristics (i.e. Age, gender, religion, occupation, education, ethnicity) account for non-Muslims' attitudes.

Methodology

Pursuing the aims and objective of the research, an online survey was conducted to collect chiefly quantitative data. According to the latest census survey,¹¹ the proportion of New Zealand households with internet access increased to 90.5 percent in 2023, compared to 86.1 percent in 2018, 76.8 percent in 2013, and 60.5 percent in 2006.

Following criterion was employed for the sample population of this online survey:

1. Non-Muslim New Zealand residents
2. Age of the participants: 18 and above
3. Any religion except Islam or no religion
4. Any ethnic group member residing in NZ
5. Both male and female

No gift/koha was offered to the online survey participants. A questionnaire was developed and designed in multiple phases: i) operationalization of the concept of attitude; ii) literature review as well as other data sources such as newspapers to identify some main issues between Muslims and non-Muslims in New Zealand.

The online survey did not ensure demographically representative data because the responses depended on many factors, such as web access, the willingness of the respondents, and interest in the research topic. However, this study received enough variation of demographic

11 <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-dwelling-and-housing-highlights/>

responses to examine what factors (media usage, demographic characteristics and interpersonal relationships) linked to attitudinal variations.

Internal Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha was used to examine the internal reliability/consistency, which is also called the reliability of an instrument/composite variable.¹² The reliability test was used to show that these composites are more coherent (i.e., that the questions and response patterns were coherent). The researcher used this test to determine the reliability of the variables across the respective questions. According to George and Mallery, the assessment of the reliability coefficient 0.9 is excellent; 0.8 is good, while 0.7 is acceptable.¹³ The researcher checked the reliability of the overall attitudes indicator, comprised of thirty-nine statements, and the result of Cronbach's Alpha indicates an unusual result, i.e., 0.923, which shows an excellent overall reliability of all the items/statements related to attitudes toward Islam/Muslims.

Use of Statistical Tests for Quantitative Analysis

As noted in the methodology chapter, the researcher applied two statistical tests to explore the variation in the mean scores of the attitudes toward Islam and Muslims in response to binary and multiple independent variables, such as media consumption, interpersonal relations, and demographic characteristics. Two statistical tests, the Kruskal-Wallis H and Mann-Whitney U tests, were employed to examine variations in the mean score of a dependent variable on account of the independent variable with more than two categories.¹⁴ The primary difference between the

12 Mihai C. Bocamea, *Online Instruments, Data Collection, and Electronic Measurements: Organizational Advancements* (IGI Global, 2012), 70.

13 Michele Marinkovic Parnell, *Neuropsychological Factors Associated with Functional Independence in the Elderly*, ProQuest, 2006, 36.

14 Jean Dickinson Gibbons and Subhabrata Chakraborti, "Tests of the Equality of k Independent Samples," in *Nonparametric Statistical*

tests is the number of categories within the independent variables, such as media usage, social contacts, and demographic background. In this way, the reason for using two different tests for the same objective is that the Mann-Whitney U test compares the mean variations in attitudes in reply to an independent variable with two categories, while the Kruskal-Wallis H test compares the mean variations that account for independent variables with two or more groups. Except one independent variable i.e., Location of the respondents (urban and rural) has two categories, so the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the mean variation of attitudes with respondents' location (rural or urban). In this context, these tests determined whether there was a statistically significant difference between the dependent variable (attitudes toward Islam and Muslims) and the independent variable with two or more categories (i.e., gender, age groups, ethnicity, annual income, location, profession, and political affiliation). The Kruskal-Wallis H test is useful because:

1. **Non-Normal Data:** The attitudes mean scores are not normally distributed, a non-parametric test like Kruskal-Wallis is more appropriate than any other statistical test.
2. **Ordinal or Continuous Data:** Kruskal-Wallis works well with ordinal data or continuous data that violates the assumptions of parametric tests.
3. **More than two Groups:** Comparison among various categories of age, such as male, female, and binary (three groups).

Structure of Online Survey Instrument

The questionnaire structure for the online survey comprised six sections: 1) demographic characteristics (7 questions); 2) Media consumption patterns (8 questions); 3) Interpersonal contacts (1 question); and 4) attitude items (39 statements).

Quantitative data were analyzed using RStudio to explore statistically significant variations in attitudes based on three interpretative resources: media, interpersonal relations and demographics. To measure the attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, 39 statements were included in the questionnaire. For the analysis, a composite variable 'overall attitudes' was created by combining these 39 statements.

Research Questions, Data Required and Method of Analysis

The Table No. 1 below outlines research questions, required data, and methods of collection in line with the objective of the study.

TABLE NO. 1

	Research Question	Data Required	Method of Collection/Analysis
R Q1	How far are variations in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims explained by media consumption patterns?	Quantitative Data was used: 1) 39 statements related to attitudes. 2) Media consumption patterns among NZ residents.	-Data analysis of quantitative data through RStudio to explore statistically significant variations in attitudes based on different media usage habits. Data was analysed in light of Encoding/Decoding model
R Q2	How far can interpersonal relations account for variation in NZ Non-Muslims' attitudes?	Used the attitudes' data from RQ1 plus data of interpersonal relations.	Data analysis of quantitative data through RStudio to explore statistically significant variations in attitudes explained by interpersonal contact data.
R Q3	How far do demographic characteristics relate to variations in Non-Muslims' attitudes?	Used the attitude data from RQ1 plus data of demographics (age, gender, income status, profession, political affiliation, location, and ethnicity.	Data analysis of quantitative data through RStudio to examine statistically significant variations in attitudes by virtue of demographic data.

Theoretical Framework: Sense-Making Process

This project draws on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. This model is important for understanding the process of formation of attitudes toward Islam and Muslims

through interpretative resources, media, interpersonal relations and demographics.

