

Cross-cultural analysis of a new indicator which measures the degree of Islamophobia social awareness

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Abstract

There is ample evidence documenting the problem of Islamophobia (discrimination and racism against the Muslim community). However, the extent to which the European population is aware of this injustice has not exhaustively been assessed. The aim of this research was to measure in a valid and reliable way the degree of social awareness of Islamophobia in four European countries: Spain, France, United Kingdom and Germany. The sample consisted of 1846 volunteers from these countries. All of them answered a structured protocol on social awareness called Degree of Islamophobia Recognition (DIR). Several cross-cultural analyses based on the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) technique, the ordinal alpha coefficient and the Greatest Lower Bound (GLB) were applied to analyze the dimensionality of the DIR and its reliability. Six sex-differentiated population scales were made based on derived typical scores (TS). The results revealed that the DIR consisted of two cultural dimensions: perceived vulnerability and connection. Both dimensions explained between 51% and 61% of the variance in all countries. Reliability coefficients were acceptable in all cases (>0.7). We propose that public policies combat Islamophobia considering these dimensions and taking into consideration the thresholds of the derived PTs to identify in which regions or social groups these intervention policies are needed.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Cross-cultural analysis, Degree of Islamophobia recognition-DIR Muslims, Social identity theory, Social cognition

Introduction

Negative social attitudes towards Islam and Muslim people represent a growing cross-cultural phenomenon in recent years (see Allen, 2011, 2020; Najib & Hopkins, 2019). According to the European study conducted by Goodwin et al. (2017), the majority of the general population is against migration flows between Muslim countries and Western countries. Moreover, certain research shows that Muslim culture tends to be excluded from public policies and is an object of concern for European political systems (see Elahi & Khan, 2017; Swami et al., 2018). Overall, European data on the presence of social rejection towards Muslims and their religion reported the following prevalence: 31% in Portugal, 24% in Ireland, 19% in Spain, 17% in United Kingdom, 13% in the Netherlands, 12% in France and 8% in Germany (see the major revisions of Pickel & Öztürk, 2018; Pickel, 2019). Nevertheless, in a robust review Peucker and Akbarzadeh (2012) obtained higher prevalence for the same countries, which ranged from 27% (in Portugal) to 46% (in Germany). Therefore, initial prevalence rates should not be underestimated. Understanding the cultural impact of Islam in Western countries is crucial to develop social policies that prevent tribalism and ensure peaceful and respectful coexistence of citizenship (e.g., Choma et al., 2016).

Origins and theoretical grounds of Islamophobia

Negative attitudes and behaviors against Islam range from individual behaviors that are discriminatory, racist, and hostile (e.g., Gravelle, 2021; Helbling, 2012; Uenal, 2016a) to widespread hatred and dehumanization by some social collectives (e.g., Abdalla et al., 2021; Kteily et al., 2015). This dehumanization can be observed in some media-especially social networks; (see Pintak et al., 2021)-or in the film history of American cinema (e.g., Touzani & Hirschman, 2018), which characterized the profile of the Muslim as someone dangerous, terrorist, primitive and irrational (see also O'Donnell, 2017). These behaviors against Islamic culture have a structural and historical origin that goes beyond Islamophobia as a psychological construct (Skenderovic & Späti, 2019).

In 1978 Edward Said proposed and described the term Orientalism to refer to an ideological structure developed historically by Western countries, commencing at the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, continuing through the colonial era, and ending at the conclusion of the Second World War (see Said, 1978, 2016). Orientalism is an ideology that advocates the superiority of Western countries over Eastern regions and specifically pays special attention to Islamic countries (Said, 2014). Consequently, Orientalism fosters behaviors of rejection, dominance, and underestimation toward Islamic culture, intrinsically relating it to the concept of Islamophobia that we present in this manuscript (e.g., Beck et al., 2017; Moosavi, 2020). Due to its historical, political and ideological character, Orientalism can be considered one of the structural bases justifying the prevalence of contemporary Islamophobia in Europe (Meer, 2014; Saeed, 2007). Following this line, some authors proposed the expression *neo-Orientalism* to explain the various factors of neo-liberalism that have fostered the maintenance of traditional orientalism and its adaptation to current geopolitical conditions and massive globalization (see Samiei, 2010 for a major revision of this concept). Therefore, we should understand the term *Islamophobia* as a broad construct that encompasses the historical-structural ideological origins underlying the Western rejection of Islamic culture (Orientalism), including more attitudinal and molecular conception (see Skenderovic & Späti, 2019; Tuastad, 2003). In this research we will focus on Islamophobia from this cognitive perspective, but integrating it within the context of Orientalism and neo-Orientalism.

