

## Takfir Through Digital Space: Analysis of Religious Discourse Content via Telegram Groups

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### Abstract

The sociological work of this article consists of deconstructing how groups bearing takfiri discourse employ the Telegram application as a virtual space that reshapes patterns of expression and influence. Through content analysis of 73 selected posts from Telegram channels reflecting the dynamics of takfiri discourse in closed and semi-closed digital environments, the study's results showed that Telegram provides a fertile environment for reproducing takfiri discourse due to its high privacy, the possibility of creating broadcast-only groups, and weak oversight that allows discriminatory discourse to spread.

Takfiri groups' exploitation of Telegram's features in developing effective recruitment methods based on a combination of inciteful discourse and digital persuasion mechanisms has enabled them to rearrange their presence, reproduce discursive authority, and build new networks of loyalty within this application. Thus, Telegram has transformed into a

strategic application for reproducing takfiri discourse through its privacy,

ease of forming closed groups, and increased opportunities for influence and incitement, which reinforces the presence of takfiri groups and deepens their ideologies in a virtual digital space that transcends borders.

**Keywords:** Digital space, Telegram application, Takfiri discourse

### 1. Research Problem

Traditional takfiri discourse is characterized by specific patterns in construction, methods, and means, as it was associated with physical spaces and direct influence mechanisms that often undergo degrees of control and oversight. With its transition to social media platforms, profound transformations occurred in the conditions of its production and circulation, especially with the emergence of digital platforms that allow opening private and closed groups

such as Telegram. The latter, with its helpful characteristics, contributed to reshaping the communicative structure of takfiri discourse and its mechanisms of influence, reformulated recruitment and persuasion methods, and made the discourse more secretive and intensive in its interaction within virtual spaces that transcend borders while reproducing its symbolic presence and expanding its communicative networks.

The problem here lies in how fundamentalist Islamic sects and movements employ the Telegram application in producing takfiri discourse characterized by freedom of content circulation and the extent of this freedom's impact on expanding the discourse's scope and changing its nature in terms of form and content. Here we pose the following question: How have fundamentalist Islamic sects and movements employed the Telegram application to produce takfiri discourse?

## **2. Study Hypothesis**

In light of the wave of transformations witnessed by the contemporary world, the need arises to understand the factors influencing the formation of consciousness and different visions within societies. Hypotheses come as a methodological entry point that helps explore and analyze these factors scientifically and systematically. The study hypothesis was as follows:

Telegram contributes to the emergence of a wave of religious revival manifestations; however, this presence is manifested in an Islamic context suffering from fragmentation and weakness. Groups bearing takfiri

discourse exploited this context, relying on the rapid publication speed provided by the platform and ease of access to it, alongside effective employment of modern communication tools, which enabled these groups to consolidate their presence and produce widely influential and widespread takfiri discourse.

## **3. Operationalization of Concepts**

### **3.1. Digital Space**

We mean operationally a virtual electronic environment comprising a set of websites and platforms that enable individuals to communicate and interact with each other. In this space, users spend a long time exchanging ideas and knowledge, introducing themselves and their opinions, and participating in dialogue and discussion freely and independently, with the possibility of using all participation and dissemination tools around multiple topics and objectives, including religious content. This space emerges as an open space away from traditional censorship.

### **3.2. Telegram Groups**

These are virtual groups on the Telegram application used as alternative and safe media spaces for passing takfiri discourse. These groups practice religious discourse, carrying takfiri theses and ideas reflecting the methodology of takfiri groups to mobilize their followers religiously and politically through this application.

### **3.3. Takfiri Discourse**

Takfir is accusing others of disbelief or religious contempt, whether unjustly or truly, and it is the opposite of faith. Islamic groups used it in the past and

present as a weapon to confront unjust authorities and also against other individuals and societies. (Hamdaoui, Jamil, 2019.)

Takfiri discourse is operationally defined in this study as the totality of religious discourses directed by scholars, thinkers, and followers within various Islamic groups or movements via the Telegram application, which adopt the idea of excommunicating others based on their ideologies and positions away from official Islam and state constraints, and excommunicating anyone who opposes them.

