

The Role of English Translation in Promoting Islam and Combatting Misinformation

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Abstract:

This paper examines the pivotal role of English translation and communication in promoting Islam and countering Islamophobia in today's global context. The paper addresses the challenges posed by misinformation and misrepresentation, highlighting the rise of "Soft Power" tactics aimed at cultural and religious influence. It underscores the significance of accurate English translations of Islamic texts in fostering intercultural dialogue, combating stereotypes, and empowering English-speaking Muslims. By analyzing the impact of widely shared stories like "She is the Soul of My Soul," the paper illustrates how these translations help reshape Western perceptions.

Keywords: Islam; English; Translation ; Islamophobia; Misinformation; Disinformation; Mal-information; Propaganda

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1. INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary discourse, the Islamic faith has become increasingly targeted by disinformation and misinformation campaigns, resulting in a surge of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim incidents in Western societies. This paper aims to explore the tactics employed to undermine and distort Islam, ultimately contributing to the rise of Islamophobia. These strategies are part of what is referred to as the "Soft Power," representing a departure from traditional forms of power projection in the modern world. This raises several pertinent questions: Are these methods gaining traction? What role does English communication and translation play in counteracting these vicious campaigns? What initiatives can be undertaken to promote accurate understanding via the use of this language?

As hypotheses, we suppose that misinformation and related concepts' campaigns targeting Islam contribute significantly to the rise of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments in Western societies. Furthermore, tactics categorized under "Soft Power," aimed at distorting and undermining Islam, are adapting to modern forms of communication and influence.

English communication and translation are essential in mitigating the effects of disinformation and misinformation campaigns against Islam by offering accurate information and challenging stereotypes.

Efforts aimed at fostering a precise understanding of Islam through English-language communication platforms have the potential to effectively address Islamophobia and foster increased intercultural understanding.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we will delve into the concepts of soft power and Islamophobia, with particular attention to the strategies employed to tarnish the reputation of Islam. This includes an examination of misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, propaganda, fake news, and hate speech.

Furthermore, we will assess the influence of the wide dissemination of the heart-wrenching story of "She is the Soul of My Soul" in English-speaking regions in order to analyze Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

The research methodology in this paper is descriptive with the aim to delineate the importance of English translation and communication in spreading accurate information about Islam, examining the different mechanisms deployed to sully its authentic portrayal.

2. The Soft Power in Modern Time:

The American political scientist and scholar, Joseph Nye, introduced the concept of "Soft Power" to the realm of warfare in his books "Bound to Lead" (1990) and "The Paradox of American Power" (2002), elaborated upon later in "Soft Power" (2004). It points out to the resort to various non-military means to influence people as the use of force has become costlier and less threatening forms of power have grown increasingly attractive. (Gomichon, 2013, p. 02).

The term soft power or war may seem contradictory, as it combines "power" or "war" with "soft," two seemingly opposing concepts. Historically, war has been associated with violence and destruction, using deadly weapons and resulting in bloodshed, looting, and infrastructure damage.

However, soft power is a term coined in modern imperialist literature, exploring warfare techniques that replace harsh methods with more appealing, influential, and effective tools. These include modern technology, the internet, media, finance, the arts, sports, cinema, and culture, all used as new weapons to influence minds.

2-1. Soft Power Through the Lens of Joseph Nye:

Joseph Nye differentiates between two types of power. Hard power is 'the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies'. (Nye, 2011, p.1). It refers to the ability to coerce via different means including threats and inducements ("sticks" and "carrots"). (Nye, 2009, p.63). It includes military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions and relies on tangible power resources, such as armed forces or economic means. (Gallarotti, 2011, p. 29).

On the contrary, soft power is the ability to get ‘others to want the outcomes that you want’, and more particularly ‘the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion’. (Nye, 2004, p. 05). Finally, Nye introduces smart power as the ‘balance of hard and soft power’. (Nye, 2005, p.18).

Soft power can be defined as —ability to shape the preferences of others without the use of force, coercion or violence, but through intangible assets, such as an attractive personality, culture, political values, institutions and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. (Zerine, 2021, p.460).

Smart power, on its part, is “an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions of all levels to expand one’s influence and establish legitimacy of one’s action.” (CSIS Commission on Smart Power, 2012, p. 11).

