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DAFTAR ISI

SALAFI-INFLUENCERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE DISCOURSE OF NEO-SALAFI PREACHERS

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Abstract

This discourse analytical study tackles the rise of Neo-Salafism in the digital age. It constitutes an exploration of the discursive technics, strategies and practices employed by the new generation of Salafi preachers on social media. It strives to unveil the various discursive methods of indoctrination pursued by Salafi-influencers and the ends such strategies tend to serve. It involves an exploration of linguistic and contextual activities and seeks to identify explicit and implicit messages incorporated into the discourse of those young preachers. The main hypothesis upon which this study rests is that young preachers of Neo-Salafism resort to modified discursive technics that correspond to the age of digitalization and social media activism for the sake of ensuring a resounding impact among their addressees. These recipients represent a social incubator to the extremist Salafi ideology and a potential pool for a new wave of radicalization among the Muslim youth worldwide. A multi-dimensional methodological framework is employed to tackle the topic raised by this study. The data analyzed within the framework of this study consist of speeches and instructional communications by young Salafi preachers published through different social media platforms. Salafi-influencers seem to have developed a discourse characterized by certain manipulative strategies to communicate particular ideological messages and to indoctrinate recipients.

Keyword: *Neo-Salafism, Salafi-Influencers, Islamism, Extremism, Discourse Analysis, Digitalization, CDA.*

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Introduction

Notwithstanding its strictly conservative teachings and orthodox doctrinal foundations, the *Salafī* movement has adapted to the media tools of the digital age in its endeavor to appeal to new generations, to disseminate its ideas and to promote its dogmatic worldview on a global stage. In our era of digitalization, a *Salafī* preacher does not necessarily need a physical audience to address; he simply needs a camera to either livestream of record a sermon or session, which can then be massively shared online, reaching innumerable recipients worldwide. There are specific factors that facilitate the increasing popularity and an ever-growing followership of such virtual preachers, referred to in this article as *Salafi-influencers*, including poor access to education, especially sound Islamic knowledge. The lack of knowledge required to understand fundamental theoretical or practical religious matters can cause a certain degree of frustration and eventually result in an increasing tendency to embrace an ideologue's advice, opinions and instructions. Once an individual seems to struggle with questions revolving around essential theological or doctrinal issues, searching online for answers is an obvious option. The results of such search queries frequently include sermons, instructional sessions or fatwas by popular *Salafi-influencers*, some of whom even make themselves available for Q&A sessions on social media platforms, with the goal of expanding the scale of their impact and gaining more followership.

Over the recent years, innovative digital platforms have provided *Salafī* ideologues with efficient instruments to strategically communicate with virtual audiences, spread ideological messages and ensure a resounding impact among the recipients. This has led to the development of a religio-doctrinal ecosystem online, with multimedia materials that promote Salafism popping up across various social media platforms. Online activities of *Salafī* preachers have proven specifically attractive and alluring to Generation Z (Gen-Z) as an emerging youth counterculture, providing a clear-cut, straightforward and comprehensive value system that supposedly ensures a strong sense of belonging and group identity.[1]

These *Salafi-influencers* primarily strive for consolidating an image about themselves as pious and knowledgeable believers who endorse a set of sacred and authentic Islamic teachings, norms and values, and offer a promising alternative lifestyle and code of conduct to their vulnerable followers. Gen-Z is regarded as a tech-savvy generation that is somehow immersed in online culture.[2] Given the fact that members of this young generation mainly know a world where information is readily available on their electronic devices, they are more likely to be indoctrinated online than in person. The ability to reach out to these young minds that are still evolving, and therefore easier to (re)shape, raises questions about the potential impact of *Salafi-influencers* and the consequences their discourse might hold

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[1] Comerford, Milo, Ayad Moustafa, and Guhl Jakob, *Gen-Z & the Digital Salafi Ecosystem,* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2021), hlm. 5.

[2] Gopal P. Mahapatra, Bhullar Naureen, and Gupta Priyansha. Gen Z: An Emerging Phenomenon. *NHRD Network Journal*, 15(2): 246-256, 2022, hlm. 249.

for the society and its future. This study investigates the multifaceted discourse of *Salafi-influencers*, exploring linguistic activities and contextual strategies employed to deliver certain ideological messages and to ensure the impact of such messages.

Results and Duiscussion

Neo-Salafism

In order to understand *Neo-Salafism* (*as-Salafiyā al-Muʿāṣirā*) and its characteristics, an exploration of the rise and growth of *Salafism* as a movement of thought and practice is inevitable. The term *Salafī* and what it designates remain ill-defined and repeatedly misunderstood and misinterpreted in the literature on this movement and in studies on Islamism in general.[3] Saudi Arabia's supreme clerical authority, the Permanent Committee for Scholarly Research and Fatwās, maintains that *Salafism* basically "refers to the righteous predecessors of the first three generations of Muslims", prominently known as *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* or the pious predecessors. These include the Prophet's contemporary companions (*al-Ṣaḥāba*), the last of whom died around the year 690; the generation that followed and known as *tābiʿīn*, lived until 750; and the third generation referred to as *tābiʿ tābiʿīn*, the last of whom died around 810. These three generations are viewed as the founders of and participants in a golden era of authenticated, attested and orthodox Islam. This arises in a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet in which he tackles the characteristics of the finest Muslims as "Of the generation to which I belong, then of the second generation, then of the third generation." Hence, *Salafism* fundamentally entails the revival and maintenance of the version of Islam specifically as understood and practiced by *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*.

Salafism is generally defined as a philosophy that believes in progression through regression where the perfect, almost utopian, life is realized only by reviving the Islam of its first three generations. The legacy of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* is deemed to be *authentic* and *pure* in this deeply revivalist doctrine. The core principles of *Salafism* implicate a consistent emphasis on *tawḥīd* (God's unity), and the preservation of *ʿaqīda* (doctrinal pureness). The Salafīs consider themselves as *al-Ṭāʾifah al-Manṣūrah* or the sole triumphant group of Muslims, and *al-Firqah al-Nājiyah* or the saved denomination.[4] The doctrine supports this claim by a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet Muhammad is reported as saying, "A group of my followers will remain victorious till *Allāh's* Order [the Hour] comes upon them while they are still victorious." The *ḥadīth* refers to an anticipated divide within the Muslim community, marked by the rise of different currents, mostly deviant, except for one group of Muhammad's followers who will remain pure in their belief and practice Islam in accordance with God's Order and will thus eventually prevail.