#### **4. Technical and Methodological Tools of the Study**

##### **4.1. Survey Method**

The current study is analytical research aimed at evaluating and analyzing the characteristics of certain groups or phenomena to obtain adequate and accurate information about them. Method is defined as the path followed by research (Nafusi, 2016.) to reveal truth in sciences through general rules that guide the mind's course toward a specific result. (Mekki, 2013.) Since the current study aims to understand the mechanisms of takfiri discourse on the Telegram application, the survey method was chosen for its suitability for such studies, as it is a fundamental method in studying social phenomena and in media and communication research, especially content analysis, where it focuses on studying the phenomenon in its natural conditions to discover reality as it exists. (Ibn Mursali, 2003)

Researcher Thawqan Obaidat defined the survey method as "a method that collects data and information about the studied phenomenon to understand its current situation and aspects of its strengths and weaknesses" (Ibid, p. 286)

##### **4.2. Content Analysis Tool**

This is an indirect research technique used to study written texts, audio recordings, and filmed movies regardless of their production time. It relies on analyzing materials issued by individuals or groups and is used in sciences concerned with individual and societal behavior (Ibid, p. 249). This technique is characterized by its ability to analyze current content as well as materials produced in the past (Angers, 2004). In line with the study's nature, this technique was relied upon through organizing units and designing analysis categories.

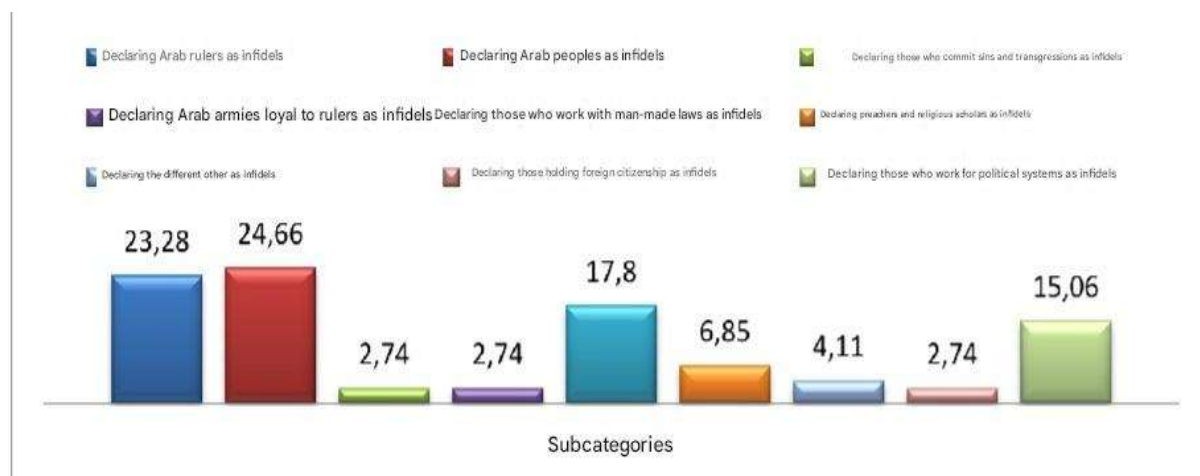
##### **4.3. Study Sample**

The study sample was chosen in a purposive selective manner due to the nature of the vast virtual research community, which is community, which is not numerically limited because of the appearance and disappearance of groups and posts. Religious groups carrying the greatest amount of meaning and significance were relied upon to achieve the study's objectives.

For this purpose, a purposive selective sample consisting of 73 posts via the Telegram application was chosen during the period from May to August 2025

## 5. Analytical Study of Takfiri Discourse Contents via Telegram

### Graphical Representation of Takfir Categories



It is observed from the above figure that the starting point of takfir through the study sample groups is divided into 9 types. At the top of the ranking comes excommunication of Arab peoples at 24.66%, followed by a very close percentage of excommunication of Arab rulers at 23.28%, then excommunication of those working with man-made laws and resorting to courts at 17.80%, followed by 15.06% for excommunication of those working with political systems, then excommunication of preachers, religious scholars, and imams at 6.85%, followed by excommunication of the different others at 4.11%. Sharing the last rank are excommunication of those committing sins and transgressions, excommunication of Arab armies, and excommunication of foreign nationality holders and those residing among foreigners at 2.74% for each category. Below we will detail each category separately.

