



Saudi diplomacy in the digital age: The interactive impact and strategic adaptation of weakening sectarianism and religious factors on the internet

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Abstract

Focusing on the digital age, this thesis explores the interaction between the weakening of sectarianism and the religious element of the Internet in Saudi foreign policy. Globalization and digitization are accelerating, and Internet religious factors are affecting international relations. The evolution of sectarianism in Saudi foreign policy is under scrutiny. Analyzing the interplay between the two, the Internet religious factor has both positive and negative effects on the weakening of sectarianism. Saudi Arabia's response strategies and the challenges it faces involve technical management, international cooperation, society and culture. Saudi Arabia has made efforts in various aspects, such as managing Internet religion, conducting cyber diplomacy, promoting online religious, educational and cultural exchanges, and promoting the weakening of sectarianism and diplomatic transformation, in order to contribute to regional peace and stability and international cooperation, and to provide lessons for other countries.

Keywords: Saudi Diplomacy, Weakening Sectarianism, Internet Religious Factors, Tactical Adaptation, Digital Age.

Introduction

In today's era of rapid digitalization, the Internet has been deeply integrated into all aspects of social life, and the field of religion is no exception. As an emerging force, the Internet religious factor is affecting the pattern of international relations with unprecedented speed and breadth. Saudi Arabia, as an important country in the Middle East, has long been closely linked to sectarianism in its foreign policy. However, with the changing times, Saudi Arabia has gradually realized the importance of weakening sectarianism for national development and regional stability. In this process, the Internet religious factor has brought new opportunities as well as posed serious challenges. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to study in depth the interaction between the weakening of sectarianism and the religious factor of the Internet in Saudi foreign policy, and to explore the corresponding strategic adjustment.

1. Weakening Saudi Sectarianism and the Context of Internet Religious Factors

The development and current state of Saudi sectarianism provides a historical vein for understanding its foreign policy transformation, while the rise of the Internet religious factor is a new variable that cannot be ignored in the digital age^[1]. Together, these two constitute a complex background that Saudi Arabia must face in its current foreign policy adjustment, and their intertwined dynamics profoundly affect the direction of Saudi foreign policy and lay the foundation for subsequent exploration of their interactive impact.

1.1 The Present State of Saudi Sectarianism

Saudi Arabia has historically played an important role in sectarian affairs in the Middle East by virtue of its religious influence, and sectarianism has influenced its foreign policy decisions to a certain extent. In recent years, however, Saudi Arabia has faced a number of internal and external factors that have prompted it to seek a weakening of sectarianism.

Domestically, the structural transformation of the economy, the need for diversified social development, and the public's desire for a harmonious and stable social environment have led the Saudi government to realize that an overemphasis on sectarianism is not conducive to the country's long-term stability. Internationally, the international community's call for peace and cooperation is growing, and regional conflicts triggered by sectarianism have attracted much attention, with Saudi Arabia under pressure from international public opinion. At the same time, the need for broad cooperation with other countries to address common challenges has prompted Saudi Arabia to re-examine its sectarian foreign policy.

1.2 Development and Characterization of the Religious Element of the Internet

The popularization of the Internet has brought religious communication to a whole new stage. Religious websites, social media groups and online religious courses have sprung up worldwide. Its features include instantaneous, borderless and highly interactive dissemination of information. Religious information can reach audiences around the world in an instant, breaking the time and space constraints of traditional religious communication. The views and teachings of different sects collide and exchange with each other in cyberspace, attracting a large number of believers and non-believers. In the Middle East, the religious factor of the Internet is even more intertwined with the complex sectarian situation there, exerting a profound influence on social opinion and people's thinking and adding new variables to the issue of sectarianism in Saudi foreign policy.

2. The Influence of Internet Religious Factors on the Weakening of Sectarianism in Saudi Arabia

Having clarified the complex context in which the Saudis find themselves, we further analyze in depth the specific impact of the Internet religious factor in this pattern. The

positive aspects of this factor have contributed to the weakening of sectarianism in Saudi Arabia, while the negative aspects of this factor have constituted a major obstacle. This dual impact has made it necessary for the Saudis to deal with it cautiously as they move forward with the process of weakening sectarianism, and it has also prompted the Saudis to seek an effective strategy for adaptation.