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[3] Bernard Haykel, 'On the nature of salafi thought and action', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement,* (London: Hurst, 2009), hlm. 33.

[4] Adib Abdulmajid, *Extremism in the Digital Era: The Media Discourse of Terrorist Groups in the Middle East,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, Springer, 2021a), hlm. 67.

Salafism is thus to be viewed as a doctrinal philosophy primarily focused on a supposedly exemplary form of Islam characterized by genuineness, purity and unconditional commitment to the teachings of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. In order to realize this vision, *Salafī* scholars refer to different methods (*manāhij*, s. *manhaj*). In a bid to explain the broadness and variance of methods to realize the *Salafī* version of Islam, Sheikh Salih ibn Fawzan provides a comparison between *manhaj* and ʿ*aqīda*: "*Manhaj* is broader than ʿ*aqīda*; *Manhaj* (method) occurs in ʿ*aqīda* (creed), in *sulūk* (behavior), in ʾ*akhlāq* (manners), and in *muʿāmalāt* (dealings), as a part of the life of every Muslim. As for the ʿ*aqīda*, it constitutes the foundation of ʾ*imān* (faith)."[4] A similar contrast was outlined by Sheikh Naasir ud-Deen al-Albani, who maintains that ʿ*aqīda* is "more specific" than *manhaj* in that it has a direct link with *tawḥīd* (monotheism), which forms "the chief and fundamental aspect of Islam." This while *manhaj* is deemed to be "broader than ʿaqīda and tawḥīd" in that it allows resorting to different methods for the sake of "conveying and actualizing Islam."[5]

Amid the rise of various *manāhij* (methods) meant to assist in the realization of the *Salafī* philosophy, one particular *manhaj* has gained the attention of the majority of Salafis since the 19th century, namely, *Wahhabism*. Introduced by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), the followers of this *manhaj* are frequently referred to as Wahhabis, and the works and legacy of ibn Abd al-Wahhab are highly influential among Salafis and of great impact on contemporary *Salafī* worldwide. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab provided what some scholars consider to be a narrow definition of 'true faith', as it mainly focuses on the founder's teachings that have ultimately introduced the principles of *takfīr* (denouncing fellow Muslims as apostates) and *jihād* against the *kāfir* (infidel). Hence, *Wahhabism* is deemed to be the most extreme manifestation of radical Sunni Islam.[5] *Wahhabism* mainly implicates a return to the basic values and teachings of Islam, and striving for the purification of the faith from any form of theological additions or philosophical speculations.[6] Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's extremely conservative thoughts stem from the fact that he was remarkably influenced by the teachings of the strictly orthodox and traditionalist Ḥanbalī school of law, and particularly by the works and thoughts of the Ḥanbalī-based legal philosopher Ibn Taymiyya. This has led scholars on *Islamism* to associate *Salafism* with the legacy of both Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who are seen as primary architects of today's *Salafism*.

One of the defining categorizations within *Salafism* was introduced by Wiktorowicz,[7] who points out that the movement can be divided into three categories: *purists*, *politicos*, and *jihadis*. The *purists*, also known as *quietists*, are mainly characterized by their missionary *Daʿwa* activities while avoiding any involvement in politics. The *politicos*, also known as *ḥarakīs* or activists, are distinguished by their involvement in politics and political activities. Unlike the *quietists* and the *politicos*, the *jihadis* believe in the legitimacy of employing force as a form of *jihād* in order to accomplish the core objectives of *Salafism*. While being used as a reference

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[5] Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate,* (California: University of California Press, 2015), hlm. 187.

[6] Abied Alsulaiman, "Het Jihadi Salafisme: Politieke and Religieuze Wortels", *Ethnische Perspectieven*, 26(3): 177-197, 2016, hlm. 180.

[7] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29: 207, 2006, hlm. 207.

by many scholars, Wiktorovicz's categorization remains prone to criticism. According to Hegghammer,[8] *Salafism* is essentially a "theological, not a political category", which raises controversy about the basis upon which Wiktorovicz's categorization was fundamentally built. Other attempts to contest this categorization were made by Hafez,[9] who criticizes the terminology employed by Wiktorowicz while dividing *Salafism* into three separate groups, arguing that the term "purist" would have been better understood if replaced by "conservative", given that all Salafists are essentially purists. Yet, the main problematic issue within Wiktorovicz's categorization is that its broadness makes it fail to depict how actors from these different groups within the movement interact with each other, the form of their approach to power and the manner in which they aspire to change it.

Amid the development of the discourse of the *Salafī* movement in general, in response to the evolution of the multifaceted challenges encountered by the movement and the emerging contexts within which the Salafists seem to operate, this current of thought and activism has undergone certain modifications in terms of strategy and agenda. This has marked the rise of a new generation of *Salafī* preachers in the recent years, mostly active in the cyber space with a particular interest in attracting Muslim youngsters, operating within the framework of what we can call *Neo-Salafism*. This modified modern version of *as-Salafīyā* manifests itself through a religio-political discourse that frequently implicates ideologizing certain theological themes, dictating specific interpretations of religious scriptures, and propagating doctrinal tenets that ultimately serve an exclusionary agenda and incite enmity towards perceived 'others'. This emerging wave of *Neo-Salafism* (*as-Salafīyā al-Muʿāṣirā*) is primarily characterized by discursive strategies aimed at indoctrinating vulnerable recipients to turn them into guardians to certain religiously inspired ideological messages.

CDA in the Digital Age

The critical approach to discourse analysis (CDA) is aimed at shedding light on "social problems, and especially the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination."[10] CDA is essentially an interdisciplinary methodology of the study of discourse with as an ultimate goal exploring how "social power abuse, supremacy and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context."[11] Wodak and Meyer explain that CDA is primarily characterized by a set of principles, such as "all approaches are problem-oriented, and thus necessarily

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[8] Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihād", *International Security*, 35(3): 53-94, 2010, hlm. 27.

[9] Mohammed Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom,* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2007), hlm. 65.

[10] Teun A van Dijk, "Multidisciplinary CDA: A Plea for Diversity", In Ruth Wodak, & Michael Meyer, (Eds.), *Methods in critical discourse analysis,* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001a.), hlm. 96.

