

Chapter 12

Religious Narrative in Turkey: Muslim Identity Built by Religious Opinion Leaders Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examined how religious opinion leaders guide people on religious issues and inform them how they should live shape the social segments they address. According to this review, four religious opinion leaders were selected, and their profiles on social media platforms were put into content analysis. As a result of the analysis, the forms of conservatism represented by religious opinion leaders were determined, and the characteristics of the Muslim identity they had built were determined. In this context, the similarities and differences of the identities revealed have been deduced. In this way, data was collected that could be used in other studies on religious opinion leaders.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, religious opinion leaders who actively operate in Turkey and influence people to follow them will be scrutinized. Religious opinion leaders create a genuine religious narrative while working for society to live with religious sensitivities. Besides, these activities seem to include current issues other than religion.

Religion in Turkey is one of the most fundamental value structures of society. The vast preponderance has a religious belief, and the vast majority of it adopts Islam as religion. Although many people in Turkey shape their lives according to Islamic rules, the number of people who believe in this religion but do not apply it to their daily life is not small. Nevertheless, they refuse to be irreligious or to have a weak belief. For religious opinion leaders, this situation creates a broad target audience that must be

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persuaded and summoned to the right path. It can be said that especially in modern world, religion is torn between being a subject to an anomic process with the relative effect of the inevitable coexistence of multiple cultures, thus accelerating the process of disappearance and revival with the stimulating effect of postmodernization encouraging localization processes. (Aktay, 2017: 339).

The religion of Islam promises a new life after death. To encounter a good or bad outcome in this new life depends on current life actions. The Islamic religion highly details these actions. Religious functionaries bring new explanations -fatwas- for the situations that arise in the face of recent developments. Aktay's assessment of this process is that it is essential to explain fatwa and religion as a whole and an absolute reality rather than a personal interpretation. According to him, the conclusions of theologies, certainly most of which are interpretative, can never be presented to the masses in a style of interpretation.

Believing masses need absolute religions to settle their way. Once they think they have reached it, they are careful not to believe that this is a straightforward interpretation (2017: 335-336). The emerging new situations and the need for explanation create new fields of activity for religious opinion leaders and the possibility of establishing a religious narrative.

According to Prince (2003), the narrative is "the representation of one or more real or fictional events conveyed by one or more narrates to one or more narratees" (as cited in Dervişcemaloğlu, 2014: 51). This definition emphasizes the duality of real narrative and fictional narrative, one of the fundamental distinctions of narratology. The point that the narrative represents fictional events rather than how reality is described is a critical starting point for our study.

Narration is essentially a tool utilized to ascribe a meaning to reality. Our experience and knowledge simply are not meaningful inherently or naturally. On the contrary, they should be organized, articulated, interpreted, and explained to be meaningful (2014: 49). The problem addressed by the study is that the narratives formed by religious opinion leaders' expressions, emphasis, and denial in their style play an indispensable role in the construction of different religious identities.

While these identities resemble at some points, they may develop in opposite directions at some points. Consequently, many diverse identities of the same religion are produced through narratives. Furthermore, these differentiating identities of a unifying religion cause conflict with each other and uncompromising wars. The study's importance is to examine why and how the established narratives and the identities constructed in this way differ.

This study has emerged due to Turkey's absence of scientific research that discuss religious opinion leaders coexisting. Since it is the first one, it aims to be a descriptive study and create data to possible future studies. In this context, the content analysis method was applied to reveal differentiating identities. For sure many different analysis methods can be used in a text and different results can be reached depending on the way preferred. Due to the desire to present a descriptive study and pave the way for other researches, content analysis appears the most appropriate method.

Social media platforms have been preferred as the medium to provide data for the study. It has been argued that there is a differentiation among the publications of religious opinion leaders on traditional media and the discourse they construct on social media. The data obtained by Facebook and Twitter were subjected to content analysis. Four names were chosen as analysis units in the study. The social media accounts of Professor Dr. Nihat HATİPOĞLU, Ahmet Mahmut ÜNLÜ, Recep İhsan ELİAÇIK and Nureddin YILDIZ were examined to bring different approaches together.

In the coding template created for the analysis units, the units' emphasis, the points they did not mention, and the general ratios of the concepts selected over binary oppositions with each other and within the study were tried to be determined.

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