#### 5.1. Category of Excommunicating Arab Peoples and Arab Rulers

From the above figure, it appears that the percentage of excommunicating Arab peoples and the percentage of excommunicating Arab rulers came very close, which reflects the correlational relationship between them, as excommunication of Arab rulers through these virtual groups has always been associated with excommunicating those they rule (Arab peoples). Some groups take Telegram as a virtual space to circulate takfiri ideas about Islamic peoples and their rulers, and they do not consider these peoples merely apostates from Islam but rather see the origin in takfir—that is, working to spread the issue of establishing disbelief in Islamic societies and spreading extremist convictions about it, excommunicating those who do not excommunicate these peoples in general. (Al-Khalifi, 2013)

Among the widespread nullifiers of Islam on which excommunication is

based, we find going to sorcerers, worshipping graves, supplicating to other than Allah, and not excommunicating polytheists. For example, in a post on one of the study sample groups, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's statement was mentioned as clarification of truth and persuasion of group users "that Arab peoples are pagan and cannot be considered people of Islam on the pretext of their displaying worship rituals" (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, 1996). The Bedouins of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's time likewise displayed worship rituals but were ignorant of monotheism, Islam, and disbelief in idols, like our people today. The post also narrates the story of a Bedouin who came to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and confessed upon merely hearing the Sheikh's call that he and his people in general are disbelievers, and those he calls Muslims are also disbelievers: "I testify that we are disbelievers"—meaning he and all the Bedouins—"and I testify that the scholar who calls us people of Islam is a disbeliever." According to the actors running these groups on Telegram, all countries are countries of disbelief without exception, and there is no country of Islam, and our peoples are disbelievers who have not entered Islam before and know nothing of it except its name (Hamdaoui, 2019).

For example, one of the actors mentions in one of the posts, "Whoever posts, 'Whoever does not excommunicate the disbeliever is a disbeliever.' Arab peoples are excommunicated, and those who do not excommunicate Arab peoples are excommunicated, with these excommunications connected to declarations witnessing followers that they excommunicate all rulers and Arab peoples and are innocent of them.

Another post included a visual release displaying Arab national flags: Algeria's flag, Palestine, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Arabia, and Morocco, then showing clips of concerts held in Saudi Arabia, Arabia, describing them as if they were if they were held in Las Vegas or Tel Aviv, with clips from the funeral of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, Akleh, describing her as the perished Christian.

According to these posts' contents, a country where polytheism appears becomes a country of disbelief, and its people's wealth is plundered and their blood made permissible. The contents of these discourses confirmed that most common people have not achieved the origin of religion, and it is known about Sunnis that whoever does not bring the origin of religion is not a Muslim.

This type of discourse through this application is an extension of the Khawarij ideology historically, as their first steps were excommunicating Muslims starting from the ruler to the ruled. They believe in this matter that every rule and arbitration is disbelief merely by a disbeliever issuing judgment or the existence of judgment by other than what Allah revealed, so their excommunication was political, not religious (Hamdaoui, 2019).

Through the contents of these posts, actors via Telegram relied on the principle of excommunicating rulers on the pretext that they do not rule by what Allah revealed but rather rule by their own law and by Western infidel atheist systems and foundations. This application gave actors greater freedom and space to excommunicate rulers, and this matter was not as difficult as it is in the real world, as excommunication moved from above chairs and pulpits secretly and with a limited number to

broader popular virtual pulpits spreading faster.