[11] Teun A.van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis", In D. Schiffrin, P. Tanne, & H. Hamilton, (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001b), hlm. 352.

multidisciplinary and eclectic; [interest in] de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data [written, spoken or visual]."[12] Accordingly, the ultimate objective of a discourse analyst is to investigate the ideological and power-related elements within a discourse and explain its relationship with reality and surrounding circumstances through interpreting concealed meanings and purposes.

In the age of digitalization and amidst the rise of a new media culture, scholarly work tends to explore new forms, frameworks and methods of discourse analysis in response to the technological evolution and the associated complexities. Digital technologies are deemed considerably multimodal in terms of combining various semiotic modes, including texts, images and multimedia products. The analysis of digital discourse mainly focuses on the study of the intersection and convergence of language resources, society and technology.[13] Hence, digital discourse analysis, also known as new media sociolinguistics, digital communication or computer-mediated discourse, is increasingly concerned with what Fairclough [14] labeled as "social practice" and less focused on language use. Jones *et al.*[15] view digital discourse analysis as the examination of the diverse manners and practices through which the social world is built and managed by means of various semiotic systems. According to Bou-Franch and Blitvich, discourse analysis in the age of digitalization is mainly concerned with "how multimodal, multisemiotic resources are employed to enact identities, activities and ideologies in the digital world, as part of a larger social world."[16] While earlier discourse analytical studies view identity practices as basically discursive and relational, digital discourse analysis tends to delve into aspects of identity performances and negotiations in the online space of communication.

Noteworthy, Critical Discourse Analysis seems predominantly concerned with the investigation of *top-down* discursive processes of ideological hegemony, while relatively neglecting *bottom-up* practices and strategies "of those who may contest or subvert these ideologies."[17] Recent discourse analytical studies that tackle questions of ideology and social identity encourage scholars to investigate popular digital practices, given the fact that technological advances have led to what Turner[18] coined as a 'demotic turn' that allows citizens to gain access to a public sphere "to either contest or reinforce dominant ideologies."[19] In order to study digital communication in terms of discursive strategies and ideologies, and for the sake of keeping up

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[12] Ruth Wodak and Meyer Michael, "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology", *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (2nd edition, pp.1-33), (London: Sage, 2008). hlm. 3.

[13] Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, *Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), hlm. 4.

[14] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), hlm. 28.

[15] Rodney H. Jones, Chik Alice, and Hafner Christoph, *Discourse Analysis and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age,* (London: Routledge, 2015), hlm. 3.

[16] Patricia Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Pilar. *Analyzing Digital Discourse:,* hlm. 4.

[17] Mary Bucholtz, *Theories of Discourse As Theories of Gender: Discourse Analysis in Language and Gender Studies.* In Holmes, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender.* (pp. 43-68), 2003, hlm. 58.

[18] Graeme Turner, *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn,* (London: Sage Publications, 2010), hlm. 58.

[19] Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, "Gender Ideology and Social Identity Processes in Online Language Aggression Against Women", *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, 2: 2, 2014, hlm. 229.

with the technological advances and the associated complexities concerning discourse, more self-reflective and critical methods are required.

Data and Methodology

The data that form the collective corpus of this study include speeches and instructional multimedia materials produced by several young *Salafī* preachers, who are described by this study as *Salafi-influencers* for their extensive use of social media channels and their influential role among the Muslim youth on a global scale. A total of fourteen instructional speeches, mostly of educative and preaching nature, are extracted from online platforms, including Facebook and YouTube, to be included in the data corpus for a critical discourse analysis. The selection criteria utilized by the researcher comprise *topic diversity*, in that each material tackles a particular topic different than the rest of the data; and *inclusiveness*, namely including *Salafi-influencers* from different parts of the world –Middle East, Africa, Europe and US– each of whom addressing a unique group of virtual recipients and enjoying a different kind of virtual followership.

1.1. Overview of the corpus data

- ....Mannāwī,
  A. *Methods of the Salaf* (instructional). FB: 27/9/2020.
- ....Mannāwī,
  A. *Doctrinal tenets: combatting non-Islamic innovation* (edu. preaching). YT: 20/10/2020.
- ....ʿAzb,   A.
  The different types of People (educational preaching). YT: 14/2/2022.
- ....ʿAzb,   A.
  Prioritizing afterlife, (instructional). YT: 28/2/2022.
- ....Ḥassan, A.
  Ruling by other than Allāh's legislation as a form of kufr, (edu. preaching). YT: 2/9/2021.
- ....Ḥassan, A.
  How to worship Allāh, (instructional). YT: 4/4/2020.
- ....Ḥassan, A.
  Increase your ʾiman, (educational preaching). YT: 19/7/2020.
- ....Līphām, S.
  Stop following these people, (instructional). YT: 16/2/2022.
- ....Līphām, S.
  Idolatry in public schools, (perspective). YT: 11/9/2021.
- ....Līphām, S.
  High paying ḥarām job or low paying ḥalāl job? (perspective). TT: 3/1/2022.
- ....Atthahabi,
  A. U. *On Salafism Cult vs Methodology*, (educational debate). YT: 11/7/2019.
- ....Barāʾ,   A.
  Scholars who don't reject ṭaghūt, (educational preaching). YT: 9/8/2021.
- ....Barāʾ,   A.
  Seeking your rights from manmade laws, (instructional). YT: 12/8/2021.
- ....Barāʾ,   A.
  The Rafiḍah – murtaddin or kāfir ʾaṣli, (instructional). YT: 8/1/2022.

In order to examine the discourse of *Salafi-influencers* and unveil its main aspects and the associated discursive strategies, as represented by the sample data, a multi-dimensional methodological framework is employed. The methodological framework applied within this study consists of a combination of Fairclough's *Text-Interaction-Context* framework (TIC) and Wordak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The discourse framework developed by Fairclough is characterized by three distinct dimensions of meaning, namely: *Text*, whether in reference to written or spoken language; *Interaction*, which entails a multifaceted process of textual production and interpretation; and *Context*, which primarily concerns the social and cultural environment that surrounds the production and interpretation of discourse. Identifying these three aspects of discourse, Fairclough distinguishes between three corresponding levels of discourse analysis, namely: Description, Interpretation, and Explanation.[20] *Description* basically centers around the structures and meanings included in a text, though it remains a hard task to distinguish between both components in a text because meanings are necessarily realized in forms and differences in meaning entail differences in form. The *Interpretation* level implies a certain degree of mediation between a given text and surrounding social practice(s) throughout a process of production and comprehension with cognitive processes involved. The final stage of *Explanation* primarily focuses on the analysis of explicit or implicit relationships between *Interaction* and the social or general *Context* of production and interpretation.

