



## A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Outrage over Quran Burning in BBC News Reports

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### تحليل تداولي إجتماعي للغضب حول حرق القرآن الكريم في تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية

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#### المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية انعكاس الغضب لغوياً فيما يتعلق بحادثة حرق القرآن الكريم في تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية من منظور تداولي إجتماعي. وقد تم اختيار هذه الحادثة تحديداً نظراً لعدم تلقيها اهتماماً كافياً من قبل الباحثين من منظور تداولي إجتماعي، وفق ما تمكن الباحث من مراجعته. وبالتالي، ينبغي سدّ هذه الفجوة المعرفية من خلال تحليل تداولي إجتماعي دقيق لكيفية تجلّي الغضب جراء حادثة حرق القرآن الكريم في سياق تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تحقيق الأهداف التالية: تحديد الاستراتيجيات التداولية التي تُجسّد الغضب في تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية، والكشف عن المتغيرات الاجتماعية التي تؤثر في استخدام خطاب الغضب بشأن حادثة حرق القرآن الكريم في تلك التقارير. وانطلاقاً من هذه الأهداف، تقترض الدراسة أن استراتيجيات تداولية مثل أفعال الكلام، التأطير، اتخاذ المواقف، الافتراض المسبق، الاختيار المعجمي، التوضيح الأخلاقي، مناشدة التضامن، وغيرها من الاستراتيجيات، يمكن أن تُستخدم لتمثيل السخط تداولياً في تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية حول حرق القرآن الكريم. كما تقترض الدراسة أن المتغيرات الاجتماعية، مثل السياق الجيوسياسي، ردود الأفعال العامة والسياسية، الحساسيات الدينية والثقافية، وتأطير الإعلام، وغيرها، تؤثر بشكل كبير في كيفية تجلّي الغضب بشأن حادثة حرق القرآن الكريم في هذه التقارير. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، تتبع الدراسة خطوات منهجية محددة، حيث تستعرض بإيجاز الأدبيات ذات الصلة حول تعابير الغضب من منظور تداولي إجتماعي في سياق تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية عن حادثة حرق القرآن الكريم، ثم تطوّر الدراسة إنموذجاً تداولياً لتحليل الغضب لغوياً، وتُخضع ثلاثة مقتطفات تمثيلية للتحليل النوعي باستخدام النموذج المطوّر لهذا الغرض، وأخيراً تناقش الدراسة النتائج للوصول إلى استنتاجات معينة. وتنتهي الدراسة بجملة من الاستنتاجات، أبرزها أن بي بي سي الإخبارية تُشكّل الغضب حول حادثة حرق القرآن الكريم ليس فقط باعتباره رد فعل عاطفياً، بل أيضاً كحدث إعلامي تداولي إجتماعي يتأثر بالسياقات الجيوسياسية والدينية والثقافية. الكلمات المفتاحية: التداولية الإجتماعية، الغضب، حرق القرآن الكريم، تقارير بي بي سي الإخبارية.

#### Abstract

This study sociopragmatically inspects how outrage is reflected in BBC News reports as far as the accident of Quran burning is concerned. Outrage is mainly selected as it has not been given a satisfactory consideration by researchers from a sociopragmatic perspective, as far as the researcher could inspect. Therefore, this knowledge gap should really be bridged by sociopragmatically scrutinizing the manifestation of outrage in the context of Quran burning in BBC News reports. This study, thus, attempts to accomplish the following aims: pinpointing the pragmatic strategies that manifest outrage in BBC News reports; and finding out the social variables that influence the use of outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports. Along the lines of its aims, this study hypothesizes that: the pragmatic strategies of speech acts, framing, stance-taking, presupposition, lexical choice, moral positioning, solidarity appeal, and other strategies can be used to pragmatically represent outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports; and the social variables of geopolitical context, public and political reactions, religious and cultural sensitivities, media framing and others highly affect the manifestation of outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports. To accomplish its

aims, this study follows certain steps: it briefly reviews the relevant literature about the sociopragmatics of outrage as far as the accident of Quran burning is concerned in BBC News reports; develops a model of the pragmatics of outrage to analyze the data; analyses three representative extracts qualitatively using the model developed in this study for this purpose; and discusses the findings to arrive at some conclusions. The present study ends up with a variety of conclusions, the most dominant of which is that BBC News constructs outrage over Quran burning not only as an emotional reaction but also as a sociopragmatic media event shaped by geopolitical, religious, and cultural discourse.