Hall identifies two determinate moments;¹⁵ the first of which is the encoding moment where ideological messages relating to social groups [e.g. Muslim community] are encoded by media practitioners through various media content, e.g: textual, audio, and video.¹⁶ The second moment, known as the decoding moment, of these messages in one of the three positions of communicative exchange; 1) Dominant-hegemonic/ Preferred reading, the audience agrees unquestioningly with the messages encoded by media professionals and construct meanings within the same reference code in which they are coded.¹⁷ The second position is Negotiated reading position in which the audience does not completely conform to the mediated message nor absolutely opposes the discourses embedded with stereotyped images. The third position is Oppositional reading; the audience opposes media discourses depicting negative/positive/neutral images entirely. Thus, the audience construct meanings in a contradictory way to replace the dominant code with their own oppositional code. Hall's model recognizes the role of media organizations in producing media texts with particular messages, and it also accounts for various ways to interpret media discourses by active audience.

Hall's encoding/decoding model help to explain sense making process. In the interpretation process, informants engage with media and other social discourses and decode the coded messages to generate ideas, which are reflected

15 Garret Castleberry, "Understanding Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model through TVs 'Breaking Bad,'" In *Communication Theory Millennial Popular Culture: Essays and Applications*, 2016.

16 Evan L. Kropp, "Using Social Scientific Criteria to Evaluate Cultural Theories: Encoding/Decoding Evaluated," *KOME - An International Journal of Pure Communication Inquiry* 3, No. 2 (2015): 19.

17 Castleberry, "Understanding Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model through TVs 'Breaking Bad'", 87.

in individual's attitudinal responses. Informants may accept, negotiate, or oppose dominant images with the help of alternative discursive resources in the form of social discourses. In essence, the data investigates informants' views on Islam and Muslims based on demographics, interpersonal and media discourses.

Section 1: Descriptive Analysis of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Demographic data was collected through an online survey. Following Table No. 2 indicates descriptive data related to the demographic data.

Table No. 2		
Gender	N	Percentage
Male	70	17.54%
Female	307	76.94%
Non-binary/third gender	22	5.51%
Age groups	N	Percentage
18-25	12	2.86
26-40	88	22.86
41-60	229	57.14
61 and above	70	17.14
Ethnicity	N	Percentage
New Zealand European - Pakeha	342	85.71
Māori	24	6.02
Other	33	8.27
Location	N	Percentage
Rural area	34	8.52
Urban area	365	91.48
Marriage	N	Percentage
Prefer not to say	0	0
Yes	332	83.21
No	67	16.79
Income	N	Percentage
Zero income	67	16.79%
Up to < NZ \$20,000	22	5.51%
< NZ \$40,000	103	25.81%
< NZ \$60,000	25	6.27%
< NZ \$80,000	22	5.51%
< NZ \$100,000	34	8.52%
Over NZ \$100,000	92	23.06%
Prefer not to say	34	8.52%
Profession	N	Percentage
Student	12	3.01
Educationist	71	17.79
Urban Profession	202	50.63
Agriculturists	11	2.76
Retired	48	12.03
Home maker	44	11.03
Unemployed	11	2.76

The researcher received five hundred and eleven (511) responses from non-Muslim participants through online survey, of which three hundred ninety-nine (399) were found to be complete in terms of all required information

(interpersonal relations, demographics and media) and were thus, included in the quantitative analysis.

The analysis of the above sample population data shows that a substantial proportion of the survey respondents (76.94 percent) were females. Two factors may account for this high proportion of female participation. First, on the recommendations of friends and colleagues in New Zealand, the researcher contacted various organizations, such as 'Feminist Mothers Aotearoa,' many of which have predominantly female memberships. Second, it is plausible that women have had comparatively greater time and interest in completing the survey. Keusch explored that women are generally more inclined than men to participate in online surveys.¹⁸ Consequently, a large number of female residents completed the survey questionnaire. Although this overrepresentation might be expected to bias the findings, women's responses still provide valid insights.

The age distribution of the survey respondents shows that various age groups ranging from 18 to 60 and above participated in this research project. The age distribution of the survey respondents shows that various age groups ranging from 18 to 60 and above participated in this research project. For example, 57.14 percent of the respondents were aged 41-60, yet the sample included a significant number of respondents from other age groups, ensuring diverse perspectives on Islam and Muslims. The majority of respondents were New Zealand Pakeha (85.71 percent). Similarly, the New Zealand Census 2023 also shows that the largest ethnic group in the population was New Zealand Pakeha (67.8 percent).

The data shows diverse income groups. Most respondents fall into three categories: those with no income, those earning ≤ NZ \$40,000, and those earning over NZ \$100,000. The Census 2023 data also present several groups based

18 Florian Keusch, "Why Do People Participate in Web Surveys? Applying Survey Participation Theory to Internet Survey Data Collection," *Management Review Quarterly* 65, No. 3 (2015): 186.

on income level.¹⁹ However, the most income earners fall within the NZ \$ 40,000 and NZ \$ 100,000 range. The Census²⁰ highlights several occupations of the residents. The top occupations are urban professionals such as sales assistants, office managers, teachers, and engineers. Accordingly, most respondents of this survey reported working in urban professional roles. In response to a question about active membership in any political party, the majority of the respondents reported their political affiliation in New Zealand.

In sum, the sample group reflects a diverse population; e.g. gender diversity, and a variety of age groups allowed for the examination of variation in attitudes across demographic groups, mitigating the influence of any single group. Overall, the results remained robust despite the gender, age and imbalances.