Fairclough's critical approach to discourse analysis emerges in a considerable consistence with Wodak's *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA), as they both view discourse essentially as a form of social practice.[21] The *Discourse-Historical Approach* is fundamentally based on three distinguishable levels of analysis: Firstly, identifying the particular *topics*, *themes*, or *contents* of a particular discourse that is driven by racist, sectarian, ethnicist or nationalist orientations or tendencies; secondly, pinpointing the *discursive practices* and *strategies* underlying the topics; and finally, exploring the *linguistic means* of the strategies employed in the discourse under study. There is thus an intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between the texts, discourses, political and sociological dimensions, historical and situational frames. Realizing such interconnections ultimately helps a discourse analyst to investigate "how discourses, genres and texts change in relation to socio-political change" and gain a broad insight into the development of meanings through the process of recontextualization or the

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[20] Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power,* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1989); Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis", In Teun A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction,* Vol .2. (London, UK: Sage, 1997)

[21] Ruth Wodak and Meyer Michael, "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory, and Methodology". *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*, (London: Sage, 2008), hlm. 1-33.

transfer of given elements to new contexts.[22] Adhering to the socio-philosophical orientation of critical theory, the DHA follows a three-dimensional concept of critique, including: '*discourse-immanent critique*' to investigate discursive inconsistencies, paradoxes, dilemmas and self-contradictions; '*socio-diagnostic critique*' to demystify manipulative characteristics of a discourse; and '*prospective critique*' to improve communication instruments and ensure a long-term impact of the conveyed messages. Analytical tools utilized within the framework of the DHA comprise: the nature of *linguistic reference* with regard to actors, phenomena and actions; *features* and *qualities* attributed to the concerned actors, phenomena and actions; *arguments* employed by the addresser in the discourse in question; the *perspective* from which the addresser expresses these *arguments*, *nominations* and *attributions*; and the nature of the respective *utterances*, whether they are intensified or mitigated.[23]

Salafi-Influencers: The Virtual Preachers

In order to analyze the multidimensional discourse of *Salafi-influencers* and to explore the utilized tools of indoctrination, two main discursive aspects are tackled by the study at hand. These included the linguistic activities pursued by the scrutinized discourse of virtual preachers on the one hand, and the associated contextual activities to efficiently convey the intended messages to the addressers.

The topics tackled by the diverse materials that comprise the corpus of this study vary in accordance with the intended messages. *Figure 5.1.* illustrates the main discourse topics emerging throughout the sermons and speeches held by the concerned *Salafi-influencers*. The diagram initially shows the three main domains to which the tackled discourse topics belong, followed by a thematic categorization and topical intersections observed across the corpus data.

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[22] Martin Reisigl and Wodak Ruth, "The discourse-historical approach", In Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer, (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis,* (2nd ed.) (London, UK: Sage, 2009), hlm. 90.

[23] Martin Reisigl and Wodak Ruth, "The discourse-historical approach", hlm. 93-94.

Theological: Core religious beliefs and practices; scriptural themes, Prophetic traditions	*Doctrinal*: Specific norms, values and teachings embraced by members of a particular religious movement	*Ideological*: Politicization of religious topics, stigmatization of perceived others, indoctrination of recipients

Thematic discursive categorization
Sermons, speeches and instructional materials by *Salafi-influencers*

At-Ṭughyān [idolatry]

Al-Ḥākimīyā [Gods dominion and sovereignty]

Al-Manhajīyā [Prophetic methodology]

At-Tawḥīd [monotheism]

Aṭ-Ṭāʾifīyā [sectarianism]

As-Slafīyā, Al-Islām Al-Muṣaffā [Salafism, the pure Islam]

Al-ʿIlm An-Nāfiʿ [Beneficial knowledge]

Tafḍīl Al-ʾĀkhirā [prioritizing afterlife]

Ash-Shirk [polytheism]

Al-Kufr [disbelief]

Aḍ-Ḍalālā [misguidance]

Al-ʾĪmān waṭ-Ṭāʿah [belief and obedience]

At-Taḥrīm wat-Taḥlīl [Prohibition and permissibility]

Linguistic Activities

Salafi-influencers tend to utilize a diverse set of terms and concepts that reflect the basic tenets of the *Salafī* doctrine. While certain concepts trace back to authentic theological themes tackled by the primary sources of the Islamic faith, others have been developed and nuanced by *Salafī* theologians to address certain doctrinal questions. The rising generation of *Salafi-influencers* has adopted this terminology and continuously employs it in its discourse while trying to tackle contemporary questions and developments within and in the surroundings of the worldwide Muslim community, especially when addressing the Gen-Z Muslims. This way, classical concepts are being utilized to explain perceived social or religious dilemmas, to demonstrate a claimed authentic knowledge, to advise and instruct

addressees, and to provide a future perspective to the rising generation of recipients based on the *Salafī* worldview. The projection of theological and doctrinal notions on contemporary developments or crises to offer a way-out is considered to be an ideological activity, for it implicates a process of politicizing religious topics, stigmatizing perceived 'others', and indoctrinating audiences.

Among the frequently emerging terms in the discourse of *Salafī-influencers* are the notions of *ḥākimīyā*, which refers to Gods dominion and sovereignty, and *ṭughyān* or idolatry. Derivatives of both concepts are employed to describe the utopian social space that the Salafists aspire to realize, and to stigmatize opponents who supposedly embrace man-made laws and judicial systems instead of the *Sharīʿa* and idolize symbols and rulers. The following samples exemplify such a language use:

- If a scholar does not reject *ṭāghūt*, he's not a Muslim.
- When you start to issue *fatāwa* to the *ṭāghūt* to fight against the Muslims to defend his own *kufr*, this is when you become the mufti of the *ṭāghūt* and thus a disbeliever.
- *Al-Ḥukm* is not restricted to the rulers; it is not restricted to just judging between two people; it's also referring to your own actions.
- To seek the judgement of the *ṭāghūt* instead of *Allāh* is *ḥarām*.
- *Fa-qad ḥakamā bi-ghayrī mā ʾanzalā Allāh*, he has judged by other than what *Allāh* has sent down.