A video of 03:42 minutes duration stated that praising tyrants is disbelief in Allah the Most High. It initially displays pictures of Arab rulers and their representatives at a summit gathering them (Saudi Arabia's ruler, Jordan, Tunisia, and Algeria's former Prime Minister Ayman ben Abderrahmane), then immediately clips of a group of citizens' opinions from various Arab countries praising their presidents. After that, with a loud and strong voice comes a clip of strong sound effects of breaking something with saying the noAlgeria'sthe saying ofble verse: "Andthe saying ofverse, "And those who disbelieve fight in the cause of Taghut" (Quran 4:76), then a clip from a chant.

All verses talking about Taghut were employed, in which people of interpretation differed in its meaning. Some said it is Satan, others said it is the sorcerer and fortune-teller, and some defined Taghut as everyone with tyranny against Allah who is worshipped instead of Him, whether human, devil, idol, statue, or whatever being. (Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, 1996)

These verses and other religious texts were interpreted according to the actors and those running these groups on Telegram as an extension of their takfiri thinking that interprets some Quranic verses ideologically verse, "Andideologically,serving their political purposes and immediate interests. This interpretation disregarded the historical dimension of religious text and began to align with these groups' direction and their seeking evidence from the Quran and Sunnah supporting their imam's and doctrine's opinion. This religious discourse contradicts the priority of the Quranic discourse in achieving security

as a major objective; it is a transgression against the spirit of the text. (ZEKRAOUI, 2025)

Religious text ideologically,textsand these issues become discursive practice textspracticessubject to interpretation mechanisms based on deconstruction thinking, which agrees with Muhammad Arkoun's opinion on the necessity of viewing text as an accumulated and successive set of ages and time periods (Angers, 2004).

## **5.2. Category of Excommunicating Those Working with Man-Made Laws and Political Systems**

Besides excommunicating Arab rulers, everyone working with man-made laws and political systems is also excommunicated. Some posts within the study sample groups included excommunicating all man-made laws and political systems in force in countries claiming to be Islamic practicesIslamic,according to them. Arbitration (resorting to man-made courts) is disbelief,Islamic,disbelief, like arbitration ofof Bedouin customs and traditions, meaning customary councils. The judiciary,judiciary, with its various institutions in Arab countries,countries, rules by other than Allah's law; therefore, we must disavow it and its legislations and laws by believing in their invalidity and denying them for contradicting Islamic Sharia rulings (Al-Khalifi, 2013).

A post stated that the tyrannical institution (judiciary) consists of three pillars, and whoever falls under them is excommunicated:

- **Legislative authority:** includes the government presidency, legislators in parliament, the constitutionthe constitution writing committee, and those who elected them

- **Judicial authority:** includes the Ministry of Justice and all who enter its courts, courts, from judges, lawyers, and litigants
- **Executive authority:** includes the Ministry of Interior, army, and police

Appointing a lawyer is of the same type as arbitration to tyrants, as it expresses the will to arbitrate to the tyrant, which is polytheism with Allah Almighty, disbelief, and strife, and strife is greater than killing. Whoever arbitrated his opponent to other than Allah and His Messenger has ruled to Taghut. The judicial authority is disbelief, and all rulings of the Ministry of Justice are disbelief, and all who enter its courts from judges, lawyers, and litigants (Hamdaoui, 2019).

The actors presented a video clip carrying a group of clips from inside courts of 04:54 minutes duration, followed by audio commentary on them and also written on the video: that arbitration to Taghut is faith in Taghut because arbitration = worship = disbelief based on Allah's saying, "They saying, "They wish to refer legislation to Taghut, while they were commanded to reject it" (Quran 4:60).

Among forms of excommunication also is excommunicating those working in political systems, those working in elected councils, parliament, international organizations, and legislative councils, as the task of these councils, councils, according to many posts, posts, is legislating for people and enacting laws, thereby competing with Allah Almighty in the attribute of legislation. Those working in them are disbelievers, and they are men chosen by peoples to enact laws for them, which in reality are councils of lords, based on Allah's saying, "They saying, "They have

taken their scholars and monks as lords besides Allah" (Quran 9:31), and the noble verse: "Or verse, "Or have they partners who have ordained for them a religion to which Allah has not consented?" (Quran 42:21).