The term *Islamophobia* is used to describe these negative and rejecting behaviors towards the Muslim community and Islamic religion (e.g., Bangstad, 2016; Kunst et al., 2013). There are also similar concepts, such as *anti-Muslim hate* or *anti-Muslim hatred* (see Altomonte, 2021; Aydin, 2016). *Anti-Muslim hate* refers to negative behaviors that are against the Muslim sociocultural system and are not limited exclusively to religious hatred (Bleich, 2011). In contrast, *anti-Muslim hatred* understands these negative behaviors to be primarily grounded in religious conflict (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2014; Valfort, 2020). This distinction was also confirmed by Ewart et al. (2021), who identified negative feelings toward the Islamic religion (*anti-Muslim hatred* in the theoretical framework of other authors) and discrimination against the Muslim community regardless of the religious component (*anti-muslim hate*) (see also Walding & Ewart, 2022). Both expressions are important because they ground the current debate about how negative behaviors toward Islam and Muslims should be measured and whether they should be limited to religious hatred (see Imhoff & Recker, 2012; Lee et al., 2013).

From an integrative perspective, Islamophobia has social consequences that transcend the religious (Kunst et al., 2012; Mansouri & Vergani, 2018). Indeed, religious particularity need not be the most important dimension (see Helbling & Traunmüller, 2018). For political science and social psychology, the essential implications lie in Islam-related misinformation (e.g., Uenal, 2016b), stereotypes or prejudices (see Imhoff & Recker, 2012) and social tribalism (e.g., Chua, 2018). Both misinformation, stereotypes, prejudice and tribalism are positively related to violence, crime and social aggression (see Awan, 2016; Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2019). This evidence reveals that widespread rejection of Muslim culture is an issue that should also be included in public safety discussions (Goodwin, 2020). Crucially, misinformation, stereotypes, prejudice, and tribalism are embedded and can be explained within the field of social identity theory (see Peterson & Stewart, 2020). Social identity theory explains that human beings construct their personal identity through a process of continuous interaction and differentiation between themselves and the surrounding social environment (Haslam et al., 2021; Hogg, 2018). During this process of interaction and maturation, the individual learns to identify threats that jeopardize his own integrity and that of the group to which he belongs (see Mackie et al., 2000). At this point we should add that the development of social identity on a sociological (and not exclusively individual) level is also grounded by origins that determined the contents of prejudices and stereotypes in this context; additionally, these origins are culturally related to the idea of Orientalism exposed in the previous paragraphs (Meer, 2014; Said, 1978, 2014, 2016). Therefore, misinformation, stereotypes and prejudices would be possible manifestations of social conceptions within the ideology of Orientalism and its current evolution (see Moosavi, 2020; Saeed, 2007). In this frame of reference, misinformation, stereotypes, prejudices, and tribalism also represent triggers for feelings of threat and, consequently, can incite hostile behaviors that harm the stability of social coexistence (e.g., Schulz et al., 2018).

Ideological denialism

The COVID-19 crisis has fostered the rise of ideological movements characterized by denial of the existence of the virus, anti-mask behavior, antivaccine beliefs and conspiracy beliefs (see Miller, 2020). This social movement is known as *denialism* (see Escolà-Gascón & Wright, 2021; Freckelton, 2021; Tourish, 2020). If we apply the idea of denialism to the context of Islamophobia we find a form of discrimination towards the Muslim community which consists of acting with indifference and not recognizing racial discrimination directed at Islam and the Muslim community as a social injustice. (see Malik, 2017). In this sense, denialism can be considered a racist movement when the object being discriminated against is religious, cultural and conscientious freedom (see van Dijk, 1992, 2002).

Theories underpinning *Islamophobia denialism* claim that denialism arises in the face of exaggerated "positive self-representation" of an ideological content, ethnicity or belief system (see van Dijk, 2006, 2014). This positive self-representation would be used as a political and social tool to minimize and trivialize injustices towards Muslims (Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Oktar, 2001). At the same time positive self-representation would also shift the sense of guilt and responsibility for these injustices to the victims, that is, to the Muslim community itself (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020). Another factor derived from theory explaining the denialism towards Islamophobia

can be found in the idea of *reverse racism* (see DiAngelo, 2019; Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020). In this case, socially influential media try to highlight and emphasize exceptional unfair situations of how the Muslim community harms (or is also racist against) Western culture (see Zia-Ebrahimi, 2020). This is concerning considering that reverse racism has grown exponentially in social media (see Hawkins & Saleem, 2022). Therefore, obtaining measurement indicators on denialism or, more specifically, on the degree of social awareness of Islamophobia is crucial information to develop public policies to prevent this type of discrimination towards people and their belief system (Akbarzadeh, 2016).

The general population's social awareness of Islamophobia is an unknown measure at present; in other words, we do not know the extent to which the European population recognizes Islamophobia as a real cross-cultural problem. Scales that measures Islamophobia in behavioral terms (e.g., Tripartite Islamophobia Scale or TIS) did not address the question of societal recognition or awareness of Islamophobia (see Kunst et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2013; Uenal et al., 2020). Measuring and knowing the degree of awareness and social recognition of Islamophobia can be an essential sociopolitical indicator to combat the threat responses cited above (e.g., denialism) and improve social acceptance of Muslim culture and religious diversity.