According to scholars, basic concepts within the Islamic faith have been radicalized by *Salafī* extremists in a process that has eventually led to the rise of some of the most fanatic and atrocious organizations in terms of thought, ideology, discourse and course of action.[24] There are various such radicalized Islamic concepts beside *ḥākimīyā* and *ṭughyān*, including *tawḥīd* and *shirk*. *Tawḥīd* or monotheism basically refers to one of the most fundamental principles of the Islamic faith as a monotheistic belief system, which is the opposite of *shirk* or polytheism that was once practiced by the inhabitants of the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula.[25] Given that such terms arise in the *Salafī-Jihādī* literature and are utilized in the discourse of radical preachers, scholars count them among the ideological discursive instruments of radical Islamists.[26] The data show frequent utilization of these concepts, as illustrated by the following examples:

- People think by performing acts of *shirk*, they are performing social justice.
- It's *shirk* to go to courts.
- For those who really want social justice, the best way to express and implement that is *tawḥīd*, worshipping *Allāh* alone.

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[24] Robin Wright, Berger J.M., Braniff William, Bunzel Cole, Byman Daniel, Cafarella Jennifer, Gambhir Harleen, Gartenstein-Ross Daveed, Hassan Hassan, and Lister Charles. *The Jihadi Threat: ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Beyond* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, Wilson Centre, 2017), hlm. 5.

[25] Adib Abdulmajid, *Extremism in the Digital Era,* hlm. 44.

[26] Jarret M Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), hlm. 41.

- This action is *shirk*.

- This has eventually led to *shirk* and *ḍalāl*.

- The *muwaḥḥid* is proud to follow *Ibrāhīm ʿalaihī as-salām* and declares *barāʾa* from the *ṭawāghīt*.

Another concept that continuously arises in the discourse of Neo-Salafists is *kufr* or disbelief. Employing the root term *kufr* or its derivatives, like *kāfir* (infidel), indicates the *takfīrī* ideology to which an addresser subscribes. *Takfīr* implicates denouncing others as apostates. Radical Salafist preachers adopt and apply *takfīr* under the pretext of preserving authentic Islam and protecting it against perversion and violations.[27] The following examples from the corpus data show how the notion of *kufr* and its derivatives have been used by *Salafi-influencers* in their quest for ideologizing their audiences:

- They are *ṭāʾifatu-kufr*, they are a *kufr*-entity.

- Some *ʿulamāʾ* know he [a ruler] is *ṭāghūt*, *kāfir*, praise his *kufr*, justify his *kufr*.

- They are *kāfir ʾaṣlī*. They are originally *kāfirs*, because they believe in a different *dīn*.

- Anyone who believes their beliefs is openly and publicly, individually and collectively *kāfir*.

- Helping the *kuffār* against Muslims.

- They have open *kufr* beliefs.

- As long as you live in *Dār al-Kufr* [house of disbelief; territory governed by non-Muslims], your rights will be taken away from you.

Furthermore, *Salafi-influencers* tend to consolidate an image about themselves as deeply pious believers and knowledgeable scholars who are capable of distinguishing between the lawful, *ḥalāl*, and the prohibited, *ḥarām*, according to what they describe as "authentic" Islam. They pronounce *taḥlīl* (permissibility) and *taḥrīm* (prohibition) about various types of actions and conditions, beside instructing their followers about how to embrace the one and avoid the other. In certain cases, the *ḥalāl-ḥarām* question is tackled in the context of daily life activities; in other cases, broader theological topics are addressed. For the sake of propagating the alleged reliability and accuracy of their own knowledge in relation to that of the perceived 'others', the distinction between *ʿilm*, authentic knowledge or enlightenment, and *jahl*, ignorance or pre-Islamic unenlightenment, is discursively reinforced. Such a terminology and derivatives thereof are observed in the data.

- You have lived a life of *ḥarām*, naturally you'll give up a lot of stuff.

- It's better to get a low *ḥalāl* paying job than a high paying job that's *ḥarām*.

- To seek the judgement of anyone other than *Allāh* is *ḥarām*.

- Their blood is *ḥalāl*, permissible.

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[27] Samir Al-Hammadi, *Al-Wahhābiyya wal-salafiyyah al-jihādiyyah. Qirāʾah fī ʾiltibāsāt al-ʿalāqah* [Wahhabism and Salafi-Jihadism. An insight into the confusions of the relation] (Casablanca: Matbaʿat al-Najāḥ al-Jadīda, 2014), hlm. 38.

- The one who hides the truth is not a *ʿālim*.
- That's the knowledge of the pious predecessors, that is *al-ʿilm an-nāfiʿ* brothers and sisters.
- This is closer to the beliefs of *ghulāt al-Murjiʾah*, of the *jāhilīs*.

The data further show that the guardians and propagators of *Neo-Salafism* and the architects of its future, the *Salafi-influencers*, resort to radicalized doctrinal notions such as *al-walāʾ wal-barāʾ* (loyalty to the Islam and the Muslims on the one hand, and disavowal of all that deviates thereof on the other) in order to define the bonds among the adherents to the *Salafi* doctrine and to demarcate boundaries of dealings with the perceived 'others'. In the discourse of *Salafi-influencers*, the reference to the notion of *al-walāʾ wal-barāʾ* often arises in the context of emphasizing the doctrinal tenets (*ʿaqīda*) of *Salafism* and the methodology (*manhaj*) of the pious predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*).

- A true *muwaḥḥid* would declare *barāʾa* from the *ṭawāghīt*.
- *Tawallā* or show loyalty to the *muʾminīn, wa-tabarra'* or disavow the *mushrikīn* and their practices.
- This *ʿaqīda* requires embracing and acting upon *al-walāʾ wal-barāʾ*.
- Following the *manhaj* of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* thus implies distancing yourself, or declaring your *barāʾa*, from all deviant thoughts and actions.