With respect to the soft power resources, Nye mentions:

1. Culture: It refers to a set of values, ideas, and practices that create meaning for a group of people, and have various manifestations, such as literature, art, language, education, and others.
2. Political values: The aim is to make them more attractive and universal to yield fruitful results.
3. Foreign policy: The domestic and foreign policy also plays a major role in the attraction or reluctance of citizens in other countries to it. (Nye, 1990, p. 15).

For his part, Jonathon McClory elaborated the components of Nye ‘s components of soft power in five parts- —Government (political values of the country), Culture (set of practices that created meaning for the society), Diplomacy (foreign policy), Education, and Business/Innovation. (Ibid).

It is worth mentioning that this policy has become a cornerstone in American policies, expressed through phrases like Winning Hearts and Minds, War of Ideas, Public Diplomacy, leading through Civilian Power, Cultural Diplomacy, Global Development Initiatives, Building Moderate Muslim Networks, Information Operations, Psychological Operations, and Conflict Prevention. (Dharma Bahadur, 2021, p. 56).

2-2. The Goals of the Soft Power:

The main objective of soft power is to achieve cultural transformation in a way that significantly impacts public opinion. This approach targets and controls the population through the strategic use of news and information, a method that the hegemonic system, typically represented by the United States, has long employed to further its own goals. By influencing the media landscape, soft power seeks to reshape societal values and norms in a manner favorable to its initiators.

Another crucial goal is political transformation, aimed at undermining the perceived effectiveness of the existing system. This involves targeting, discrediting, and slandering the foundational pillars of the government, thereby eroding public trust and confidence in its institutions. By portraying the system as inept and corrupt, the objective is to weaken its authority and legitimacy. (Nye, 2011, pp. 94-96).

Soft power also seeks to instill fear around critical issues, such as poverty, war, or the threat of an oppressive foreign power. By spreading rumors and creating an atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity, it aims to destabilize the social fabric and induce a state of collective anxiety. This climate of fear can make the population more susceptible to manipulation and control.

Creating divisions among the populace and fostering discord between the country's military and political leadership is another key objective. Such strategies aim to cause political disintegration by exploiting and amplifying existing tensions and conflicts within the society and its governing bodies. This can lead to a breakdown in cohesion and cooperation, further destabilizing the nation.

Promoting a sense of hopelessness and discouraging societal and emotional joy from the country's advancements is also targeted in soft power- war. By focusing on negative aspects and downplaying positive developments, the aim is to foster a climate of despair and resignation, thereby weakening the resolve and morale of the citizenry.

Soft power endeavors to render the youth indifferent to the country's important issues. By disengaging young people from critical national matters, it seeks to erode the future leadership and activism potential within the country, making it easier to manipulate the direction of national discourse and policy.

The military's morale and efficiency are also prime targets. Soft war aims to create differences and conflicts among various branches of the military and security forces, reducing their effectiveness and unity. This can be achieved through misinformation, psychological operations, and fostering internal disputes.

Creating differences within the country's command and control systems is another objective. By disrupting these critical infrastructures, soft power seeks to impair the nation's ability to respond effectively to crises, both internal and external. (Kobaysi, 2026, p. 05).

The use of black propaganda, which includes the spread of rumors, pornography, and clandestine threats (night-letters), is employed to incite overthrow and chaos. These tactics are designed to undermine public order and government stability by creating confusion, fear, and moral decay. (Nye, (2011, p. 81).

Strengthening religious, ethnic, political, and social discontent with the government is also a key strategy. By exacerbating existing grievances and creating new ones, soft war aims to cause the country to disintegrate during critical periods of discontent. This can lead to a loss of national unity and facilitate external manipulation.

Efforts to portray the country's situation inaccurately through exaggerated news and analysis are aimed at misinforming both the domestic and international audience. This false narrative can undermine the country's reputation and influence, both internally and globally, creating additional pressure on the government.

To recapitulate, the soft power targets minds, ideas, values, ethics, identities, and religions through distortion and manipulation without resorting to physical violence. Its outcomes include inciting sectarian strife, fostering traitorous factions, eroding moral values, and inundating thought with frivolous content and sterile debates.

To execute these objectives, soft war requires specific tools and capabilities, including sophisticated media operations, psychological tactics, and strategic communication efforts. These resources are used to influence public perception and behavior subtly but effectively, steering the targeted nation towards desired outcomes without the overt use of military means. Nye, for instance, singles out four main channels through which states can use their soft power, notably “public diplomacy, broadcasting, exchanges, and assistance”. (Nye, 2011, p. 96).