Section 2: Variations in Attitudes toward Islam and Muslims explained by Demographic Characteristics

This section addresses the research question relating to variations in non-Muslims' attitudes toward Islam and Muslims explained by demographic characteristics. The study considers demographic attributes as interpretative resources, which may contribute to the formation of attitudinal responses. The social status plays a role in the interpretation of messages, as it shapes the social, cultural and economic contexts of individuals. With these contexts, people, in turn, challenge or reinforce the prevailing representations images in the process of decoding media and other social discourses. In other words, demographic background enables people to examine/evaluate media and other social discourses and thus, people may reject, negotiate or accept media messages in the process of interpretation of media discourses. The demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and

19 <https://www.moneyhub.co.nz/wage-salary-distributions.html>

20 <https://figure.nz/chart/sS5y8SJ3aPjYP0mF>

occupation are not themselves, forms of knowledge; rather, they provide a framework for the process interpretation in making sense of Islam and Muslims.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test and Mann Whitney U test were conducted to investigate differences in respondents' attitudes, (the dependent variable), with regard to various demographic characteristics including (the independent variable). Following Table No. 2 presents the results of the Kruskal-Wallis H Test and Mann Whitney U test:

Result of Kruskal-Wallis H Test and Mann Whitney U Test to examine mean variations in Respondents' Attitudes toward Islam/Muslims by demographics						
Table No: 3						
	Mean ²	Std. Deviation	Mean ± ranges	Df	Kruskal-Wallis H test	Sig.(p)
Gender						
Male	2.51	0.56	2.00	3.44	98.63	2.2e-16
Female	1.98	0.38	1.13	2.95		
Non-binary /third gender	1.39	0.12	1.28	1.51		
Age Group						
18-25	2.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	50.58	5.991e-11
26-40	1.92	0.58	1.13	3.13		
41-60	1.97	0.29	1.51	2.74		
61 and above	2.47	0.62	1.49	3.44		
Ethnicity Group						
NZ-EU Pacific	2.07	0.447	1.28	3.44	13.743	0.001037
Māori	1.80	0.000	1.79	1.79		
Others	2.05	0.84	1.13	3.13		
Income Group						
Zero income	1.84	0.40	1.00	2.22	181.97	2.2e-16
<NZ\$ 20,000	2.06	0.06	2.00	2.11		
<NZ\$ 40,000	2.46	0.58	1.33	3.44		
<NZ\$ 60,000	1.73	0.28	1.44	2.00		
<NZ\$ 80,000	2.78	0.00	2.78	2.78		
<NZ\$ 100,000	1.99	0.33	1.67	2.44		
Over NZ\$ 100,000	2.41	0.28	2.11	2.89		
Prefer not to say	2.57	0.33	2.11	2.89		
Profession Group						
Student	1.39	0.00	1.34	1.34	79.182	5.272e-15
Educationist	3.43	0.37	2.74	3.74		
Urban professionals	3.42	0.19	3.03	3.85		
Agriculturalist	1.39	0.00	3.38	3.38		
Retired	3.33	0.39	3.00	3.95		
Home maker	3.54	0.11	3.56	3.64		
Unemployed	3.51	0.00	3.51	3.51		
Overall Attitudes	Mean ²	Std. Deviation	Mean ± ranges	Df	Mann Whitney U Test	Sig.(p)
Location						
Rural area	3.21	0.15	3.03	3.38	10639	5.175e-12
Urban area	3.45	0.26	2.74	3.95		
Political Affiliation						
No	2.09	0.51	1.13	3.44	14488	9.128e-05
Yes	1.85	0.27	1.51	2.26		

The results indicate statistically significant variations in the mean ranks of respondents' attitudes toward Islam and Muslims, which are explained by demographic characteristics, including gender, age groups, professions, ethnicity, location, income levels and active political affiliation.

Regarding age factor, the results show statistically significant differences in attitudinal responses among male, female and

third-gender individuals. Mean scores data from the current study indicate that female and third-gender individuals express slightly more positive responses compared to male respondents. Previous studies have reported mixed findings regarding gender-based attitudes toward Muslims, with evidence of both positive or negative attitudes of males and females toward Muslims. For example, Sibley found that male respondents were associated with lower levels of warmth towards Muslims.²¹ Similarly, male respondents exhibited less appreciative attitudes toward Muslims than their peers.²² Greaves reported likewise observed that higher levels of anti-Muslim sentiment were evident among male respondents.²³ In the same vein, Gravelle noted that males demonstrate slightly less positive perceptions towards Muslims compared to females,²⁴ while Abrams demonstrated that male participants held significantly more negative attitudes towards Muslims than female participants.²⁵ However, some studies have reported contrasting finding. For example, Gusciute revealed

21 Lara M. Greaves, *et.al.*, "Comparative Study of Attitudes to Religious Groups in New Zealand Reveals Muslim-Specific Prejudice," *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, (2020): 11;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2020.1733032>

22 Alyssa N. Rockenbach, *et.al.*, "An Examination of Non-Muslim College Students' Attitudes Toward Muslims," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 88, No. 4 (2017): 496;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2016.1272329>

23 Greaves, *et.al.*, "Comparative Study of Attitudes to Religious Groups in New Zealand Reveals Muslim-Specific Prejudice," 11.

24 Timothy B. Gravelle, "Friends, Neighbours, Townspeople and Parties," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 51, No. 3 (2018): 653.

25 Jessica R. Abrams, *et al.*, 2018. "Attitudes toward Muslims: A Test of the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis and Contact Theory," *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 47, No. 4 (2018): 283;

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1443968>

that women tend to support opposition to Muslim immigration more than men.²⁶

Focusing on age as a demographic indicator, the quantitative data also reveal statistically significant relationships between respondents' age groups and their attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. Various studies have examined this association. For example, Sue and Sue's suggest that senior citizens report the strongest unfavorable views towards Muslims.²⁷ Moreover, Ok *et al.*, found age-related differences that adults are more prone to engage in altruistic behaviours than younger people.²⁸ However, the current study identifies statistically significant relationships across multiple age groups, including those aged 18-25, 26 to 40 and 41-60. The mean score data show that young adult respondents (aged 26 to 40) provided marginally more positive responses for the overall attitudes, compared to respondents in various age groups. This result indicates that respondents aged 26 to 40 may be considered active decoders of stereotypical negative discourses about Islam and Muslims. This group appears to engage in oppositional readings, enabling them to construct moderately more positive attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

One further result is a statistically significant difference in respondents' mean attitudes toward Islam and Muslims based on ethnicity, across the overall attitude responses. The Post hoc analysis shows that Maori respondents demonstrate slightly more favourable responses towards Islam and Muslims. Contrary to the findings of this study, Landis & Albert's study revealed that Maori expressed more negative attitudes toward immigrants than other ethnic

26 Gusciute, *et.al.*, "All Welcome Here? Attitudes towards Muslim Migrants in Europe," *International Migration* (2021): 157.