The present study

The main objective of this study is to assess the degree of social recognition of Islamophobia by the general population in four European countries (Spain, France, United Kingdom and Germany). This raises the following question: to what extent is the Western population aware of and recognizes Islamophobia as a problem that needs to be addressed from an inclusive and cross-cultural perspective? The specific objectives of this study are the following: 1) to present the development, validity and reliability of the Degree of Islamophobia Recognition scale (hereafter DIR) as an estimator of the probability that an individual recognizes Islamophobia as a social problem; and 2) to reflect on the use of social awareness as an indicator that can be useful in generating social policies to address these intercultural and interreligious difficulties.

Methods

Sample description

The sample of this research consisted of 1846 volunteers from four different countries: Spain (n = 505; with listwise deletion= 486), France (n = 500; with listwise deletion= 440), United Kingdom (n = 501; with listwise deletion= 473) and Germany (n = 501; with listwise deletion= 447). Sampling was non-probabilistic and developed in collaboration with the international data collection company GESOP. The following sociodemographic variables were recorded: gender, age, educational level and political leaning according to each country. Political tendency is a variable that referred to the ideological position (left-wing and/or right-wing) that each participant occupied within a graded scale that fluctuated between 1 and 7. 1 meant "I am completely left-wing" and 7 meant "I am completely right-wing". Position 4 represented the neutral alternative. The sociodemographic data are represented in Table 1.

Table 1
Sociodemographic information distributed by country.

	Sex		Education level		Age	Political ideology (from 1 to 7)
	M	W	Level	n		
Spain (n = 505)	250	255	Without studies	1	Mean= 45.14 SD= 14.506	Mean= 3.87 SD= 1.708
			Primary school	52		
			High school	139		
			Vocational training	126		
			University studies	187		
France (n = 500)	227	234	Without studies	7	Mean= 46.20 SD= 15.569	Mean= 4.26 SD= 1.489
			Primary school	39		
			High school	150		
			Vocational training	96		
			University studies	169		
United Kingdom (n = 501)	237	236	Without studies	14	Mean= 45.97 SD= 16.080	Mean= 4.06 SD= 1.396
			Primary school	107		
			High school	103		
			Vocational training	63		
			University studies	186		
Germany (n = 501)	235	231	Without studies	47	Mean= 46.64 SD= 15.523	Mean= 3.81 SD= 1.154
			Primary school	36		
			High school	75		
			Vocational training	196		
			University studies	112		

Note: M= man; W= Woman; n = counts; SD= Standard deviation.

Procedures

A structured survey divided into 3 parts was elaborated: the first part was the informed consent, which explained to each volunteer the objectives of this research, the rules and conditions on how to answer the survey (in the respective language of each country). The second part included queries on sociodemographic variables and the third section of the survey presented a set of specific items intended to examine the participants' experience and knowledge of Islamophobia. The original version included 15 items with different response options. These questions were initially conceived and written by Dr. Miriam Diez-Bosch and Dr. Josep Lluís Micó.

Subsequently, Dr. Àlex Escolà-Gascón reviewed the content validity of each of the questions. According to the criteria of maximum representativeness of content validity (see [Kline, 2013](#)), it was decided to use only 8 of the 15 questions asked. These 8 items have contents rationally plausible with the concept of Islamophobia highlighted in the introduction.

Dr. Àlex Escolà-Gascón recoded the answers to these 8 questions with the purpose of homogenizing the measurement of the responses into three graded options: 0 (meaning "no"); 1 (meaning that the participant neither affirms nor denies the contents of the items) and 2 (meaning "yes"). This allowed us to have a numerical value for the decisions or responses made by the participants on each item. The total direct scores ranged from 0 to 16. [Table 2](#) shows the 8 questions chosen.

The objective was to obtain a valid and reliable measure of the degree of recognition, social acceptance or social awareness of Islamophobia. The structured protocol with these 8 questions was named *Degree of Islamophobia Recognition* (DIR). High levels of direct total scores on the DIR protocol indicate high social awareness. In this report we present the statistical properties of this new measurement scale.

It should be noted that the data collection was done with the original version of the survey (and not with these 8 items); this allowed us to collect information on other media-related content that will be analyzed in another report in much more detail. The new report will be a second part of this research. Following the criteria of [Kline \(2013\)](#), it is a priority and essential to initially validate the scores of a statistical scale/indicator in order to be able to employ it consistently and effectively in the next analyses.

With respect to the sampling developed by GESOP, we report that it was conducted with the following conditions: 1) it was a telematic sampling (using social networks and telephone calls); 2) the forms were applied with a support of online forms or orally by telephone; and 3) the sample was collected during the month of June 2021.