**Keywords:** Sociopragmatics, Outrage, Quran Burning, BBC News Reports.

## 1. Introduction

The accident of the Quran burning by Salwan Momika in Sweden in the summer of 2023 has ignited notable controversy and global outrage. It raises critical questions about the intersection of freedom of expression, religious sensitivity, and sociopolitical discourse. In turn, Media plays a key role in shaping public perception of such events with their language which influences audience interpretations. This study, thus, examines how BBC News reports construct and mediate outrage in response to the Quran burning incident. Utilizing a sociopragmatic approach, this study probes the pragmatic strategies used in BBC News reports to represent a voice of outrage by means of condemnation, defense, and neutrality. Particularly, it scrutinizes speech acts, presuppositions, and evaluative language to discover the underlying ideological and discursive patterns. Hence, the present study makes an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the social variables that affect the pragmatic representation of outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports?
2. What are the pragmatic strategies employed by BBC News reporters to convey outrage over Quran burning?

To that end, this study seeks to understand how media discourse navigates the tension between religious sentiments and democratic values, and how it contributes to the broader sociopolitical narratives surrounding acts deemed offensive or provocative. This study, thus, is noteworthy in the broader context of sociopragmatics, media studies, and intercultural communication. Understanding how news reports frame outrage and political responses to the accident of Quran burning can provide deeper insights into the role of media in managing ideological conflicts and shaping public opinion. Through a qualitative sociopragmatic approach, this study aims to contribute to the growing field of sociopragmatics by highlighting the interplay between language, power, and social meaning in contemporary news reporting.

## 2. The Sociopragmatics of Outrage over Quran Burning in BBC News Reports

From a sociopragmatic perspective, outrage can be considered as a social and emotional reaction that arises when individuals or a social group perceive a violation of moral, social, or political norms. From a sociopragmatic perspective, outrage over the Quran burning in BBC News reports is a discursively constructed reaction to disrespect toward the Islamic sacred book (Quran) and such outrage is expressed through public condemnation, political statements, protests, and social media activism. In BBC News reports, outrage is shaped by cultural norms, religious sensitivity, media framing, and geopolitical contexts, where different reporters engage in pragmatic strategies to assert moral, ideological, and political positions. While there may not be specific studies focusing solely on the sociopragmatic analysis of BBC News reports concerning Quran-burning incidents, some scholars provide valuable insights into media representations of such events and the sociopragmatic aspects of media discourse.

Berry and Sobieraj (2014) examine how outrage is expressed and strategically used in political media and they argue that outrage in political media is not just a spontaneous emotional reaction but a calculated strategy. For Blitvich and Kádár (2021), outrage is often tied to moral values, where individuals or groups express indignation when social norms or ethical principles are violated. Rasoulikolamaki *et. al.* (2023) examines how news reports, including the BBC, articulate the Quran burning incident. They found that media outlets usually can depict protests as peaceful or confrontational, and this variation underscores the effective role of the media in shaping public perception and the socio-political climate. Larsson and Mattsson (2024) reveal a kind of dilemma between freedom of speech and freedom of religion when they analyze the public debate in Sweden after the accident of the Quran burning by Rasmus Paludan. In this study and from a sociopragmatic standpoint, outrage is operationally defined as more than just an emotional reaction as it is a socially and linguistically

constructed phenomenon that serves communicative, moral, and political functions. It shapes public discourse, reinforces group identities, and influences social change.

### **3. Social Variables Affect Outrage over Quran Burning in BBC News Reports**

The use of outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports is influenced by several social variables, including:

#### **3. 1 Geopolitical Context**

The use of outrage, in the context of BBC News reports, can be affected by the location where the Quran burning occurs and its political climate, the international diplomatic relations and tensions between Western and Muslim-majority countries, and the responses from the global organizations.

#### **3. 2 Public and Political Reactions**

Outrage in BBC News reports is influenced by the response of protests or riots to the incident, especially in Muslim-majority countries. It can also be affected by speeches from world leaders or influential figures condemning or supporting free speech rights. Likewise, it is affected by the actions taken by governments.