3. Islam, the target of the Soft Power:

Islam has been a prime target of these fifth-generation wars, resorting to soft but ruthless tools to tarnish its image and values. The dissemination of falsehood has led to the emergence of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crimes in the Western world, undermining national identity and questioning Islam's ability to address contemporary challenges.

3-1. The Emergence of Islamophobia:

It is worth mentioning that the term "Islamophobia" emerged in the 1970s to describe the longstanding phenomenon of fear and hatred directed towards Islam, which often manifests as violence, prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination against Muslims. This includes physical assaults, verbal insults, and discriminatory acts against individuals wearing identifiable Muslim attire, such as hijabs or beards. Violent acts may extend to bombings and desecration of mosques with urine, excrement, or pigs, as well as hateful graffiti. Discrimination can involve exclusion from employment, education, and political participation, as well as heightened surveillance in public spaces. (Allen, 2017, p. 03).

As of the 1970s, discrete events have occurred, with the 9/11 attacks being the pinnacle of these incidents, followed by the London bombings of 7/7. Collectively, these events have pushed Muslims to take a center stage in the Western public sphere, contributing to their portrayal as irrational, extremist, and a threat to Western values. (Hussain, Y and Bagguley, 2012, p. 1).

Academically, Islamophobia is often defined as an "unfounded," "irrational," or "unjustified" fear of Islam. The Runnymede Trust, established in the UK in response to the surge in Islamophobia, provided a comprehensive definition in 1997. It outlined several key features of Islamophobic prejudice, including the perception of Islam as monolithic, separate, and inferior to the West. Islam is often depicted as violent, aggressive, and a political ideology used to justify discriminatory practices against Muslims. (Abbas, 2004, p. 26).

Critics like Fred Halliday argue that the concept of Islamophobia oversimplifies the diversity within Islam and focuses too much on the religion rather than the people targeted. They argue that it shields Islam from criticism. (Halliday, 1993, p. 16).

Others, like Allen, suggest that Islamophobia should be seen as one of many concepts, like homophobia or anti-Semitism, that describe prejudice and discrimination. (Allen, 2017, p. 03). Meer and Modood counter that attacks are often directed at Muslims based on visible markers of their faith, such as clothing or appearance, blurring the distinction between Islam and Muslims. (Meer, Modood, 2009).

3-2. Misinformation and Related Concepts:

In combatting Islamophobia, it's crucial to understand the mechanisms at play in tarnishing the image of Islam. While disinformation, fake news, propaganda, mal-information, and misinformation all contribute, it's misinformation that often takes center stage.

At the outset, let's define these terms as stated by the College of Staten Island - The City University of New York- (College of Staten Island).

Disinformation is the deliberate dissemination of false or inaccurate information in order to discredit a person or organization.

Fake news is the intentional falsification and fabrication of news-based information with the purpose of harming and deceiving people.

Misinformation is the sharing of inaccurate and misleading information in an unintentional way.

Propaganda: An information deliberately spread to influence or raise awareness of a particular political cause or value position. Propaganda may

—— The Role of English Translation in Promoting Islam and Combatting Misinformation resemble advertisements since both are highly visual, but propaganda does not engage in selling products or services.

Mal-information - true information shared intentionally to cause harm.

3-3. Additional Studies on the Afore-mentioned Concepts:

It's important to acknowledge that far from the dictionary, a significant volume of research has been conducted on these terms. For instance, there have been numerous high-quality academic investigations commissioned by the European Parliament since 2017. (Bressanelli and al., Institutions and foreign interferences, 2020, p.27).

The study of Wardle and Derakhshan for the Council of Europe entitled Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking, sets out three key definitions:

1. Disinformation is information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization, or country;
2. Misinformation is information that is false, but not created with the intention of causing harm.
3. Mal-information is information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country. (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017. p. 50).

As long as propaganda is concerned, Bayer et al. favor the definition introduced by the international special mandates on freedom of expression, which frames propaganda as being "designed and implemented to mislead a population and interfere with the public's right to know, as well as the right of individuals to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds." This narrower definition helps distinguish between legitimate political communication and harmful manipulative practices. (Bayer et al., 2009, pp 18-53).

Finally, the tactic of Fake News is considered as a weapon with which powerful actors can interfere in circulation of information and attack and undermine independent news media, while the notion of hate speech is to publicly incite to violence or hatred against a group of people or a specific community based on their race, color, religion or their national or ethnic origin.