The discursive strategy of *othering* arises in the linguistic activities of *Salafi-influencer*, reflecting the ideological foundation of the sermons of certain preachers.[28] In order to consolidate an emphatically positive image about themselves and a deeply negative portrayal about doctrinal or ideological opponents, positive expressions and features are attributed to the *in-group*, while negative features are discursively associated with the *out-group*.[29] Examples of terms and notions of positive connotations that are employed by the *Salafi-influencers* under study to describe themselves include: *ʿilm* (authentic knowledge) and *ʿulamāʾ* (rightly guided scholars) to express righteousness; *ʾAhl as-Sunnah* (followers of the Prophetic tradition) to show religious authenticity and genuine piety; *muwaḥḥidūn* (monotheists) to portray themselves as the sole faithful monotheists and bearers of the monotheistic legacy of the pure Islam as practiced by the pious predecessors; and *muʾminūn* (believers) to promote themselves as truly dedicated worshippers of God and devotees of the Islamic faith in its purest version. Terms with negative connotations utilized in reference to the perceived 'others' include: *kuffār* (disbelievers), *ʾAhl al-Bidʿā* (deviants, heretic innovators), *ḍāllūn* (misguided), *mushrikūn* (polytheists), *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites), *Rāfiḍah* (rejectors, sectarian-based pejorative term for the *Shīʿa*), *Nuṣayrīs* (heterodox, sectarian-guided expression stigmatizing the *ʿAlawites*), *ghulāt* (extremists), and *jāhilīs* (ignorant, unenlightened).

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[28] Sune Q. Jensen, "Othering, Identity Formation and Agency". *Qualitative Studies*, 2(2), 63-78, 2011, hlm. 64.

[29] Adib Abdulmajid, "Islam and Sectarianism: The Major Split and Its Manifestations", *Journal of Humanities Insights*, 6(2): 11-23, 2022, hlm. 11.

2.2. Table: Key linguistic activities utilized by Salafi-influencers

Strategies	Objectives	Devices
Nomination (linguistic reference)	Discursive construction of social actors (positive or negative connotations)	• **We**: *ʿUlamāʾ*, *ʾAhl as-Sunnah*, followers of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*, *mujāhidūn*, *muwaḥḥidūn*, *al-Firqah al-Nājiyah*, *muʾminūn*. → **positive defining expressions** • **They**: *Kuffār*, *ṭawāghīt*, *ʾAhl al-Bidʿā*, *ḍāllūn*, *mukabbalūn*, *mushrikūn*, *munāfiqūn*, *Rāfiḍah*, *Nuṣayrīs*, *ṭāʾifatu-kufr*, *ghulāt*, *jāhilīs*. → **stigmatizing ideological expressions**
	Discursive construction of phenomena (abstract or concrete expressions)	• *Ḥākimīyā* [Gods dominion and sovereignty] vs. *Ṭughyān* [idolatry] → **abstract** • *ʾImān* [belief] vs. *Kufr* [disbelief] → **concrete** • *ʾĀkhirā* [afterlife, Judgement Day] vs. *Dunyā* [life, worldly affairs] → **abstract** • *Tawḥīd* [monotheism] vs. *Shirk* [polytheism] → **concrete** • *ʿIlm* [knowledge, based on authentic sources] vs. *Jahl* [pre-Islamic ignorance] → **concrete**
	Discursive construction of actions (practical or conceptual expressions)	• *Ḥalāl* [religiously permissible] vs. *Ḥarām* [prohibited] → **practical, conceptual** • *Ṣafāʾ* [purity] vs. *Bidʿā* [heretic innovation] → **conceptual** • *Ṣidq* [truthfulness] vs. *Nifāq* [hypocricy] → **practical, conceptual** • *Walāʾ* [loyalty] vs. *Barāʾ* [disavowal] → **practical, conceptual** • *Thabāt* [steadfastness] vs. *Ḍalālā* [misguidance] → **conceptual**
Predication (attributions)	Discursive qualification of social actors, phenomena and actions, more of less positively or negatively.	• *Al-ʿIlm al-Nāfiʿ* [beneficial knowledge] → **positive phenomenon** • *Al-Ḥukm bi-ghayrī mā ʾanzalā Allāh* [judging or ruling by man-made laws instead of Gods revelations] → **negative action** • *Kufrun dūna-kufr* [a minor disbelief that precedes a major disbelief] → **negative phenomenon** • *Tafḍīl al-ʾĀkhirā ʿalā ad-Dunyā* [prioritizing afterlife over worldly affairs] → **positive action** • *Kabbalatkā khaṭīʾatuk* [constrained by one's own sins] → **negative phenomenon** • *As-Salafīyā* is *al-Islam al-muṣaffā* [Salafism refers to Islam in its purest form] → **positive phenomenon** • *Kāfir ʾaṣlī* [a genuine disbeliever] → **negative social actor**

Table 5.3. presents the linguistic strategies observed in the data comprising the corpus of this study, including the discursive practice of *nomination* or linguistic reference to social actors, phenomena and actions, as employed by the speakers. It also shows the discursive strategy of *predication*, or the type of attributions utilized to consolidate a positive image about the addresser and a negative image about the perceived 'others' (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).[30] The specific terminology, or linguistic devices, employed by the addressers to accomplish these objectives are presented in the right column.

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[30] Martin Reisigl and Wodak Ruth, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", hlm. 87-120.

Contextual Strategies

A diverse set of contextual strategies is identified in the discourse of the *Salafi-influencers* whose sermons and instructional materials are scrutinized within the framework of this study.[31] *Justifying* own beliefs and actions, *questioning* the accuracy of the criticism voiced by perceived opponents, and *modifying* epistemic and deontic status of utterances in a way that ultimately serves the intended, increasingly ideological, messages are among the most common contextual methods applied by *Neo-Salafi* virtual preachers.[32]

In order to promote their exclusive righteousness and the pureness of their own version of *Salafiyā*, *Neo-Salafi* preachers often question the normative rightness of those they view as 'self-proclaimed' Salafīs, and the correctness of the doctrine to which those 'other' Salafīs adhere. They would then preach their own vision about how *Salafiyā* should be understood, and what its fundamental doctrinal tenets essentially entail, as illustrated by the following examples:

- Following the *manhaj* of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* does not mean embracing today's outrageous and partisan *Salafism*, that of the political leaders.
- True *Salafiyā* does not allow helping the *kuffār* against Muslims.
- Attacking the *'ulamā'* of *'Ahl as-Sunnah* contradicts the *manhaj* of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*.
- It rather implicates following the *manhaj* of the *Ṣaḥāba*.
- *As-Salafiyā* is *al-Islam al-muṣaffā*, al-Islam which is pure and not contaminated with anything.
- *Salafism* is a synonym for pure Islam. just as *al-Firqah al-Najiyah* [the saved denomination] is a synonym for practicing Islam the correct way.