2.1 Positive Influence

Information dissemination contributes to religious moderation. Saudi Arabia utilizes official religious websites, social media accounts and other online platforms to actively disseminate the concept of a moderate and inclusive religion [2]. For example, it publishes modern interpretations of religious classics and encourages interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Such information can be quickly disseminated to a wide range of audiences at home and abroad, helping to correct some people's misunderstanding of Saudi religious policy and promoting the idea of religious moderation. By showcasing Saudi Arabia's positive efforts in the areas of religious and cultural preservation and religious charities, they have shaped the country's image of religious openness and inclusiveness, and created a positive climate of international public opinion for the weakening of sectarianism.

Web-based platforms to facilitate interdenominational exchanges. The Internet provides a convenient channel for communication among the different sects within Saudi Arabia and with the international community. Online religious forums and academic exchange platforms have attracted the participation of many religious scholars, clergy and ordinary believers. They share their views and discuss religious teachings on the platforms, enhancing mutual understanding and respect. Saudi Arabia actively organizes and participates in such online exchanges, which have contributed to the process of inter-confessional reconciliation. For example, the organization of cross-border webinars on religion, in which representatives of different sects are invited to discuss the problems and challenges facing contemporary religions, has promoted the harmonious development of sectarian relations and provided strong support for the weakening of sectarianism at the diplomatic level.

2.2 Negative Influence

Challenges to the spread of extremist ideas. The anonymity and openness of the Internet provide opportunities for the spread of extremist religious ideas. Extremist organizations make use of encrypted communications technology, hidden groups on social media and other means to spread extremist doctrines and violent ideas on the Internet. Such information not only affects the thinking of some people within Saudi Arabia, leading to the growth of extremist tendencies, but also spreads to the international community through the Internet, triggering negative evaluations of Saudi Arabia's religious image. The dissemination of extremist ideas has exacerbated inter-sectarian tensions, running counter to Saudi efforts to weaken sectarianism and seriously hampering the implementation of its foreign policy.

Internet opinion exacerbates sectarian divide. The online public opinion environment on social media platforms is complex and volatile, and issues such as sectarian bias and inaccurate information occur from time to time. Some

people with ulterior motives take advantage of the magnifying effect of the Internet to deliberately disseminate statements that provoke sectarian confrontation and trigger emotional reactions among people of different sects. In Saudi Arabia, such online public opinion could lead to social instability at home and affect the public's trust in the Government's policy of weakening sectarianism. Internationally, they could also damage Saudi Arabia's diplomatic image and expose it to greater public pressure in international affairs, making it more difficult for the country to advance its foreign policy of weakening sectarianism.

3. Saudi Arabia's Diplomatic Tactical Adaptation to Deal with the Influence of Religious Factors on the Internet

In the face of the complex impact of the religious dimension of the Internet, Saudi Arabia has acted proactively by adopting a series of measures to adapt its diplomatic strategy. These measures are designed to make full use of the opportunities presented by the Internet and to address the challenges it poses, from strengthening governance and public diplomacy to the promotion of religious education and cultural exchanges, in order to deal with the religious dimension of the Internet in all its aspects and to create an environment conducive to the weakening of sectarianism [3].

3.1 Strengthening Religious Governance on the Internet

Improvement of laws and regulations and regulatory mechanism. The Saudi Government has formulated a series of laws and regulations governing religious activities on the Internet, clearly stipulating the legitimate scope and prohibited content of religious information disseminated on the Internet. It has set up specialized Internet regulatory bodies, equipped with professional and technical personnel and law enforcement forces, to strengthen the day-to-day supervision of religious websites, social media groups, online religious courses and other Internet platforms. Advanced Internet monitoring technologies are utilized to track and filter undesirable religious information in real time, and violations of laws and regulations are cracked down on. At the same time, it has established a sound complaint and reporting mechanism, encouraging the public to actively participate in Internet religious governance and to work together to maintain a healthy online religious environment.

Promoting cooperation between religious institutions and Internet companies. Saudi Arabia actively promotes close cooperation between religious institutions and Internet businesses. Religious institutions, on the basis of their profound religious knowledge and ability to interpret doctrine, provide professional guidance to Internet enterprises, helping them to accurately identify the nature and impact of religious information. Internet enterprises, on the other hand, utilize their technical advantages to develop efficient content management systems and filtering tools to accurately screen religious information. The two sides have jointly established a set of standardized Internet religious content review criteria to ensure that online religious information is in line with Saudi religious policies and social values. For example, through cooperation in the development of intelligent algorithms, they have been able to automatically identify and block extremist religious ideas and sectarian incitement, effectively purifying the online religious space.