27 Sue Derald Wing, and David Sue. *Counselling Arab Americans and Muslim Americans*. 7th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 385

28 Ok, *et al.*, "Do Religious Muslims Help the Poor More than the Non-Religious?" *International Empirical Studies on Religion and Socioeconomic Human Rights, Religion and Human Rights* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2020), 284.

groups, perceiving them as economic competitors and cultural threats.²⁹ In contrast, Highland found no significant relationship between Maori and attitudes towards Muslims.³⁰ In the current study, however, Maori respondents provided slightly more positive responses to overall attitudes compared to other ethnic groups. From Hall's perspective, Maori respondents may be considered oppositional readers of dominant discourses embedded with stereotypical portrayals of Islam and Muslims, particularly in relation to their professional engagements.

With respect to location as a demographic category, the results demonstrate a statistically significant difference in respondents' mean attitudes towards Islam and Muslims based on their place of residence (rural and urban) across the overall attitudes. Building upon Hall's model, these attitudinal differences indicate that respondents' location, whether urban and rural, may influence their engagement with media and other social discourses in alternative manner. The urban respondents, who tend to have greater access to multicultural environments, nevertheless embrace preferred readings and exhibit marginally more negative attitudes compared to rural respondents. This pattern may reflect a lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims, which could limit their ability to reject stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims.

The social scientists such as Ecob & Smith³¹, Lane³², and Crain,³³ generally refer to income as an explanatory factor

29 Landis, Dan, and Rosita D. Albert. *Handbook of Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), 125.

30 Landis & Albert's (2012), 61.

31 Russell Ecob and George Davey Smith. "Income and Health: What Is the Nature of the Relationship?" 1999. *Social Science & Medicine* 48, No. 5 (1999), [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536\(98\)00385-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277-9536(98)00385-2).

32 Robert E. Lane, "Diminishing Returns to Income, Companionship – and Happiness," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 1, No. 1 (2000), 103–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010080228107>

associated with social outcomes, including attitudes.³⁴ In line with these studies, a statistically significant relationship was found between respondents' income and their attitudes across the overall attitudes. Income is typically negatively associated with prejudice, suggesting that higher income levels are linked to more positive attitudes.³⁵ In contrast, the quantitative data from the present study indicate that respondents with annual earnings of NZ\$ ≤60,000 expressed marginally greater positive attitudes toward Islam and Muslims across the overall attitudes than the other groups with different income levels. In other words, socioeconomic position influences attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. From Van Dijk's (1989, p. 45)³⁶ perspective, socioeconomic diversity mediates a person's interpretation, construction, and evaluation of media discourses, resulting in the development of differentiated attitudes and belief systems.

With regard to professional groups, the statistical data indicate that unemployed respondents display moderately more unfavorable responses toward Islam/Muslims compared to other professional groups. According to Hall's model, the data suggests that home maker respondents accept negative images encoded in discourses by engaging preferred readings, and consequently they demonstrate negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslim.

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- 33 W. Mark Crain, "An Empirical Estimate of the Income Elasticity of Political Participation," *Kyklos* 30 No. 1 (1977): 122–25, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/bla/kyklos/v30y1977i1p122-125.html>
- 34 Daniel Doherty, Alan S. Gerber, and Donald P. Green, "Personal Income and Attitudes toward Redistribution: A Study of Lottery Winners," *Political Psychology* 27, No. 3 (2006), 144.
- 35 Sonia Livingstone, "The Participation Paradigm in Audience Research," *The Communication Review* 16, No. 1–2 (2013), 21–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2013.757174>, 257
- 36 Dijk, Teun A. Van. "Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power." *Annals of the International Communication Association* 12, No. 1 (1989), 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1989.11678711>

Knowledge acquired through professional experience plays a vital role in shaping one's understanding of the world. According to Dijk, individuals hold a rich repository of commonsense knowledge informed by everyday experience, which is used in human cognition to interpret the issues of daily life.³⁷ This form of knowledge is observed in various forms, particularly in professional contexts, and serves to supplement or replace commonsense cultural understanding.³⁸ The quantitative data of the current study also confirms a statistically significant difference in respondents' attitudes towards Islam and Muslims based on professional groups. This result is consistent with the findings of King Wai & David W. K.'s,³⁹ whose study explores variation in attitudes toward people with disabilities among various occupational groups. The current study found that homemaker respondents provide more unfavourable responses toward Islam/Muslims on overall attitudes, where they expressed more negative views than those from other professional groups. Following Hall's model, it may be argued that homemaker respondents construct marginally more unfavourable responses toward Islam and Muslims while adopting a preferred reading position, accepting negative aspects related to Islam/Muslims on overall indicator.