It also came to pass verse, "Or to pass that United Nations charters are disbelief because they are a commitment to disbelief and a covenant upon it, including obligating its members to arbitrate to the International Court of Justice. Discourses called for disbelief in Arab League laws and human rights organizations for one's Islam to be valid.

### **5.3. Category of Excommunicating Preachers, Religious Scholars, and Imams**

The idea of excommunicating preachers and imams raises the issue of the ruling on mosques in the land of disbelief and the ruling on praying in them through these spaces. According to the actors in these groups on the Telegram application, mosques have become temples for the Sultan (Taghut) to spread disbelief and polytheism and call various infidel political systems like democracy and others (Hamdaoui, 2019).

These mosques are under the control of endowments in each country, and those supervising endowments are people who ensure calling to Taghut and his misleading methodology after his endorsement of them. These mosques are called "mosques of harm" in the study sample posts, characteristics mentioned in one post is that they are based on Allah's saying, "And [there are] those [hypocrites] who took for themselves a mosque for causing harm and disbelief and division among the believers" (Quran 9:107-108).

A post stated excommunicating Ibn Taymiyyah, known as Sheikh al-Islam, on the pretext that he says in his book *Dar' Ta'arudh al-'Aql wa al-Naql* that "Allah is upon the Throne and the angels carrying the Throne feel the weight of the Compeller." This, according to the actors, is explicit disbelief from Ibn Taymiyyah, and there is no disbelief after this disbelief. In another post, Ibn Taymiyyah was excommunicated on the pretext that scholars of his era in the four schools of thought issued fatwas of his disbelief.

The actors via Telegram try to break the symbolic image of some scholars and preachers in their followers' minds by attempting to overturn and distort some ideas, sayings, and fatwas to excommunicate their owners. The preacher, imam, or Muslim scholar has his symbolism, weight, and consideration among Muslims (Hamdaoui, 2019).

#### **5.4. Category of Excommunicating the Different Other**

Excommunicating the different other is a weapon wielded by anyone who disagrees with the other. Through the posts and with the superiority of refutation jurisprudence in these spaces, we find each sect excommunicating the other, and its argument is that it is the saved sect and others are in Hellfire: "We are right," "We, and others are in disbelief, misguidance, and loss." "Whoever was not with us and did not adhere to our ideas and had a reference other than our reference is a disbeliever (Hamdaoui, 2019).

The number of Islamic sects' sects' and movements' groups via Telegram cannot be counted or enumerated. There are sects across these spaces calling for reform, change, and enlightenment; enlightenment; others are

moderate and centrist sects and movements, and there are rhetorical extremist sects that were distinguished by their reliance on the weapon of excommunication.

Through the posts, there was excommunication of Sufism, excommunication of the Brotherhood, excommunication of Madkhalism, Madkhalism, and likening them to Jews. As came in a post that Jews, Sufis, Madkhalists, Shiites, and Christians are brothers in nationalist creed—no difference between them because they are children of one nation, all disbelievers.

Excommunication of Ash'aris came in one of the posts on the pretext that they are people of whims and innovations, and their testimony is not accepted in Islam. They are people of theology, and their inner being is disbelief and misguidance. They also took from the Mu'tazilites, Mu'tazilites, prioritizing reason over revelation, revelation, and took from Sufism and Rawafid polytheism in divinity, worshipping graves, and supplicating the dead (Hamdaoui, 2019).

Excommunication via this virtual application became the fastest means to eliminate the other, the other opinion, the other's reference, his intellectual ideology, and even to eliminate him and remove him from his path to rule and power. It was a political weapon in certain periods to subjugate people and control them, and the main goal of the excommunication idea was reaching power.

#### **5.5. Category of Excommunicating Those Committing Sins and Transgressions**

The post stated that whoever follows desire or takes bribes is considered among people of sins and major sins and



has committed minor disbelief. The ruling on one who abandons prayer and clarification of aspects of his disbelief from the Quran, Sunnah, and consensus—the post carried a group of fatwas about one who abandons prayer without denying it and it and abandons obligations without ignorance or excuse is a disbeliever (Hamdaoui, 2019).