The way *Neo-Salafi* preachers approach and address their audiences varies in accordance with the type of message they try to convey. Certain messages are of an advisory nature, while others are meant as warnings to those who might be involved in specific actions that are undesired or even prohibited according to the doctrinal tenets of *Neo-Salafism*. The delivery of messages is contextualized in a way that, directly or indirectly, involves the recipients or creates the illusion that such messages require their close attention. When a message is communicated with a recommendatory or commendable tone, recipients are addressed as '*brothers and sisters*' or '*we*'. Whereas in the case of sending warning signals, recipients are rather addressed as '*you*'.

- As long as you live in *Dār al-Kufr*, your rights will be taken away from you.
- When you start to issue *fatāwa* to the *ṭāghūt* to fight against the Muslims to defend his own *kufr*, this is when you become the mufti of the *ṭāghūt* and thus a disbeliever.

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[31] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

[32] Martin Reisigl and Wodak Ruth, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", hlm. 121.

- The knowledge of the pious predecessors is *al-ʿilm an-nāfiʿ* [beneficial knowledge] brothers and sisters.

- We, *'Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah*, believe that *'imān* increases in the obedience of *Allāh* and decreases in the obedience of *shayṭān*.

- The fact that we now have the internet and social media, any- and everyone can present themselves as somebody knowledgeable about the religion. Verify, brothers and sisters.

- If you are unable to pray and unable to fast, then you are *mukabbal*, you are chained; *kabbalatkā khaṭīʾatuk*, you are chained by your sins.

While tackling questions relating to devotion, moral obligations and supposedly deviant actions with negative consequences for an individual Muslim and the *'ummah* at large, *Salafi-influencers* seem inclined to contextualize their arguments and frame them as indisputable truths and incontrovertibly accurate and well-founded statements that are to be embraced as normative rightness. In order to ensure the discursive impact of certain messages, explicit and implicit warnings are contextually associated with the message for potentially disobedient or critical addressees.

- To seek the judgement of the *ṭāghūt* instead of *Allāh* is *ḥarām*.

- If you are capable, make *hijrā* and save yourself.

- Everyone who deserted the *Qurʾān* and neglected its message will have to face the Prophet of *Allāh* on Judgement Day, which is terrifying.

- *Al-Ḥukm* [judging by God's laws] is not restricted to the rulers… it is not restricted to just judging between two people; it's also referring to your own actions.

- Converts give up so much when they embrace Islam. You know, you have lived a life of *ḥarām*, naturally you'll give up a lot of stuff.

In order to increase the effect of particular messages, *Salafi-influencers* employ the contextual strategy of *perspectivization* (ibid, p. 116-117)[33] through the expression of direct involvement or by explicitly distancing themselves from supposedly deviant or heretic beliefs or practices embraced by the perceived 'others'. To contextually perspectivize a certain narrative and to demonstrate involvement or distancing, *Neo-Salafī* preachers resort to the utilization of object pronounces such as *'us'* and *'me'*. These pronounces often arise in the context of concluding remarks about a previously tackled topic. The connotational dimension of such expressions are determined by the context within which they are employed and the explicit or implicit messages they are meant to serve. They usually reflect the *ideological perspective* of a speaker, either through an expression of *involvement* or by means of an expression of *distance* regarding the topic in question.

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[33] Martin Reisigl and Wodak Ruth, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", hlm. 116-117.

- May *Allāh* preserve us from their misguidance.

- May *Allāh* the Almighty preserve us and you from Hellfire.

- Anybody who does not come out declaring the *barāʾa* from those *ṭawāghīt*, for me he's somebody suspicious.

- The Prophet taught us that you'll not give up something for the sake of *Allāh* except that He will replace it with something better.

- May *Allāh* count us among them.

- Many of us spend so much time listening to people who want to lead us astray.

Modification is also deemed to be among the main contextual strategies exploited by *Salafi-influencers*.[34] Within the framework of discursive modification, the *epistemic* or *deontic* status of an utterance is either *intensified* or *mitigated* by the addresser, based on the nature of the communicated message, whether implicit or explicit, and its implications. While some utterances are doctrinal based, dealing with questions related to the doctrinal teachings, norms and values to which *Neo-Salafis* adhere, others address politicized dogmatic questions and reveal the ideological orientation of the addresser.

- The *bidʿā* is the main reason for *shirk bi-Allāh* [polytheism].

- Anyone who believes their beliefs is openly and publicly, individually and collectively *kāfir*.

- The worst thing a human being can do is to worship other than *Allāh*, to associate partners with him, to commit idolatry.

- Read and understand the *Qurʾān* and act upon its message… only then you can live a joyful life in this world and the next.

- For those who really want social justice, the best way to express and implement that is *tawḥīd*, worshipping *Allāh* alone; it's acting upon that and inviting others to that.

Urging the excommunication (*takfīr*) of those who embrace a different set of religious beliefs than those to which the addresser subscribes, or discursively consolidating a negative image about different belief systems by stigmatizing them as heretic innovations (*bidʿā*) and considering them as "the main source" of polytheism (*shirk*) reflects attempts of discursive ideologization by the addresser towards the addressees. [35]

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[34] Martin Reisigl and Wodak Ruth, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", hlm. 113.

[35]   Adib Abdulmajid, *Extremism in the Digital Era*), hlm. 110.