The study further investigates the role of respondents' active political participation in shaping their attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. A statistically significant difference in average mean scores was observed across the overall attitudes between respondents who identified as active members of a New Zealand political party and those who did not. The relationship between political affiliation and individual

37 Teun A. Van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 37.

38 Dijk, *Ideology*, 38.

39 Au King Wai and David W. K. Man, "Attitudes toward People with Disabilities: A Comparison between Health Care Professionals and Students," *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research* 29, No. 2 (2006): 155.

attitudes toward Muslims was examined by Gravelle, who found variation in attitudes based on party identification.⁴⁰ For instance, a majority of Canadians affiliated with the Conservative Party expressed more negative attitudes towards Muslims compared to those affiliated with Liberal party. Similarly, Abrams found that political party affiliation tends to moderate the relationship between print media consumption and attitude toward Muslims.⁴¹

Various factors may explain the influence of political affiliation on respondents' attitudes. Active membership often leads to increased political awareness and engagement with societal issues. Through participation in political debates and exposure to party platforms, respondents gain knowledge about Islam and Muslims. This means political groups in New Zealand may hold established stances or ideologies regarding Muslim immigration to New Zealand, multiculturalism, and the Islamic belief system. These political ideologies may support or oppose the presence of Muslims in New Zealand, halal food, Islamic banking system, the status of Muslims women, and the Islamic concept of Jihad. Political involvement also encourages both direct and indirect interaction with Muslims. In addition, political affiliation often encourages participation in multicultural events that involve engagements with Muslim communities.

Hall's model affirms that discourse interpretation is shaped by the social positioning of the receiver, including the skills and experiences to which they have access (Hall, 2010, p. 44).⁴² Based on Hall's model, and grounded in the

40 Timothy B. Gravelle, "Friends, Neighbours, Townspeople and Parties," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 51, No. 3 (2018): 656.

41 Jessica R. Abrams, *et.al.*, "Attitudes toward Muslims: A Test of the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis and Contact Theory," *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47, No. 4 (2018): 283; <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1443968>

42 Stuart Hall, *Social Theory: Power and Identity in the Global Era* (The Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 44.

knowledge gained from political activism, the statistical results suggest that respondents tend to accept positive discourses and reject negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims, adopting oppositional reading positions.

The respondents' political affiliation and other interpretative resources likely shaped the structure of ideologically influenced information, which in turn guided their interpretation of discourses related to Islam and Muslims. As a result, politically affiliated respondents tend to develop more considered and favorable attitudes towards Islam and Muslims across the overall attitudes.

Section 3: Variation in Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in respect of Media Consumption Patterns

This section explores variation in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims (the dependent variable) in relation to different media consumption habits (the independent variables). For this purpose, the Kruskal Wallis H test was performed to examine whether significant differences exist in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims drawing on respondents' media usage. A comprehensive research of contemporary literary materials shows that media discourses are imprinted with various images of Islam and Muslims, including negative images of Islamic fundamentalists and positive constructions of ordinary Muslim.⁴³ The quantitative data also confirm that the respondents received information about Islam and Muslims from various forms of media.

43 Veronica Hopner, *et.al.*, "Islam in the News: Persistent yet Changing Characterisations," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 11, No. 3 (2023): 287;

<https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10064>

Rahman & Emadi, "Representations of Islam and Muslims in New Zealand Media," *Pacific Journalism Review* (2018): 184.

Result of Kruskal-Wallis H Test to examine mean variations in Respondents' Attitudes toward Islam/Muslims by Media Consumption Pattern						
Table No: 4						
	Mean±	Std. Deviation	Mean ±ranges	Df	Kruskal-Wallis H test	Sig.(p)
Television Viewing						
Nil	3.33	0.24	3.10	3.56	3	49.905
less than 1 hour	3.28	0.25	2.74	3.54		
1-3 hours	3.49	0.24	3.03	3.95		
4-5 hours	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
Above 6 hours	3.36	0.00	3.36	3.36		
Newspaper Reading						
Nil	3.10	0.09	3.00	3.23	2	113.75
less than 1 hour	3.48	0.22	2.74	3.85		
1-3 hours	3.51	0.26	3.03	3.95		
4-5 hours	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
Above 6 hours	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
Radio usage						
Nil	3.41	0.31	2.74	3.83	2	4.573
less than 1 hour	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
1-3 hours	3.43	0.22	3.03	3.95		
4-5 hours	3.54	0.00	3.54	3.54		
Above 6 hours	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
Books/magazines reading						
Nil	2.38	0.00	2.38	2.38	3	146.1
less than 1 hour	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		
1-3 hours	2.24	0.57	1.13	3.44		
4-5 hours	1.84	0.26	1.28	2.15		
Above 6 hours	1.83	0.23	1.49	2.20		
Social Media usage						
Nil	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3	54.53
less than 1 hour	1.74	0.42	1.13	2.31		
1-3 hours	2.06	0.43	1.49	3.44		
4-5 hours	2.95	0.00	2.95	2.95		
Above 6 hours	2.48	0.00	2.49	2.49		
Movie watching						
Nil	1.98	0.28	1.28	2.49	2	0.02254
1-3 movies	2.12	0.59	1.13	3.44		
4-5 movies	1.86	0.30	1.51	2.23		
Above 6 movies	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00		

Television Viewing and its Influence

Various scholars argue that television viewing is a major source of information about Islam and Muslims. For instance, Rane found that television is a "dominant media outlet for information on Islam and Muslims."⁴⁴ Rane study also found that 62 percent of the participants rely on television news, particularly current affairs programs. The overall findings of O'guinn and Shrum's study also suggested that television viewing strongly influences perceptions of adults.⁴⁵ Manan *et al.*, uncovered that television is the leading medium for Islamic teachings and education.⁴⁶ Comparably, respondent

44 Rane Halim, *et.al.*, *Islam and the Australian News Media* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 108.

45 Thomas C. O'guinn and L. J. Shrum, "The Role of Television in the Construction of Consumer Reality," *Oxford Journals* 23, No. 4 (1997): 385;
<https://doi.org/10.1177/20594363211047369>

46 Manan, *et.al.*, "The Role of Mass Media as a Channel to Learn about Islam among Muslims in Gombak," *Intellectual Discourse*,

H (a survey participant) expressed, "*the little I know of Islam comes mainly from TV.*" Considering television as a source of information, the quantitative data of the present study also showed a statistically significant difference in overall attitudes of respondents based on different amounts of television viewing. This result highlighted that variation in respondents' attitudes depends on their television viewing habits. This means that respondents varying television habits tend to have meaningful relationships with variation in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. The findings also indicate that television viewing is an important factor linking respondents' overall attitudes. The mean score data in Table No. 4 demonstrates that moderate viewers exposure of 1-3 hours per day responded more positively to overall attitudes indicator.