#### **3. 3 Religious and Cultural Sensitivities**

The manifestation of outrage in BBC News reports is affected by the perception of Islamophobia and religious discrimination, the variation in cultural attitudes toward blasphemy and freedom of expression, and the public discourse of religious leaders.

#### **3. 4 Media Framing and Agenda-Setting**

The use of outrage is influenced by how BBC balances coverage between free speech debates and religious offense, whether the coverage aligns with broader narratives about extremism, nationalism, or minority rights, and the language used in reporting.

#### **3. 5 Historical Precedents**

Previous incidents of Quran burning and how similar controversies have been reported in the past and their long-term impact on media discourse affect the manifestation of outrage in BBC News reports.

#### **3. 6 Legal and Ethical Considerations**

Outrage is influenced by the law protecting free speech vs. the law against hate crimes and incitement to violence. It is also affected by ethical considerations in journalism such as avoiding sensationalism while reporting on sensitive religious topics.

### **4. Methodology**

The data of this study is represented by three extracts from BBC News reports that are concerned with outrage over the accident of Quran burning. These reports are entitled as "violent protests after Quran burning in Sweden", "Denmark Quran burning: Muslim nations condemn far right group's action", and "Turkey condemns vile Sweden Quran-burning protest". In this study, Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts is adapted to include all the speech acts which suit the manifestation of outrage including assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts. Other pragmatic strategies such as framing, stance-taking, presupposition, lexical choice, moral positioning, solidarity appeal, causal implicature, emotional emphasis, evaluative language, emotional intensification, emotionally charged language, and diplomatic consequence framing are also activated to pragmatically represent outrage in BBC New reports. The model is a top-down model that works from top to bottom where the two phases of this model. On one hand, the first phase is concerned with the sociopragmatic analysis of speech acts used to demonstrate outrage. On the other hand, the second phase is concerned with all and only pragmatic strategies used to demonstrate the use of outrage over the accident of Quran burning in the context of BBC News reports. The proposed model is clearly sketched in Figure (1) below:

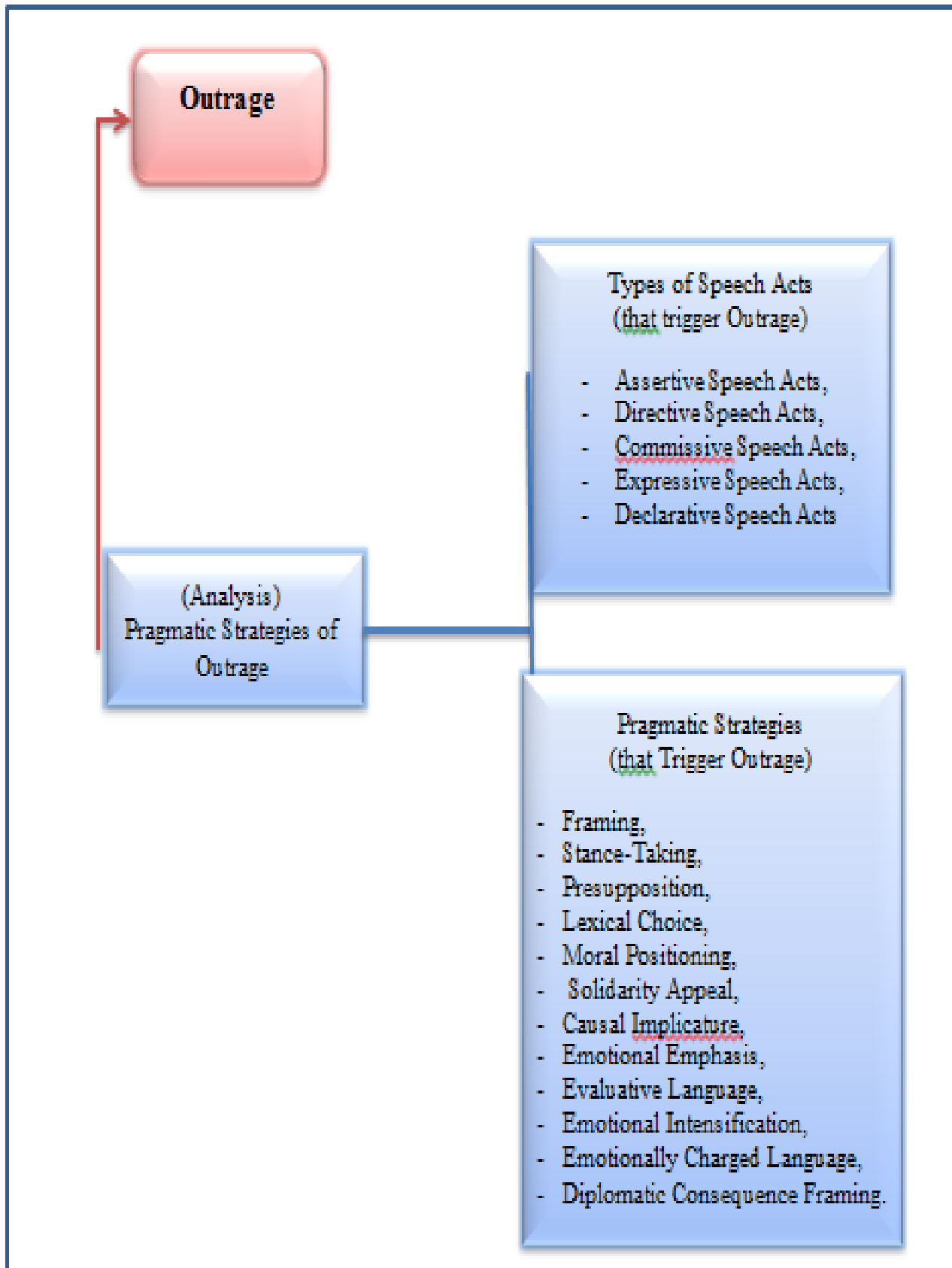


Figure (1): A Pragmatic Model of Outrage in Media Discourse

## 5. Data Analysis

In this section, five representative extracts are analyzed by means of the model developed in this study for this purpose.

### Extract (1)

*"Three men have been arrested in connection with a violent riot following a Quran burning in Sweden. Unrest erupted after an Iraqi anti-Islam activist Salwan Momika set fire to a copy of the Islamic holy book on Sunday".*

**The Title of the Report:** Violent protests after Quran burning in Sweden.

**Analysis:** In this extract, the reporter primarily employs assertive speech acts to report factual events, but elements of expressive speech acts can also be inferred to indicate outrage. In his utterance, *"Three men have been arrested in connection with a violent riot following a Quran burning in Sweden"*, the reporter intends to present factual information about arrests and unrest. His utterance *"Unrest erupted after..."* implies causality which indirectly highlights the seriousness of the reaction but maintains a neutral tone. The reporter also makes use of an expressive speech act which indicates outrage in his use of *"violent riot"* which signals strong emotional and social consequences as it indirectly reflects the gravity of public outrage. Moreover, referring to Salwan Momika as an *"anti-Islam activist"* carries an evaluative stance that frames him in opposition to Islamic values, which could contribute to an implicit condemnation of his actions. While the BBC generally avoids direct expressions of outrage to maintain journalistic neutrality, the framing and word choices like *"violent riot"* and *"unrest erupted"* contribute to an implied expression of public and societal anger. Also, the reporter subtly conveys outrage using several pragmatic strategies despite maintaining a neutral journalistic stance. He resorts to the strategy of presupposition in his utterance *"Unrest erupted after an Iraqi anti-Islam activist Salwan Momika set fire to a copy of the Islamic holy book on Sunday"* which presupposes that the Quran burning was a provocative act that led to unrest, subtly attributing responsibility to the individual. Likewise, the use of *"erupted"* implies sudden and intense reactions, reinforcing the idea of public outrage. The reporter also uses the strategies of evaluative language and framing when he uses the utterance *"Violent riot"* as it intensifies the description of the protest, emphasizes the severity of the reaction, and implies strong emotions involved.

His utterance *"Anti-Islam activist"* frames Salwan Momika in opposition to Islam to make his act seem deliberate and provocative, and such utterance reinforces negative sentiment and potential outrage. The strategy of causal implicature is used in the utterance *"following a Quran burning"* as it implies a cause-effect relationship between the burning and the unrest. This utterance suggests that the Quran burning triggered a violent response to indirectly acknowledge the outrage without explicitly stating it. The reporter, furthermore, makes use of lexical choice and emotional intensification when he uses the utterance *"set fire to"* rather than *"damaged"* or *"destroyed"* to emphasize the destructive nature of the act which potentially evokes strong emotions in readers. Additionally, the use of the utterance *"Islamic holy book"* rather than just *"Quran"* highlights the religious significance which makes the act appear even more offensive to Muslims, reinforcing outrage. Hence, though BBC maintains a factual tone, pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, causal implicature, evaluative language, and lexical choices subtly express the gravity of public outrage without explicitly stating it. These strategies help construct the narrative while adhering to journalistic neutrality.