3-4. Misinformation-Driven Islamophobia:

In this paper, the term "misinformation" is chosen to accurately describe another mechanism through which Islamophobia is perpetuated. Unlike deliberate disinformation campaigns targeting the religion, Islamophobia is further exacerbated due to the massive unintentional dissemination of inaccurate and misleading information by different outlets due to our failure to counter disinformation at first.

The hostile powers initially spread false information widely: 'the disinformation process'. When we are incapable or negligent in countering it, other outlets inadvertently amplify and perpetuate these falsehoods. Consequently, the misinformation becomes the widely accepted version of our religion, the distorted version, overshadowing the authentic one. This process is known as soft penetration.

Indeed, it's crucial to recognize that the unintentional spread of misinformation can be just as damaging as deliberate disinformation campaigns. While deliberate disinformation is always orchestrated with malicious intent, the unintentional dissemination of misinformation can still be orchestrated from behind by these vicious circles.

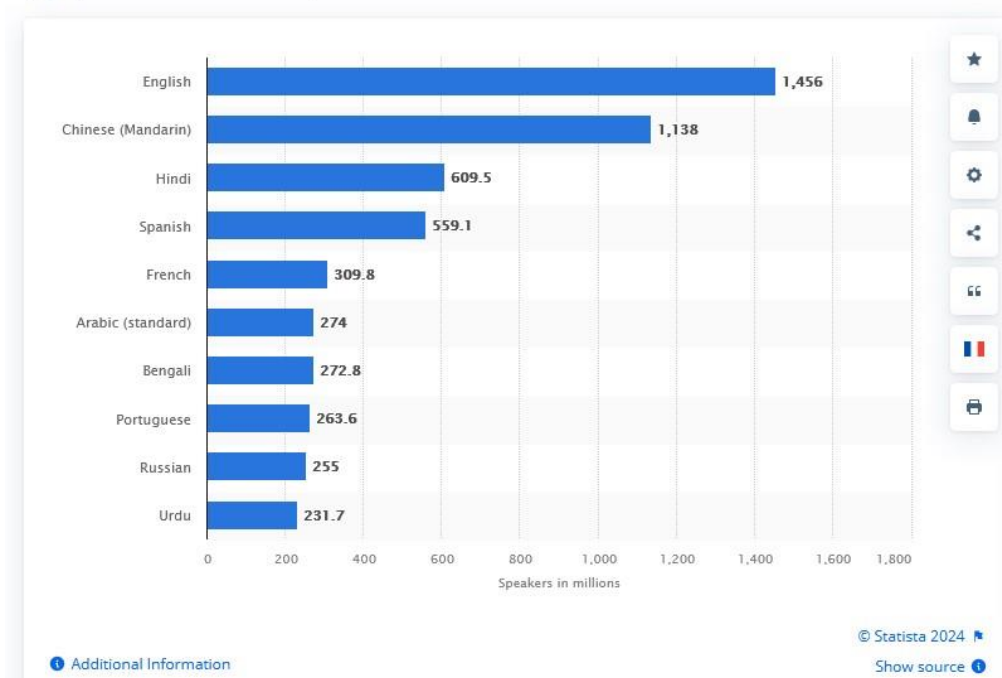
4.English Communication and Translation to Counter Misinformation:

Before delving into the paramount role of the English language in countering systematic campaigns against our religion, it's important to shed light on some statistics about the global prominence of English.

- Current research suggests that the English language is now spoken by approximately 1.5 billion people speaking it natively or fluently in 2023. (Einar H. Dyvik, 2024).
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The most spoken languages worldwide in 2023

(by speakers in millions)



- English is also the most studied language in the world. In Continental Europe, English is the most commonly studied language, with an estimated 96% of students learning English.
- English is the most common language on the popular language learning app Duolingo, topping the ratings in 122 countries. (Duolingo, 2023).
- English is an official language in 75 different countries worldwide, meaning that 39% of countries have English as one of their official languages.
- Nearly 58% of the content on the internet is in English.
- Over 750 million people worldwide speak English as a foreign language.
- English as a second language accounts for roughly 375 million English language learners, according to the British Council.

- English is the official language in 59 countries and 27 non-sovereign entities around the world. It is spoken in 88 countries and is also the language of the United Nations and the European Union.
- The global English language learning market is huge and, according to a report issued by Meticulous Market Research, will be worth \$69.62 billion by 2029. (17 English Language Learning Statistics, 2024).