Newspaper Reading Influence

Recent data collected by Roy Morgan's readership reports that 2.70 million New Zealand residents aged 14 and above, representing 61.7 percent of the population, have access to newspapers in an average week.⁴⁷ Prior studies have also confirmed that newspapers are generally regarded as a key mass media outlet and a vital source of news, primarily offering factual information. For example, Eveland Jr., Seo, & Marton,⁴⁸ as well as Rane, Ewart, & Abdalla⁴⁹ assert that newspapers tend to present more "factual information to communicate than a typical evening news broadcast." The

IIUM Press, *International Islamic University Malaysia* 30, No. 1 (2022): 206,

<https://journals.iiu.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id>

47 Roy Morgan, *Online Readership Surveys*, Australia, 2025,

<https://www.roymorgan.com/readerships/readership-in-new-zealand>

48 William P Eveland Jr., Mihye Seo, and Krisztina Marton, "Learning from the News in Campaign 2000: An Experimental Comparison of TV News, Newspapers, and Online News," *Media Psychology* 4 No. 4 (2002), 357.

49 Halim Rane, Mohamad Abdalla, Jacqui Ewart, *Islam and the Australian News Media* (Academic Monographs, 2010), 105.

quantitative findings also indicate a statistically significant variation in respondents' attitudes toward Islam and Muslims in relation to newspaper reading habits. This finding reinforces the notion that newspapers remain a primary and trusted medium for factual information. The mean scores data shows that respondents who spend 1-3 hours per day reading newspapers responded somewhat more unfavorable responses toward Islam and Muslims for overall attitudes compared to other respondents with various levels of newspaper reading habits.

Radio Listening Habit

Radio programs offer a valuable medium of information and provide "a platform for building a sense of community."⁵⁰ In the context of Islam and Muslims, quantitative data illustrate the role of radio as an important medium of information. This variation in attitudes supports the idea that radio is a primary medium for acquiring knowledge about Islam and Muslims. One example is the Radio New Zealand (RNZ) survey 2014-2015, which found that radio listening may reflect a certain educational level and contributes to the "development of an informed society." However, these findings are not universal. A study by Alshawi *et al.*,⁵¹ concluded that, in comparison to television and online platforms, radio broadcasting contributes less markedly to the development of Islamic identity and cultural values. In contrast, Green *et al.*⁵²

50 Netra Timilsina, "Cultural Identity, Hybridity and Minority Media: Community Access Radio and Migrants in New Zealand," (Master's thesis, University of Canterbury, 2019), 265,

<https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/1413a053a84a-4653-bee4-2d213b7fff9b/content>

51 Alshawi, *et al.*, "The Impact of the Use of Digital Media in the Radio on the Dissemination of Islamic Culture." 2022. 657, *International Journal of Health Sciences* 6, No. S3 (2022):

<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS3.5407>

52 Green, Donald P., Dylan W. Groves, Constantine Manda, and Bardia Rahmani. "A Radio Drama's Effects on Attitudes toward Early and Forced Marriage: Results from a Field Experiment in Rural." *Comparative Political Studies* 56, No. 8, (2023): 1.

revealed radio drama has a statistically significant impact on attitudes related to forced marriage and gender equality. However, the mean scores findings indicate that the respondents with 4-5 radio listening habit responded slightly more negatively to the overall attitude's indicator.

Books/Magazines Reading

Roy Morgan reported that 1.65 million residents of New Zealand (37.9 percent) aged 14 and above age group are regular magazine readers.⁵³ Reading books is also a source of education and knowledge, particularly in relation to understanding about Islam and Muslims. Supporting this view, Veinguer found that books are a source of information about Islam.⁵⁴ Johnson also discovered that exposure to counter-stereotypical narratives supports empathic development and reduces prejudice.⁵⁵ Engaging with fiction books like *Harry Potter* promotes empathy and reduces prejudice through character identification and perspective taking.⁵⁶ The present study also provides evidence of a link between books or magazine and developing understanding of Islam and Muslims. The quantitative data also indicate a statistically significant difference in the mean attitudes of respondents who read books or magazines, reflecting various patterns in their attitudes toward Islam and Muslims in reference to their books/magazines reading habits. For example, the cohort who read books/magazines for more than 6 hours daily, demonstrated more favourable responses in terms of overall attitudes toward Islam and Muslims.

53 Roy Morgan, *Online Readership Surveys*.

54 Aurora Alvarez Veinguer, *et.al.*, *Islam in Education in European Countries: Pedagogical Concepts and Empirical Findings* (Munster: Waxmann, 2009), 60.

55 Dan R. Johnson, "Transportation into Literary Fiction Reduces Prejudice against and Increases Empathy for Arab-Muslims," *Scientific Study of Literature* 3, No. 1 (2013): 77.

56 L. Vezzali, *et.al.*, "The Greatest Magic of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* (2015): 118.

Social Media Contribution

Social media is a digital space where communities are formed and interact with one another, which has "resulted in people flocking to communities to exchange narrative in a manner that has not happened since the industrial revolution."⁵⁷ Based on data from New Statista (2025), "social networking sites are estimated to reach 5.42 billion users" in New Zealand.⁵⁸ About three-fifths of the respondents of this survey (58.30 percent) use social media at various levels (from less than 1 hour to over 6 levels). Thus, it is argued that a significant number of respondents use social media as a source of information. The test indicates a statistically significant difference in respondents' mean attitudes toward Islam/Muslims across overall attitudes as explained by social media usage. Moreover, the mean scores finding indicate that the social media users in the less than 1 hour category responded more positively to the statements concerned with overall attitudes indicator.