In relation to the inclusion/exclusion criteria, we highlight the following: 1) GESOP ensured that the volunteers in the sample were of legal age (>21 years) and that they were in the appropriate physical and psychological conditions to answer the survey (this means that they should not suffer from any terminal illness and should not have any associated severe mental pathology); and 2) those participants who declared themselves to be Muslim were eliminated from the sample to avoid generating noise in the data matrix.

Statistical analysis

The raw data were processed in written form in a cvs-file and Microsoft Excel (version 2013) was used to perform the exploratory statistical analyses. After the exploratory analyses, the data were processed with the statistical program MPLUS and the R programming language was used using RStudio support ([The R Core Team, 2021](#)).

- Regarding the analysis of the mathematical validity of the measurements: 4 Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFAs) were applied taking as variables the 8 items and answers of the survey. There was one EFA for each type of population according to the European country of the participants. Because the coding of the responses was ordinal, polychoric correlation matrices were used between the items (instead of using the conventional covariance matrices intended for variables that are quantitative and continuous). The unweighted least squares method (hereafter ULSMV) was used as the estimation criterion. The number of factors retention was performed following the parallel analysis method (see [Reise et al., 2000](#)). This method is more efficient than the classic Kaiser criterion because it does not represent an arbitrary decision and is based on the intersection of the sedimentation curve between the simulations of the eigenvalues obtained by chance and the eigenvalues estimated from each sample. In order to optimize the factorial pattern of the saturation matrix, the GEOMIN axis rotation method (based on specialized algorithms when the variables are ordinal-categorical) was used. This rotational method is oblique because it is based on the statistical assumption that the dimensions or factors extracted in each EFA are related to each other. This assumption is important for calculating the reliability of the measurements. Following the statistical criteria of [Mulaik \(2018\)](#), ideally the DIR model would be considered statistically valid when each of the items significantly saturated on only 1 factor (>0.250). Items that did not have significant factor loadings would

Table 2

Items of the degree of islamophobia recognition (DIR).

	Items/Questions
1	<i>Is Islamophobia a real problem?</i>
2	<i>Do you think there is animosity towards Muslim people?</i>
3	<i>Do you think Muslims are discriminated on social networks?</i>
4	<i>Have you ever witnessed any act of discrimination against Muslims?</i>
5	<i>Do you remember receiving Whatsapp messages badmouthing Muslim people?</i>
6	<i>Do you know of any entity or body that monitors media content in order to assess whether there is discriminatory treatment of Muslims?</i>
7	<i>Do you know of initiatives or organizations that fight against hate on social networks?</i>
8	<i>Do you personally know Muslim people?</i>

be eliminated from the protocol. Similarly, according to Kline (2013), when an item had 2 or more significant factor loadings it would be assigned to the factor with the highest loading.

- 2) Regarding the analysis of the reliability of the scores: reliability was estimated from the analysis of the internal consistency of the responses of the DIR items. The common use of Cronbach's alpha in this study was not statistically justified because the variables or items had categorical responses. Instead of the conventional alpha, an ordinal

$$\alpha = \frac{n}{n-1} \left[\frac{n(\bar{\lambda})^2 - \bar{\lambda}^2}{n(\bar{\lambda})^2 + (\mu^2)} \right] \quad (1)$$

where $\bar{\lambda}$ is the arithmetic mean of the factor loadings, $\bar{\lambda}^2$ is the square arithmetic mean of the factor loadings, and μ^2 is the arithmetic mean of the single variance.

In addition to the ordinal alpha, internal consistency was also calculated from the residual matrix trace. This calculation is often referred to as Greatest Lower Bound (GLB) and has the following expression:

$$GLB = 1 - \frac{tr(Ce)}{\sigma_x^2} \quad (2)$$

where σ_x^2 is the variance of the questionnaire/protocol; and $tr(Ce)$ is the trace of the error covariance matrix.

The alpha coefficient and the GLB have values between 0 and 1. The reliability of the scores will be good if the result is close to 1. Values equal to or greater than 0.6 are usually acceptable (see Hair et al., 2010). Reporting these equations is essential for future authors to replicate the obtained results.