In the face of both the relentless and deliberate onslaught by certain Western circles seeking to undermine the noble religion of Islam and tarnish the revered legacy of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and our illustrious Islamic history, as well as the emergence of misinformation coupled with the continued dominance of the English language in the modern age, it has become imperative for us as Muslims to arm ourselves proficiently with the English language and subsequently translate into that language, as the importance of accurate translation in this sphere cannot be overstated, particularly in promoting cross-cultural understanding and dispelling misconceptions about Islam. English translation, in particular, serves as a pivotal tool in these endeavors. By offering faithful translations of the Holy Quran, collections of Hadith, and other Islamic literature, translators seek to debunk myths and stereotypes while fostering a more nuanced comprehension of the religion.

Furthermore, English communication and translation facilitate cross-cultural dialogue, bridging the divide between Muslims and individuals of differing faiths. Through translated texts, individuals from diverse backgrounds gain access to Islamic teachings, thereby acquiring insights into its principles, beliefs, and practices. Moreover, proficiency in English communication and translation serves as indispensable tools for academic and research pursuits in the field of Islamic studies. Scholars and students rely on accurate translations to explore Islamic texts from various historical periods, conduct comparative analyses, and formulate pertinent conclusions.

Additionally, English translation empowers English-speaking Muslims to confidently engage with their faith within their communities. Access to religious sources in English enables them to deepen their understanding, strengthen their connection to Islam, and participate more actively in religious discourse and activities.

5. Initiatives to Counter Ferocious Campaigns Against Islam:

To achieve these goals, a series of measures and initiatives should be undertaken by the relevant authorities in all Arab and Islamic countries in order to counter the ferocious campaign against Islam.

As far as English language curricula are concerned, we propose that English language teachers integrate English language lessons for students of the Religious Sciences, arming them to embark on a noble journey of defending our religion. The aim of this approach is to equip them with authentic Islamic concepts and cultural terminology in English, enabling them to engage in dialogues with English speakers and to translate our books for foreigners. Acquiring such skills contributes significantly to shaping their strong Islamic personalities, capable of engaging in constructive dialogues with non-Muslims.

We emphasize an important point, which is that our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged his noble companions to learn other languages, such as Syriac, Persian, and Hebrew, and various other languages, so that Muslims could be vigilant and wary of the schemes and plots of non-Muslims.

Also, we suggest that Waqf “Endowment” and Islamic institutions in our Arab and Islamic world intensify English-language translation efforts by creating institutions specialized in the translation of Islamic books.

Besides, honorable imams and preachers should join these initiatives. This is essential to enable them to spread the Islamic call with wisdom and good counsel to non-Muslims living in our countries and in Western countries. Learning and acquiring English language skills are crucial for them in decisively responding to various Western circles, which are launching a fierce attack on Islam and our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

At the level of Arab and Islamic embassies in Western countries, we suggest that these accredited diplomatic representatives, in collaboration with Islamic organizations active in Western countries, intensify efforts towards translating and distributing pamphlets, publications, and visual materials into English. This should be done in a manner capable of addressing Western populations at various levels.

Furthermore, at the level of official and private satellite television stations in our Arab and Islamic countries, we propose that these television stations dedicate a portion of their programs to presenting programs and documentaries in English to highlight the greatness of our noble Islamic religion and our radiant history. Media outlets are bearing the responsibility of disseminating and defending the Islamic call by launching various programs in the English language or resorting to the audiovisual translation (AVT).

6. The Influence of of the Story of "She is the Soul of My Soul" in the West:



Certainly, the story of "She is the Soul of my Soul" exemplifies the pivotal role of English communication and translation in promoting the true values of Islam and dispelling misconceptions. This story has garnered widespread attention over the past few months, resonating globally and leading many to convert to Islam.

The video depicting Palestinian resilience and determination to reclaim their rights in their occupied land, as an elderly grieving sheikh, named Khaled Nabhan, with a thick, long beard and turban, "often associated by the vicious Western campaigns to extremists and terrorists," stands in the emergency room of a hospital, seemingly unaware that someone is capturing the moments of farewell between him and his martyred granddaughter, along with his statements uttering the peace of all humanity, remarkable patience, submission, acceptance of fate, and the fatherly tenderness advocated for by our religion, as well as other videos uploaded on his platforms, covering resistance and religious values-related topics and translated into English via subtitling and dubbing, gained prominence worldwide. (Al-Nadabi 2024).