### Extract (2)

*"Iraq and some other Muslim-majority countries have strongly condemned the burning of a Quran on Monday by a group called 'Danish Patriots' outside the Iraqi embassy in Copenhagen".*

**The Title of the Report:** Denmark Quran burning: Muslim nations condemn far right group's action.

**Analysis:** In this extract, the reporter makes use of an assertive speech act of stating facts in his utterance *"by a group called 'Danish Patriots' outside the Iraqi embassy in Copenhagen"* in his attempt to provide factual information about who performed the act and where it occurred. The use of the assertive speech act here establishes context but also indirectly frames the act as controversial by linking it to a specific nationalist group. The expressive speech act of condemning is also operated by the reporter when he uses the verb *"condemned"* as it conveys disapproval and outrage over the Quran burning. Likewise, the adverb *"strongly"* intensifies the condemnation, emphasizing the severity of the reaction.

A commissive speech act is also utilized in the utterance "*strongly condemned*" which implies future diplomatic or political actions against the group or Denmark. Though no explicit threat is made, this commissive speech act suggests that these countries may take further action to address the outrage. Together, these speech acts construct a strongly critical stance toward the Quran burning incident. The reporter operates the strategy of presupposition to imply the act is offensive in his utterance "*Iraq and some other Muslim-majority countries*" which presupposes that these countries share a common cultural and religious identity that finds the act offensive and unacceptable. Also, his utterance "*the burning of a Quran*" presupposes that this act is serious enough to warrant a strong international reaction. In order to position these countries as taking a firm stance against the Quran burning, the reporter uses the strategies of stance-taking and evaluative language when he frames the event through the utterance "*strongly condemned*". Causal implicature is also triggered by the reporter in this extract which implies that the Danish Patriots' act triggered the outrage, and this implicates them as responsible for diplomatic tensions and widespread condemnation. The reporter also uses the strategies of lexical choice and emotional emphasis in his utterance "*Outside the Iraqi embassy in Copenhagen*" which adds a geopolitical and diplomatic layer to the outrage, suggesting that the act was not only religiously offensive but also politically provocative. The specification of the embassy location reinforces the diplomatic severity of the incident. By employing all these pragmatic strategies, this report conveys outrage in an implicit yet powerful way, ensuring neutrality while emphasizing the severity of the Quran burning incident and its international consequences.

### Extract (3)

"*Turkey has condemned as 'vile' a protest in Sweden in which a Quran was burned, further complicating Ankara's approval of Sweden's NATO membership bid*".

**The Title of the Report:** Turkey condemns vile Sweden Quran-burning protest.

**Analysis:** In this extract, several speech acts contribute to manifest outrage. An assertive speech act of stating facts is used by the reporter when uses the utterance "*a protest in Sweden in which a Quran was burned*" which describes the event as factually occurring, framing it as an objective reality that justifies outrage. While no direct command is given, the condemnation implies a demand for Sweden to take corrective action. Thus, an indirect directive speech act is activated. Thus, it seems that Turkey's diplomatic stance suggests an expectation of apology, legal action, or preventive measures against similar incidents. The reporter uses an expressive speech act of conveying emotion and evaluation when he uses the verb "*condemned*" which signals his moral disapproval and outrage and the word "*vile*" which serves as a negative evaluation that intensifies condemnation and frames the act as repugnant. Also, the reporter uses a declarative speech act as he intends to make an official condemnation by formally denouncing the act. Strategies of evaluative language and emotionally charged language are used when the reporter uses the word "*vile*" which is a highly negative evaluation that frames the act as morally repugnant. Also, the use of the verb "*condemned*" reinforces a strong emotional response. The strategy of diplomatic consequence framing is utilized by the reporter when he uses the utterance "*further complicating Ankara's approval*" which pragmatically links the outrage to real-world consequences, increasing its significance. This strategic implication pressures Sweden by suggesting that its NATO bid is at risk. Implicature is activated when the reporter implies the assumption that burning Quran is a severe offense warranting international condemnation. Thus, the implicature involves that Sweden must take action if it wants to ease diplomatic tensions. By publicly condemning the act, Turkey aligns itself with global Muslim outrage. This strengthens group identity and appeals to shared religious and cultural values. In this sense, strategies of moral positioning and solidarity appeal are used by the reporter.