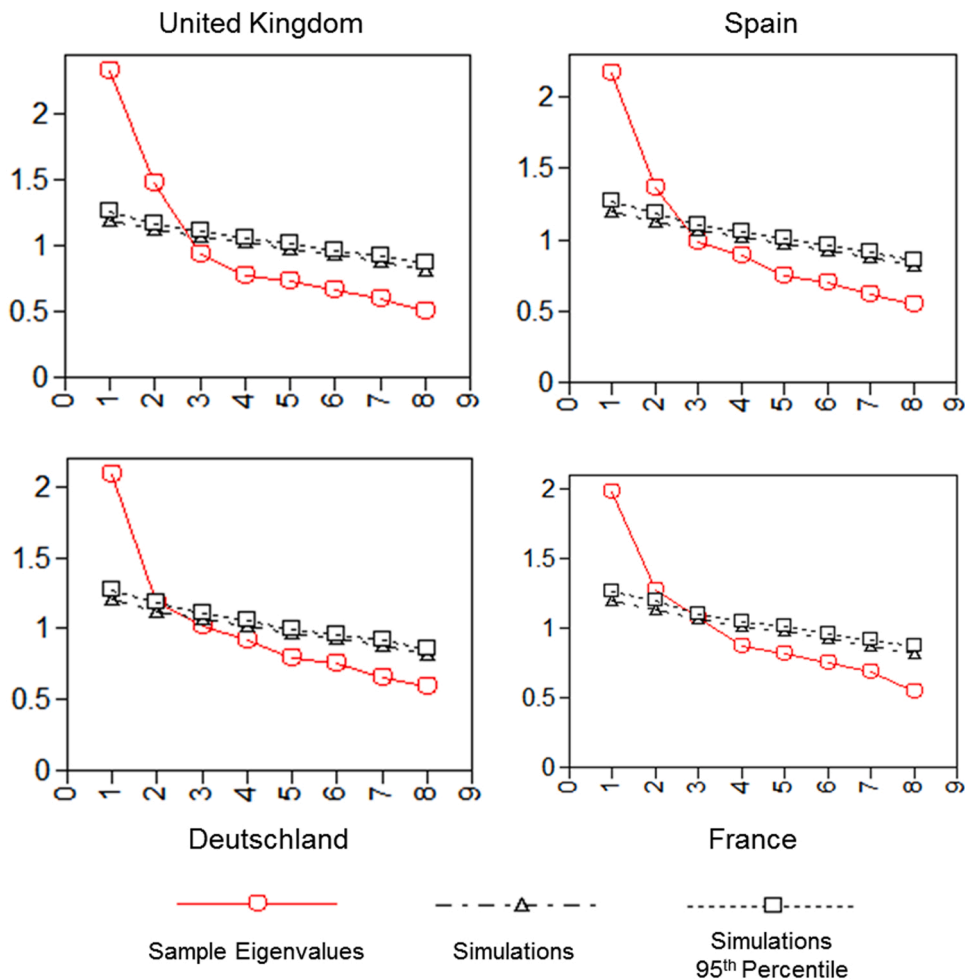


Fig. 1. Scree plots with sample eigenvalues and simulations for each country. The parallel analysis method makes it possible to determine the number of dimensions-factors that a survey should have.

Results

Validity of internal structure: exploratory factor analyses according to each country

The first step in EFAs execution consists of calculating the matrix of polychoric intercorrelations between the variables and deciding on the number of factors to be retained. Fig. 1 shows the sedimentation plots between the expected eigenvalues by chance and the observed eigenvalues. The point of intersection between the two curves in each graph determines how many factors or dimensions we should accept in each of the samples.

Visual analysis based on the intersection between the two curves of each sedimentation plot indicates that the number of factors to be retained is 2. The curves of the France plot could justify the inclusion of a third factor. However, in this case the most conservative decision should be to retain 2 factors only. According to this criterion, 4 EFAs were run (one for each country). Recall that the objective of the EFA technique is to analyze the internal or dimensional structure of the DIR in each of the samples divided by country. This is important, because for the DIR to be valid in its measurements, the dimensional pattern must be the same in all samples. For the factorial pattern to be the same in the samples, we must look at the loadings or saturations. This information is specified in Table 3.

The EFAs in Table 3 allow making two types of inferences. First, the degree of social awareness of Islamophobia should be evaluated at two levels; on the one hand, in conceptual terms, which explore what each individual thinks about Muslim social discrimination; on the other hand, also at a level that connects the subject's conception of Muslim discrimination with the facts in which Islamophobia is observed. Thus, according to the rational content of the items, the first factor provides information about each individual's conception of Islamophobia. On the other hand, the second factor deals with the degree to which the subject connects or is able to identify in his/her environment acts that harm Muslim people, as well as social initiatives that support the rights and freedom of expression of those who practice Islam. These two dimensions are positively related to each other (with a linear correlation between 0.3 and 0.4). This means that the degree of social awareness can be measured with an overall or total score. This total score would be the sum of the values of each response reported by the participants. Secondly, in the four versions of the DIR applied to four different population and cultural groups, between 51.2% and 60.3% of the variance attributed to the degree of social awareness of Islamophobia is explained or predicted. It should be taken into account that the complementary of the explained variance (1-Var. %) will indicate the amount of information that remains to be explained and that is attributable to other socio-cultural variables that are not accessible from this research. These hypothetical contents will be addressed in the discussion.

Reliability and validity of statistical inferences

Another question related to validity is whether the factor loadings and the estimated parameters of the EFAs allow us to reproduce

Table 3

Exploratory factor analysis (the matrix-pattern of saturations for each country is presented). Rotation applied in all EFAs = GEOMIN.