These videos, embodying resistant people armed with the true teachings of Islam and genuine human peace, challenge misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, stereotypes, and misconceptions, attracting millions of viewers who have become interested in the just Palestinian cause and Islam.

Other subtitled videos flooded modern social media platforms, depicting Palestinians' true faith and resilience even in the face of such atrocities and the ongoing relentless onslaught perpetrated against them by the criminal Zionist entity. These videos have shocked the global human conscience, prompting existential questions. How can a mother, holding her slain infant or toddler, stand tall, uttering the words "Alhamdulillah" (praise be to Allah)? What is the source of this deep faith? This is Islam.

Scrolling these subtitled videos prompted Western societies, especially their youth, to seek the source of this profound faith that has brought them such tranquility. In a world where people are searching for solutions to psychological distress and depression, resorting to drugs and sedatives despite having access to comfort and favorable living conditions, individuals are now flocking to buy translated copies of the Holy Quran,

reading it eagerly and attentively. Numerous videos have emerged on social media platforms featuring individuals discussing their experiences with reading the Holy Quran and the profound messages it contains.

Participants at the general conference of the Council of European Muslims (CEM), held in Istanbul, Turkey, from January 25 to 28, 2024, echoed the sentiment that the profound faith demonstrated by Palestinians has inspired numerous non-Muslims to explore Islam, with many ultimately converting. (Guemaz, 2024).

Shortly before that, the Guardian also published an article titled "Youth Americans are picking up the Quran, to understand the resilience of Muslim Palestinians, " exploring how young Americans are increasingly turning to Islam in record numbers, driven by a profound respect for the resilience and patience demonstrated by Palestinian Muslims in the face of severe hardships and atrocities. This growing interest in Islam among American youth is closely tied to their admiration for the steadfastness of Palestinians, which has sparked a desire to understand the religious and cultural foundations that support such endurance.

Crucially, the accessibility of translated texts and contents has played a significant role in the surge of this interest. The availability of these translations in English has made it possible for a broader audience to explore Islamic teachings as without them, the spread of Islamic knowledge and the resulting cultural exchange would have been severely limited. (Demopoulos, 2023).

As a result, one may conclude that the translation of these videos and contents shattered the image used to demonize Muslims and Arabs in countless thriller movies over the past thirty years. It presents a different narrative, one of compassion, resilience, peace, dignity, and faith, and illustrates the pivotal role of English communication and translation in promoting understanding among diverse communities.

In conclusion, despite the immense material, human, and technological capabilities possessed by Western and proselytizing satellite television channels that are hostile to Islam, we, as an Islamic nation, at various educational, cultural, and political levels, are capable of promoting the true image of Islam using linguistic means.

We are called upon, within our respective roles and capacities, to bear a responsibility to combat disinformation and misinformation while fostering a more accurate understanding of Islam. Through collective action and leveraging our diverse abilities and resources, we can effectively promote the authentic values of Islam.

6. CONCLUSION:

This paper sheds light on the crucial role of English translation and communication in fostering a nuanced understanding of Islam and addressing the pervasive issue of misinformation that fuels Islamophobia. English, as the global lingua franca, is instrumental in disseminating accurate information about Islam, thereby bridging linguistic and cultural divides. Accurate and accessible English translations of Islamic texts empower Muslims to engage confidently with their faith and facilitate intercultural dialogue.

According to the paper's study, the challenges posed by misinformation and misrepresentation, exacerbated by "soft power" tactics aimed at cultural and religious influence, highlight the urgent need for proactive measures. English translations act as powerful tools to combat stereotypes and prejudices, providing a platform for authentic Islamic voices.

The paper showcases that the English translation of the heart-wrenching story of "She is the Soul of My Soul" has yielded fruitful outcomes in Western societies, where individuals have initiated an exploration of our religion and pushed for changes in their governments' policies toward Muslims, particularly in Palestine, highlights the importance of English communication and translation in portraying the genuine depiction of Islam.

Ultimately, this paper asserts that the strategic use of English translation is essential for promoting a true understanding of Islam, fostering cross-cultural communication, and empowering English-speaking Muslims. By harnessing the transformative power of accurate translation and active communication, we can confront the detrimental impacts of misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, hate speech, propaganda, and fake news, and uphold the integrity of Islamic teachings in an increasingly interconnected global context.

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