Movie Watching Impact

Hollywood movies are widely watched in most parts of the world, but the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in these movies is common.⁵⁹ While examining popular films in New Zealand, Khan found that the representation of Muslims in movies is both underreporting and frequent portrayed unfavourable stereotypes images.⁶⁰ Likewise, Jackson argues that popular films convey mixed messages about

57 Nurdan Öncel Taskiran, *Handbook of Research on Effective Advertising Strategies in the Social Media Age* (IGI Global, 2015), 361.

58 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

59 Masroor Khanum and Zafar Iqbal, "Hollywood Movies Stamping of Islam and Muslims: An Analysis of Representation," *Journal of Journalism, Media Science & Creative Arts* 2, No. 2 (2022): 39.

60 Mussarat Khan and Kathryn Ecklund, "Attitudes Toward Muslim Americans Post-9/11," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* VII, No. 1 (2012): 5.

Muslims, although their portrayal is often associated with "negative stereotypes".⁶¹

Ali and Rizvi have found that Muslims are frequently portrayed in violent frames, such as anti-feminist, religious intolerant, terrorist, misogynists, and fanatical.⁶² Regarding the relationship between negative depictions and people attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, several studies have identified the negative role of movies on the development of anti-Muslim attitudes. For instance, Ahmed's study found that exposure to Hollywood films serves as a strong predictor of prejudice against Muslims.⁶³ In contrast to this finding, the results show that respondents' movie watching habit was not significantly associated with their attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

Analysis

The mean score data shows variation in attitudes explained by various media consumption patterns, including positive or negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. For instance, the data shows that television viewers and newspapers readers who spend 1-3 hours per day responded exhibited somewhat more unfavourable responses towards Islam and Muslims, compared to respondents with different levels of television and newspaper consumption. Similarly, some other findings indicate that the respondents with 4-5 radio listening habit responded slightly more negatively to the

61 Liz Jackson, *Muslims and Islam in U.S. Education: Reconsidering Multiculturalism* (London: Routledge, 2014): 67.

62 Shahzad Ali and Sayyed Aamir Abbas Rizvi, "Muslims Vs. Non-Muslims Representation in Hollywood Movies: A Semiotic & Cinematographic Analysis," *Al-Qalam, Institute of Islamic Studies* 25, No. 2 (2020): 223.

63 Saifuddin Ahmed, "News Media, Movies, and Anti-Muslim Prejudice: Investigating the Role of Social Contact," *Asian Journal of Communication*, 27, No. 5 (2018): 547, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2017.1339720>

overall attitudes.⁶⁴ New Zealand media depict Islam and Muslims through both positive and negative framings in text and visuals of published articles, contributing to the construction of the image of Islam and Muslims in media discourses. While applying Hall encoding/decoding model, television and newspapers consumed by group of respondents who spend 1-3 hours per day may accept the negative portrayals of Islam in media discourse embraced Dominant-hegemonic, or Preferred reading position and develop corresponding attitudes to the negative portrayals and hold negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. Moreover, these results also reflect critical engagements of this group of respondents who consume television and newspaper content for 1-3 hours daily with these media outlets deeply to accept biased media portrayals but they could not balance enough to those discourses with alternative perspective. Moreover, it tends to show that these respondents employed selective exposure that aligns with their pre-existing biases about Islam and their believers, as a result amplifying negative attitudes toward them.

In contrast, the cohort who read books/magazines for more than 6 hours daily, demonstrated more favourable responses in terms of overall attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. In align with the finding indicate that the social media users in the less than 1 hour category responded more positively to the statements concerned with overall attitudes. This is possible due to accessibility of books/magazine and social media content as a medium of information, particularly on topic related to Islam and Muslims. Moreover, the heavy book/magazine readers and light social media users may be exposed to a wider variety of favourable or unfavourable images of Muslims; however, by accepting only positive images, they reinforce positive views about Islam and Muslims. In other words, these consumers fall into a

64 Rahman and Emadi, "Representations of Islam and Muslims in New Zealand Media," *Pacific Journalism Review* (2018).

category who reject negative messages being balanced by diverse content in oppositional reading position.

Section 4:

This section addresses another key research question of the research project: To what extent can interpersonal relations (the independent variables) explain the variation in attitudes of non-Muslims in New Zealand (the dependent variable)? Sterri supports this line of inquiry by noting that students who have more opportunities to interact with out-group members in their school cohort tend to hold more favourable attitudes towards Muslims compared to those with fewer such interactions.⁶⁵ To investigate this relationship, the analyses focus on interpersonal relations (i.e. family/relatives, friends, educational institutions, local community, work colleagues, neighbours, politicians/political activity, religious leaders (e.g. rabbi, priest), or personal experience of visiting any Islamic country) and their influence on attitudes toward Islam and Muslims.

In online survey, the respondents were asked to answer a question regarding their knowledge of Islam and Muslims derived from different social groups (mentioned above). In response, the respondents ranked the names of as many of their social groups as they could from the given list. While using RStudio, the respondents who selected any form of social contact in their top three choices (such as 1, 2 or 3) were grouped together as one group. This exercise came up with nine different groups. For example, the respondents who ranked family/relatives in their top three choices were gathered in one group.

By doing so, two groups were created in a way that one group represents those respondents who gain knowledge from social groups, which they chose in their top three sources of information, and the other group of respondents

⁶⁵ Erika Braanen Sterri, "Attitudes Toward Muslims Among Majority Youth in Norway," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, Helsinki University Press 12 No. 4, (2022): 426.

consists of those respondents who did not choose that category. For example, 151 respondents chose family as one of their top three most important sources to gain knowledge of Islam and 167 respondents did not.