	United Kingdom (n = 473) (Total var. %= 60.3)		Spain (n = 486) (Total var. %= 55.56)		
	Vulnerability	Connection	Vulnerability	Connection	
1	0.770 *	–	1	0.750 *	–
2	0.770 *	–	2	0.737 *	–
3	0.399 *	–	3	0.366 *	–
4	0.379 *	0.636 *	4	0.663 *	–
5	–	0.751 *	5	–	0.618 *
6	–	0.739 *	6	–	0.647 *
7	–	0.644 *	7	–	0.641 *
8	–	0.269 *	8	–	0.359 *
Var. %	39.50	20.8	Var. %	36.45	19.11

	Germany (n = 447) (Total var. %= 51.2)		France (n = 440) (Total var. %= 52.3)		
	Vulnerability	Connection	Vulnerability	Connection	
1	0.453 *	–	1	0.209 *	–
2	0.805 *	–	2	0.203 *	–
3	–	0.530 *	3	0.276 *	–
4	–	0.612 *	4	≈ 0.99 *	–
5	–	0.690 *	5	–	0.986 *
6	–	0.461 *	6	–	0.503 *
7	–	0.613 *	7	–	0.575 *
8	–	0.457 *	8	0.375 *	–
Var. %	34.9	16.3	Var. %	34.7	17.6

Note: *p < 0.05.

the observed polychoric correlation matrices. In other words, it is a matter of analyzing whether or not the statistical inferences we have analyzed fit the empirical data obtained. For this task, the Chi-Square, normed Chi-square, CFI (Comparative Fit Index; threshold: ≥ 0.9), TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index; threshold: ≥ 0.9), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; threshold: ≤ 0.08) and RMSR (Root Mean Squared Residual; threshold: ≤ 0.1) fit indices were used. This information is presented in Table 4. Also included in this table are the ordinal alpha and GLB reliability indices.

Table 4 shows satisfactory fit indices in all population groups. This means that the statistical inferences tend to accurately reproduce the polychoric correlation matrices, which supports the validity of the DIR. These results should be replicated with structural equation models with new samples and data. Nevertheless, these results provide a basis for the mathematical validity of the DIR.

Regarding reliability, the results exceed the threshold of 0.6 for all indices. In fact, most of them exceed 0.7, which means that the reliability of the scores is good. These indicators allow us to accept the validity and reliability of the DIR as a new measurement scale to examine the degree of social awareness of Islamophobia.

Finally, we offer the population scales based on percentiles and derived typical scores. These are exploratory scales that can be extended to include new social groups and countries. This information is presented in Table 5.

The purpose of the standardized scores in Table 5 is to facilitate the interpretation of the measurements and to know what position a subject or a social group occupies within a typified distribution according to each of the countries. The interpretation criteria are explained in the discussion.

Discussion

Using the results obtained, in the discussion we will assess the socio-cultural implications of the DIR items, justify the standardization of the DIR scores to facilitate their interpretation and analyze how to use social awareness of Islamophobia as a useful variable to generate public policies to prevent racism and social violence against immigration, including the promotion of religious freedom rights. We will also highlight several recommendations aimed at optimizing the DIR and improving its statistical goodness-of-fit indicators.

How to interpret social awareness of Islamophobia: theory and practice

Theory

Social consciousness about any injustice arises from people's concept of that injustice. Therefore, interpreting the social consciousness of Islamophobia involves reflecting on what Islamophobia means or what meanings are attributed to it according to the predominant culture of each country.

In relation to the theory of social identity, it is scientifically proven that belonging to a particular social group (whether due to an ideological, family or religious issue) causes biases in the perception we have of individuals who belong to other social groups with different characteristics (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021; Tatum, 1997). In parallel, we highlight that in this research Islamophobia was assessed in people who did not practice Islam and also belonged to a cultural group different from the Muslim community. These details are important, because the meaning of Islamophobia would be distorted if it were assessed with members of Muslim communities. This is related to the following question: Is it possible that Muslims can develop Islamophobia toward other Muslim members? (see Ramsay & Marsden, 2015). It is important to note that exaggerated positive self-representation and reverse racism proposed from the theory of *racial negationism* (see van Dijk, 1992, 2002, 2006) could also be involved and explain how discrimination occurs between different groups within the same culture and religion (Mishali-Ram & Fox, 2021). The analysis and response to the above question was not directly addressed in the development of the DIR because the scale is primarily focused on Orientalism, but the question is something to be considered in future research as a complement to social identity theory.

The theoretical model that characterized Islamophobia in the different scales previously published varies according to each type of questionnaire. In the scale developed by Kunst et al. (2013) they initially extracted 3 dimensions: 1) general fear, 2) fear of Islamization and 3) Islamophobia in media. The conception of Islamophobia in this scale was based on the idea of social anxiety or fear towards Muslim culture and religion (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008). This is crucial, as understanding Islamophobia as a social anxiety (and not as a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims) implies measuring it as a person's emotion, rather than measuring it as an attitudinal predisposition. This theoretical model contrasts with the model of Uenal et al. (2020) who conceived Islamophobia as a hostile, hateful attitude based on prejudice or stereotypes towards the Muslim community and Islam. These authors extracted three

Table 4

Goodness-of-fit and reliability indices of total scores.