## 6. Results and Discussion

This study examines the sociopragmatic strategies used by BBC News to construct and convey outrage over Quran-burning incidents. The analysis is based on speech acts, lexical choices, framing techniques, and pragmatic strategies used in News reports. Findings indicate that BBC employs a balanced yet nuanced approach, integrating expressive condemnation, consequence framing, and strategic source selection to shape the discourse. The study identified four primary speech acts used in BBC News reports to convey outrage which are assertive speech acts, used to state facts and contextualizing outrage, expressive speech acts, used to convey emotion and judgment, directive speech acts, used to convey implied expectations and calls for

actions, and declarative speech acts to communicate official positions and consequences. The study found that BBC employs multiple pragmatic strategies to frame outrage in a way that remains journalistically neutral while acknowledging the emotional weight of the issue. These strategies include evaluative and emotionally charged language, consequence framing and political implications, implicature and presupposition, and balancing free speech vs. religious sensitivity. The findings suggest that BBC's sociopragmatic approach to outrage over Quran-burning incidents serves three key functions which are legitimizing outrage, maintaining neutrality, and highlighting global impact. This study demonstrates that BBC News employs a strategic blend of speech acts and pragmatic strategies to construct and frame outrage over Quran-burning incidents. The balance between expressive condemnation, assertive reporting, and political framing allows BBC to navigate a highly sensitive issue while upholding journalistic objectivity.

## 7. Conclusions

The present study ends up with several key conclusions as follow:

1. From a sociopragmatic perspective, BBC News constructs outrage over Quran burning not only as an emotional reaction but also as a media event shaped by geopolitical, religious, and cultural discourse. This framing ensures both neutrality and legitimacy while acknowledging the diplomatic, security, and societal consequences of such incidents.
2. To pragmatically manifest outrage over Quran burning in the context of BBC News reports, assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts are utilized.
3. BBC News reports employ a balanced yet strategic use of assertive and expressive speech acts to manifest outrage over Quran-burning incidents while maintaining journalistic neutrality.
4. BBC reports use declarative speech acts to highlight official condemnations from governments and international organizations, reinforcing the legitimacy of outrage at the global level.
5. Outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports is pragmatically manifested in the use of the pragmatic strategies of framing, stance-taking, presupposition, lexical choice, moral positioning, solidarity appeal, causal implicature, emotional emphasis, evaluative language, emotional intensification, emotionally charged language, and diplomatic consequence framing.
6. Emotionally charged language as in the use of the utterances "*condemn*", "*vile*", and "*provocative*" is selectively used to emphasize the intensity of outrage, particularly through quotations from political and religious figures.
7. Diplomatic and political framing plays a crucial role in BBC's discourse, often linking outrage to geopolitical consequences such as NATO membership, diplomatic tensions, and security risks.
8. The pragmatic strategy of implicature allows BBC to imply condemnation without directly expressing bias, ensuring that the reporting remains objective yet impactful.
9. Balancing free speech and religious sensitivity is a key feature of BBC's reporting, often juxtaposing outrage with discussions on democratic values and legal frameworks.
10. Historical comparisons and intertextual references to previous Quran-burning incidents (e.g., Terry Jones, Rasmus Paludan) help frame the event within a broader pattern of religious and political conflict.
11. Certain social variables affect the representation of outrage over Quran burning in BBC News reports including geopolitical context, public and political reactions, religious and cultural sensitivities, media framing and agenda-setting, historical precedents, and legal and ethical considerations.
12. BBC strategically amplifies the consequences of outrage by focusing on protests, diplomatic fallout, and international responses, rather than theological or religious debates.
13. The sociopragmatic strategies observed in BBC News reports reflect a broader trend in international media discourse, where outrage is framed through a combination of linguistic, political, and cultural narratives.
14. Multimodal elements, such as imagery, video clips, and headline phrasing, enhance the emotional impact of the reports, subtly reinforcing the gravity of the situation.

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