This type of post via this application raises a group of rulings specific to the Khawarij methodology with its various sects that sinners are eternalized in Hellfire with all other disbelievers, even if these sects differed in the reason for the ruling of disbelief on those committing sins and transgressions.

#### **5.6. Category of Excommunicating Arab Armies**

Belonging to apostate systems and working for the tyrannical government, government, as came in the study sample groups' contents, contents, is disbelief. Joining armies of disbelief is also disbelief. Excommunicating Arab armies results from excommunicating Arab rulers and excommunicating all security apparatuses affiliated with them (Al-Khalifi, 2013).

A post came excommunicating all who fell under the tyrannical institution of authorities and excommunicating all workers in executive authority institutions, which includes the Ministry of Interior with all its agencies: army, police, and gendarmerie. They were judged with disbelief by the text of the Quranic verse: "And those who disbelieve fight in the cause of Taghut" (Quran 4:76).

Another post in its discussion of the issue of excommunicating Arab armies cited Sayyid Qutb's saying: These Arab armies that you see are not for defending Islam and Muslims but rather to kill you and will not fire a single shot at the Jews.

#### **5.7. Category of Excommunicating Foreign Nationality Holders and Residents Among Foreigners**

From the starting point of excommunication, a group of contents via the Telegram application raised the ruling on residing in an infidel country and a Muslim holding this country's nationality—that whoever resides among disbelievers is a disbeliever, and whoever seeks and searches for nationality in an infidel country, that is the very essence of allegiance to the disbeliever, based on Sheikh al-Albani's fatwa .

Excommunication of those residing among foreigners came based on the consequences of this residence, especially matters of creed like loyalty and disavowal and what this residence carries of danger to creed, morals, and a Muslim's religion and behavior. Whoever lives in a certain environment is certainly affected by it.

#### **Conclusion**

Takfir (excommunication) is considered one of the dangerous phenomena in Muslim societies, as it constitutes a perilous factor in reinforcing division, discord, tension, and the fragmentation of unity within these communities. The severity and danger of this instrument have intensified with the speed and breadth of dissemination afforded by social media platforms and applications. Extremist movements have resorted to it as a safe tool to execute their objectives, employing it to transgress against individuals, institutions, sanctities, and national rights in the name of religion and from the standpoint of their particular interpretation thereof. Consequently, these judgments have proliferated and penetrated through these networks and virtual pages, excommunicating others and

excommunicating those who do not excommunicate what they themselves excommunicate, relying upon the interpretation of religious texts and prophetic hadiths in accordance with their ideology and objectives. This is accompanied by the selective extraction of scholars' and jurists' statements through taking excerpts from their declarations and jurisprudential opinions to ensure the meaning aligns and conforms with their desired ends, while appointing whomever they choose to issue fatwas concerning the affairs of the Ummah from among those who align with their judgments and actions.

In conclusion, we can say that takfiri groups have taken control of issuing takfir rulings against individuals, institutions, and society, exploiting special interpretations of religious texts, which turn them into an ideology that justifies the violation of blood, money, and honor. Political conditions in Arab countries, along with the characteristics of social media sites such as Telegram, have contributed to facilitating the dissemination and communication of takfir (excommunication) beyond being a traditional accusation to a tool that justifies committing crimes in the name of religion, which threatens the unity of the nation and its doctrinal and intellectual security and undermines the path of true citizenship. The greatest danger lies in using these rulings as legal justifications for violating the sanctity of individuals, with its impact on religious, political, and social security. These premises are based on a superficial understanding of religious texts without their historical and cultural context, where Telegram users monopolize the right to interpretation under the slogan "No independent reasoning is permissible in the presence of a clear

text." This constitutes an ideological deception that reinforces extremist interpretations. Today, Telegram has become a major source of informal social capital, as takfiri groups have resorted to it to promote their ideas, bypassing fatwas prohibiting it, taking advantage of its encryption and ease of file sharing for recruitment, propaganda and planning. This enabled it to employ modernity and globalization and develop a discourse that suits the consumerist mentality in order to attract broad segments, especially the masses, and reproduce itself in a virtual religious market.

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