Population groups	χ^2 (p-values)	χ^2/DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSR	α	GLB
United Kingdom	18.708 (0.132)	1.439	0.988	0.974	0.03	0.041	0.77	0.7
Spain	32.032 (0.002)	2.464	0.952	0.9	0.055	0.054	0.74	0.72
Germany	39.027 *	3.002	0.905	0.8	0.067	0.065	0.74	0.71
France	39.393 *	3.03	0.9	0.8	0.068	0.074	0.73	0.7

Note: * $p < 0.001$; CFI= Comparative Fit Index; TLI= Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA= Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; RMSR= Root Mean Squared Residual; GLB= Greatest Lower Bound. The alpha coefficient was transformed for application to ordinal variables.

Table 5

T Scores and percentiles of DIR. (Scores distributed according to each country).

Pc	United Kingdom		Spain		Germany		France		T
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	
99	16	15-16	16	15-16	16	16	16	14-16	73
98	-	14	-	14	-	14-15	-	-	71
97	14-15	12-13	15	13	-	-	14-15	13	69
96	-	-	14	12	15	13	-	12	68
95	-	-	13	-	14	-	-	-	66
90	12-13	10-11	12	11	12-13	12	12-13	11	63
85	11	-	11	10	11	10-11	11	10	60
80	10	9	10	-	-	-	10	9	58
75	-	-	-	9	10	-	-	-	57
70	9	8	-	-	9	9	8-9	8	56
65	8	-	9	8	-	8	-	-	54
60	-	7	8	-	8	-	-	-	53
55	-	-	-	7	-	-	7	7	51
50	7	-	7	6	-	7	-	-	50
45	-	6	6	-	7	-	6	6	49
40	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	47
35	-	5	-	-	6	6	-	-	46
30	5	-	5	5	-	-	5	5	44
25	-	-	4	-	5	-	-	-	43
20	4	4	-	4	-	5	-	4	42
15	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	40
10	3	3	3	3	4	4	-	-	37
5	2	2	2	1-2	3	3	3	3	34
4	1	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	32
3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1-2	31
2	-	1	1	-	1	2	-	-	29
1	0	0	0	0	0	0-1	0-1	0	27
N	231	230	241	245	223	224	219	220	N
Mean	7.36	6.78	7.31	6.86	7.78	7.53	7.29	6.97	Mean
SD	3.510	2.899	3.537	3.142	3.392	2.911	3.14	2.80	SD

Note: Pc= Percentiles; T = T Scores; N = sample; M= Means; SD= Standard Deviations.

dimensions of Islamophobia: 1) anti-Muslim prejudice, 2) anti-Islam sentiment and 3) conspiracy beliefs. *Conspiracy beliefs* are a new proposal by Uenal et al. (2020) that emerges from the false stereotypes and paranoias promoted by orientalism; in other words, they are the beliefs that irrationally accept that Muslims have hostile intentions towards the Western world. These two scales make it possible to define Islamophobia from two perspectives: one centered on attitudes and the other based on emotions.

The novelty of the DIR is the measurement of Islamophobia from a cognitive (rather than attitudinal or emotional) perspective. In this case, we use the term *cognitive* to refer to the degree of an individual's awareness of the problem of Islamophobia in the accidental world. More specifically, DIR focuses on social cognition (i.e., social awareness) concerning the facts and attitudes that unfairly reject Muslims and Islam. This observation is essential in this study because it means that social cognition is projected toward Islamophobia understood as a hostile or hateful attitude and not as an emotion. This determines what kind of social consciousness we are measuring regarding Islamophobia, and how to approach the possible interpretation of the theoretical structure of the DIR.

On one hand, the extracted dimension *vulnerability* should be interpreted theoretically as the degree to which a person is aware of the discriminations (i.e., rejectionist facts and attitudes) that Muslims receive and how this makes them more likely to suffer from Islamophobia. More concretely, what this dimension represents is the social cognition by which Western people have a mental representation of the concept of Islamophobia (and therefore can be aware of it), and about what are the associated dangers. Thus, we are faced with an abstract dimension that examines the mental concept that each person has of Islamophobia.

On the other hand, the *connection* dimension has a theoretical explanation that is more focused on practice. This term refers to the degree to which the individual recognizes from his or her experience the facts that manifest discrimination, hatred, offense or rejection of Muslims and Islam. This dimension does not examine the concept and mental representation of Islamophobia but does examine the degree to which a person recognizes in practice unjust Islamophobic facts. In this dimension consciousness is also involved, but the level of cognition is different from the previous one in that it is required to connect the abstract representation of what Islamophobia is with the direct experience of how it is applied in today's society.

The union and linear combination of the scores of these two dimensions would provide an overall measure of the degree of awareness or social cognition that the population has of Islamophobia based on the negative attitude towards Muslims and their religion.