Table: Main contextual strategies employed by Salafi-influencers

Strategies	Objectives	Devices
Argumentation (persuasive arguments employed)	Justification, questioning of truth and normative rightness	• Following the *manhaj* of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* does not mean embracing today's outrageous and partisan *Salafism*, that of the political leaders… it rather implicates following the *manhaj* of the *Ṣaḥāba* as the first generation of the pious predecessors. → **claim of truth**. • If you are unable to pray and unable to fast, then know *ʾannakā maḥrūmun*, you are prohibited from this; you are *mukabbal*, you are chained; *kabbalatkā khaṭīʾatuk*, you are chained by your sins. → **claim of normative rightness, topos or fallacy of negative consequences.** • Nowadays, so many of us spend so much time listening to people who want to lead us astray… you have to get knowledge from the right people. → **claim of normative rightness**. • It could be that he [a scholar] has some *ḥizbīyā*… And the other one tries to praise the *ṭāghūt*, praise his *kufr*, justify his *kufr*, and start to call anybody who fights against *ṭāghūt* that his blood is *ḥalāl*, the mujāhidīn's blood is *ḥalāl*. → **topos or fallacy of negative consequences.** • A main sign of spiritual pureness and actual piety is the prioritization of *ʾĀkhirā* over *dūnyā*. → **fallacy of secondary importance**. • If you say "*lā ʾilāha ʾilla-Allāh, waḥdahū lā sharīka lah, lahū al-mulk wa-lahū al-ḥamd, wa-huwā ʾalā kullī shayʾin qadīr*" a hundred times a day, your sins will be forgiven, even if it's as large as the ocean. → **claim of truth and normative rightness**. • People think by performing acts of *shirk*, they are performing social justice; by default, those who are against it are labeled as people who are against social justice. These are the same exact tactics that are used to promote the LGBT agenda. → → **topos or fallacy of moral obligation.** • As long as you live in *Dār al-Kufr*, your rights will be taken away from you. → **topos or fallacy of moral obligation.** • When you start to issue *fatāwa* to the *ṭāghūt* to fight against the Muslims to defend his own *kufr*, this is when you become the mufti of the *ṭāghūt* and thus a disbeliever. → **claim of normative rightness.** • The knowledge of the pious predecessors is *al-ʾilm an-nāfiʾ* [the sole beneficial knowledge] brothers and sisters. → **claim of truth.** • To seek the judgement of the *ṭāghūt* instead of *Allāh* is *ḥarām*. → **topos or fallacy of moral obligation.**
Perspectivization, representation (addresser's point of view as basis)	Positioning addressers perspective, expressing involvement or distance	• We, *'Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamāʾah*, believe that *ʾimān* increases in the obedience of *Allāh* and decreases in the obedience of *shayṭān*. → **expression of involvement** • If there was something that the companions [of the Prophet] had the ability to do at their time and they did not do it, we don't do it, it's as simple as that. → **expression of distance** • Converts give up so much when they embrace Islam. You know, you have lived a life of *ḥarām*, naturally you'll give up a lot of stuff. → **ideological perspective** • Everyone who deserted the *Qurʾān* and neglected its message will have to face the Prophet of *Allāh* on Judgement Day, which is terrifying. → **ideological perspective, expression of distance**

		• *Al-Ḥukm* is not restricted to the rulers… it is not restricted to just judging between two people; it's also referring to your own actions. → **ideological perspective** • May *Allāh* preserve us from their misguidance. → **expression of distance, ideological perspective** • May *Allāh* count us among them. → **expression of involvement** • May *Allāh* the Almighty preserve us and you from Hellfire. → **expression of distance** • If you are capable, make *hijrā* and save yourself. → **ideological perspective** • Anybody who does not come out declaring the *barāʾa* from those *ṭawāghīt*, for me he's somebody suspicious. → **ideological perspective, expression of distance** • The Prophet taught us that you'll not give up something for the sake of *Allāh* except that He will replace it with something better. → **expression of involvement**
Intensification, mitigation (modification)	Intensifying or mitigating epistemic or deontic status of utterances	• The *bidʿā* is the main reason for *shirk bi-Allāh*. → **deontic intensification, ideological** • Anyone who believes their beliefs is openly and publicly, individually and collectively *kāfir*. → **epistemic intensification, ideological** • Read and understand the *Qurʾān* and act upon its message… only then you can live a joyful life in this world and the next. → **epistemic intensification, doctrinal** • *As-Salafīyā* is a synonym for pure slam; just as *al-Firqah al-Nājiyah* is a synonym for practicing Islam the correct way; just as *ʾAhl as-Sunnah* is a synonym for practicing Islam in the correct way. → **deontic intensification, doctrinal** • *ʾAhl al-Bidʿā* permitted such resentful practices, claiming to act out of *manṭiq* [logic]. → **deontic intensification, ideological** • *As-Salafīyā* is *al-Islam al-muṣaffā*, al-Islam which is pure and not contaminated with anything. → **deontic intensification, doctrinal** • There are people who think by promoting the worst sin to children in public schools that they are making the world a better place. For those who really want social justice, the best way to express and implement that is *tawḥīd*, worshipping *Allāh* alone; it's acting upon that and inviting others to that. → **epistemic mitigation, ideological** • Those who merely read the Holy Book but never bother to understand the message and act upon it. → **epistemic mitigation, ideological** • Now, by and large in the West, the fact that we now have the internet and social media, any- and everyone can present themselves as somebody knowledgeable about the religion. Verify, brothers and sisters. → **epistemic mitigation, ideological** • If a scholar does not reject *ṭāghūt*, he's not a Muslim. → **deontic intensification, ideological** • The worst thing a human being can do is to worship other than *Allāh*, to associate partners with him, to commit idolatry. → **epistemic intensification, ideological**

Table 5.5. shows the contextual strategies observed in the corpus data, including *argumentation* or the strategy of delivering persuasive arguments in order to justify the speaker's point of view, and to question the views of the perceived 'others'. It also presents

the contextual strategy of perspectivization or the positioning of the addresser regarding the tackled topic, whether by means of demonstrating involvement of distancing. The third contextual strategy incorporated is *modification*, which is accomplished by means of either intensifying or mitigating epistemic or deontic status of utterances to ensure the delivery of the intended message and its impact among the recipients. Illustrative extracts from the discourse of *Salafi-influencers* included in this study are presented in the right column.

Conclusion

The critical analysis of the discourse of *Salafi-influencers*, the missionary advocates of *as-Salafīyā al-Muʿāṣirā* or *Neo-Salafism*, has shown considerable attempts by this new generation of preachers to indoctrinate and ideologize recipients. Various discursive tools of persuasion and manipulation have been employed within the scrutinized data to ensure a resounding impact among the recipients. The identified and analyzed linguistic and contextual strategies have been instrumentalized to generate and deepen social stratification by means of othering. Amidst the growing impact of *Salafi-influencers*, as indicated by the increasing followership of their online channels, and their ability to reach out to the young minds amongst the Muslims worldwide with the goal of (re)shape their opinions and beliefs, the discourse of such preachers is believed to hold serious consequences for the society and its future. This study constitutes an attempt to dismantle the multifaceted discourse of the virtual preachers of *Neo-Salafism*. Yet, the increasing number of such figures and the growing impact of their discourse in our digital age require more academic attention. Future studies need to investigate discursive strategies and aspects that were not covered by this research, employing diverse methodological instruments and examining a broader dataset to advance our knowledge and understanding regarding the discourse of *Salafi-influencers*.

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