Sholen also found that building relationship between individuals from different background foster inclusive and favourable understanding and promotes positive awareness of social and cultural differences.⁶⁶ Interpretative resources as a form of personal knowledge received through interpersonal relations with Muslims may allow respondents to over-ride the negative images of Islam and Muslims. Various studies have examined interpersonal channels for acquiring knowledge about Islam and Muslims. For example, Khan & Ecklund found that personal experience with Muslims has a statistically significant positive relationship with favourable attitudes toward Muslims as compared to those people who do not have such personal experience.⁶⁷ In a similar vein, they explored that knowing through friends and family form positive views of Muslims.⁶⁸ Kollontai confirmed that school and college were significant sources of information on Islam rated by the respondents (77.67 percent) followed by less than 20 percent of the respondent who cited that "their information about Islam came from their parents."⁶⁹ Contrary to these findings, the results of the current study indicated that there is statistically no significant variation in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims on the basis of various interpersonal sources of information, i.e. family; friends, work colleagues, neighbours, educational

66 Muh Ibnu Sholeh, *et.al.*, "Development of Multicultural Curriculum to Enhance Student Tolerance in Senior High School," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education* 2. No. 3 (2024): 169.

67 Mussarat Khan and Kathryn Ecklund, "Attitudes Toward Muslim Americans Post-9/11," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* VII, No. 1 (2012): 13.

68 Khan and Ecklund, "Attitudes Toward Muslim Americans Post-9/11," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, (2012), 13.

69 Pauline Kollontai, *Community Identity: Dynamics of Religion in Context* (A&C Black, 2007): 259.

institutions; local community; political leaders; religious leaders. Following section explores relationship between experience of visiting any Islamic country as a source information and attitudes toward Islam and Muslims.

Relationship between Experience of Visiting any Islamic Country as a Source Information

A Mann-Whitney U test was performed to examine attitude differences toward Islam/Muslims between the two groups: 1) respondents who ranked visiting an Islamic country among their top three knowledge sources on Islam/Muslims, and 2) respondents who did not.

Difference in mean attitude scores toward Islam/Muslims between respondents who included their experience of visiting an Islamic country among their top three knowledge sources and those who did not.

Table No:	Mean2	Std. Deviation	Mean +/-ranges	Df	Mann-Whitney U Test	Sig.(p)
Visiting an Islamic country in the top three choices						
Yes	1.56	0.47	1.09	3.13	1	18274
No	2.07	0.48	1.13	3.44		1.842e-05

The table indicates a statistically significant difference in mean scores for attitudes toward Islam/ Muslims between two groups: 1) respondents who ranked visiting any Islamic country among their top three sources of knowledge on Islam/Muslims, and 2) respondents who did not. The difference is observed across overall attitudes. Otegui-Carles observed that women often decide to travel with the aim of gaining autonomy, feeling empowered, and achieving social prestige.⁷⁰ Convergent finding, the result of the current study also reveals that respondents who ranked visiting an Islamic country among their top three sources gave slightly more positive responses.

Through the lens of encoding/decoding model, respondents who visited an Islamic world appear to act as active respondents of media and other social discourses. They interpret these discourses based on their access to slightly more first-hand lived experiences gained through visit to

70 Otegui-Carles, *et.al.*, "Solo Travel Research and Its Gender Perspective: A Critical Bibliometric Review," *Review, Tourism and Hospitality* (2022): 735.

Muslim-majority societies, enabling them to engage in oppositional readings. In this interpretative process, they resist negatively framed images of Islam and Muslims. As a result, they express slightly more positive responses across overall attitudes

Conclusion

In addressing the research objectives, the present research focused on epistemological role of interpretative resources, demographic attributes, media engagements, and interpersonal relations, in shaping attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. The quantitative data reinforce existing scholarship, indicating a statistically significant association between attitudes toward Islam/Muslims and demographic variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, political affiliation, socioeconomic position, across overall attitudes.

The findings of quantitative analysis illustrate the complex and dynamic process of the formation of attitudes toward Islam and Muslims shaped through several discursive interpretative resources. The quantitative data established clear patterns associated with media consumption, across print media, electronic media, literary material and social media, to significant variations in attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. Across interpersonal relations, visiting Islamic country was evident as influential factor in shaping attitudes toward Islam and Muslims.

These results can be understood through encoding/decoding model, which conceptualises meaning-making as a negotiated process between media producers and receivers. The statistically significant associations between attitudes toward Islam and Muslims and demographic variables indicate that audiences do not passively absorb encoded meanings but decode them through social positions, such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, political affiliation. Similarly, variation in attitudes associated with various forms of media consumption patterns, reflecting differential decoding practices shaped by access to distinct discursive resources. However, within interpersonal

relations, experiences in Islamic country emerged as the only factor providing alternative framework that enabled oppositional readings of negative media representations, thereby fostering favourable attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

Policy Recommendations

As evidenced by the study, non-Muslim respondents in New Zealand expressed both positive and negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims. Several Muslims from Asian countries, especially from Pakistan, intend to visit New Zealand either to pursue studies or to establish businesses. Based on researcher's personal experience as a student in New Zealand, along with the findings of this study, multiple recommendations are offered. Asian governments should arrange awareness training sessions regarding New Zealand's multicultural environment.

Global media should play an important role in raising public awareness about New Zealand. Media should provide accurate, balanced and contextualized information about its society, culture, and political system. Through responsible reporting and inclusive narratives, the media can help counter negative depiction of Islam and Muslims, promote cross-cultural understanding, and foster more informed perceptions of New Zealand among Asian audiences. Media awareness campaigns for students and the business diaspora should be organized to highlight the positive contributions of Muslim communities in Islamic countries as well New Zealand. Muslim-majority countries should consider expanding Muslim media conglomerates to ensure balanced representation of Muslim community in international media. Thus, media can help mitigate misunderstandings by fostering dialogue and promoting accurate information about Islam and its adherents.

Students should also be encouraged to conduct extensive research to explore support networks in New Zealand. In addition, students must register with Asian diaspora associations in academic institutions.

Visits of officials from Asian government and the New Zealand government should be arranged. Bilateral trade agreements between Asian and New Zealand must be encouraged. Moreover, a multilateral trade involving more than two countries should be promoted. Free trade agreements should also be established between trading states.