Practice

At the cross-cultural level (among the countries of Europe), the meaning of Islamophobia also has some important nuances derived from the EFAs. In the factorial patterns, some differences in item saturations and between each country are observed that should be taken into account. Although the validity (at this exploratory stage) is acceptable in all samples, items 3 and 4 show significant factor

loadings on the connection factor rather than vulnerability. On a cultural level, this means that participants from the countries of Germany and France interpret the contents of these items as something practical that they observe and identify in reality. The contents of these items share the concept of "discrimination". This fact is suggestive, as the term "discrimination" may have different semantics due to cultural differences between the other two countries. At a hypothetical level, we can infer that the semantics of the term "discrimination" will be practical and applied for France and Germany; on the other hand, for the UK and Spain it is a less identifiable idea in the cultural environment of these countries. Something similar happens with item 8; in the German sample, this item saturates significantly in "vulnerability" instead of "connection". This can have two possible interpretations: first, it is possible that the German participants have understood item 8 as their concept of Muslim people and not of Islamic culture. Then, instead of understanding this question in practical terms, they have elaborated a theoretical understanding. This form of interpretation could be due to a matter of cultural differences between each of the countries and would not necessarily impair the metric quality of the DIR. Secondly, another possible interpretation is that this item has semantic problems and tends to generate biased responses when applied to the German population. In this scenario, the differences would have to be explained by reasons attributable to the item and not to cultural differences.

In view of these observations, the next analyses to extend the validity of this scale should be based on structural equation modeling and should include invariance analysis to examine whether the differences in item saturations are due to instrument-related biases or whether they correspond to purely cultural biases. In these analyses, we recommend mathematically modeling the saturation parameters in such a way that two confirmatory factor models are tested: one confirmatory factor model would have specified for items 3, 4 and 8 effects/parameters of both the vulnerability and connection dimensions; and the other model would maintain the unidimensionality of these items as is the case with the UK EFA (items 3 and 4 would belong to the vulnerability factor and item 8 would belong to the connection factor). The modeling would allow to check which model has better levels of fit.

How to use and interpret population scores in cross-cultural research

Table 5 provides a standardization in percentiles and T-scores of the DIR results. The groups are divided according to each country and are differentiated by the sex variable. In the side columns are the T-scores and percentiles that correspond to each direct score. The percentiles are interpreted as an ordinal position measure that informs about the weight of social awareness of Islamophobia. T-scores are useful because they allow us to discriminate which levels of social awareness of Islamophobia are significant and which are not. This is done because the derived T scores have a normal distribution with mean 50 and SD= 10. This means that direct DIR scores having a value of 60 or more will present significant levels of social awareness and will report that the social group or participant recognizes Islamophobia and considers it to be unjust. Similarly, direct scores having a derived T-score of 40 or less will be significant and indicate an absence of social awareness of Islamophobia. Although these thresholds will need to be examined in the future to estimate their sensitivity and specificity, they are cut-off points that policymakers and researchers can use to identify in which communities, social groups or countries there is social awareness of Islamophobia (typical derived scores greater than 60 points) and in which there is not (typical derived scores less than 40 points). Along these lines, public policies aimed at combating Islamophobia can take into account in which communities it is necessary to intervene and act.

Table 5 also serves a practical purpose: although the transformation of each direct DIR score could be calculated manually, Table 5 was constructed to spare the researcher the mathematical burden of the transformation-derivation equations of the direct DIR scores.

Limitations and conclusions

Limitations

The limitations of this research were mentioned previously but are highlighted again at this point as a practical summary: on the one hand, the validation of the DIR was exploratory. This is not a negative because exploration is the first phase that should be performed with any survey metric validation. However, it is a limitation because more indicators of validity and statistical reliability would be missing; examples are structural equation models and sensitivity-specificity tests. On the other hand, as a complement, we emphasize that the coding of the responses (in only three alternatives) could also be a factor that could impair the statistical variability of the responses (for this reason more robust statistical procedures were used). In future research we recommend expanding the number of alternatives by following the 5-choice Likert-type scaling model. These codings better fit the preconditions of structural equation models and will allow the use of other parameter estimation methods, such as maximum likelihood, which is more beneficial because it also allows obtaining a larger number of estimators of the model's goodness-of-fit.

Conclusions

The conclusions we have found from the results of this research are related to the DIR protocol. The 8-item Degree of Islamophobia Recognition questionnaire is a valid and reliable protocol for making cross-cultural inferences about levels of social awareness of Islamophobia. Practical recommendations for interpretation are provided from the T-scores and percentiles applied for each country: scores above 60 points will indicate that there is a significant level of social awareness of Islamophobia; scores below 40 will inform results to identify social groups or individuals who do not have a significant social awareness of Islamophobia. Policymakers and official organizations combating Islamophobia can use the DIR and thresholds of these derived T-scores to optimize their campaigns and interventions against religious racism and social discrimination towards the Muslim community.

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