3.2 Utilizing the Internet for Public Diplomacy

Shaping a positive online religious image. Saudi Arabia has carefully planned a series of online promotional activities to showcase its rich religious cultural heritage, moderate and inclusive religious policies and efforts to promote sectarian harmony on international Internet platforms through the production of high-quality multimedia content, such as religious and cultural documentaries, virtual religious exhibitions and videos of religious art performances. Utilizing the extensive dissemination power of social media platforms, they have attracted the attention and likes of many users around the world, effectively enhancing Saudi Arabia's religious image in the international community. At the same time, Saudi Arabia has actively cooperated with the international media to issue news reports on the dynamics of religious development and positive achievements in Saudi Arabia, enhancing international public opinion's positive perception of Saudi religious policy.

Enhancing cyber-diplomatic interactions and dialogues. Saudi Arabia actively participates in and hosts various cyber-diplomatic activities, such as online international religious conferences and foreign policy seminars. Government officials, religious leaders, scholars and experts from all over the world are invited to participate in these events and to discuss important topics such as religion and international relations and the harmonious coexistence of sects. At these events, Saudi representatives actively share their country's experience and practical cases in weakening sectarianism and religious governance, while listening to the views and suggestions of the international community. Through cyber-diplomatic interactions, Saudi Arabia has established closer communication channels with other countries, enhanced mutual understanding and trust, and won international support for its foreign policy transformation.

3.3 Promoting Online Religious Education and Cultural Exchange

Development of online religious education resources. Saudi Arabia has invested considerable resources in the development of a series of online religious education courses covering a wide range of aspects of religious doctrine, history, culture, ethics and so forth ^[4]. These courses use multimedia teaching methods, such as animated presentations, online lectures and interactive discussions, to make religious education more lively, interesting and easy to understand. They are open to people at home and abroad free of charge through the official education platform, aiming to disseminate accurate and moderate religious knowledge and cultivate religious believers with a spirit of tolerance and rational thinking. The online religious education courses have not only been widely welcomed within the Kingdom, but have also attracted the participation of many international students, enhancing the Kingdom's influence in the field of international religious education.

Promotion of online religious and cultural exchange activities. Saudi Arabia has organized a rich variety of online religious and cultural exchange activities, such as transnational online religious music festivals, digital exhibitions of religious and cultural heritage, and virtual religious pilgrimage experiences. These activities break down geographical limitations and enable people from all over the world to experience the charm of Saudi religious

culture in an immersive manner. In the course of the activities, Saudi Arabia encourages people from different countries and regions to share their own religious and cultural stories and traditions, which promotes mutual appreciation and learning from religious culture. Through online religious and cultural exchanges, deep cultural and emotional ties have been established between Saudi Arabia and other countries, laying a solid humanistic foundation for the weakening of sectarianism and the development of diplomatic relations.

4. Challenges to the Adaptation of Saudi Diplomatic Strategy

Although the Saudis have been actively engaged in the adaptation of their diplomatic strategy, the process has not been easy. A number of challenges have arisen, including technical and managerial difficulties, the complexity of international cooperation, and social and cultural adaptation. These challenges not only test Saudi Arabia's ability to implement its policies, but also affect the ultimate effectiveness of its diplomatic strategy, requiring in-depth reflection and a search for solutions to ensure the realization of the goal of weakening sectarianism.

4.1 Technical and Management Challenges

Regulatory difficulties arising from the updating of network technology. With the rapid development of Internet technology, such as the application of blockchain technology in the field of information encryption and the enhancement of information security by quantum communication technology, extremist organizations and undesirable religious forces have also continued to make use of new technological means to circumvent regulation ^[5]. They have adopted more complex encryption algorithms, virtual private networks (VPNs) and other tools, making it difficult for the Saudi government to effectively track and monitor the source of the spread of undesirable religious information. In addition, the emergence of new social media platforms and communication applications has posed a great challenge to the regulatory authorities, which need to constantly update their regulatory techniques and tools in order to adapt to the rapid changes in cybertechnology.

Complexity of coordinated multisectoral management. There are numerous departments involved in the management of religion on the Internet within Saudi Arabia, including the religious affairs department, the communications management department, the security department and others. Each department differs in terms of its scope of responsibility, focus and management style, leading to difficulties in coordinating their work in practice. For example, the religious affairs department focuses on reviewing religious teachings, while the communications management department is more concerned with regulating the technical aspects of the network, and the security department focuses on preventing security threats caused by religious extremism. Poor information sharing and inefficient coordination between departments make it easy for management loopholes and duplication of efforts to occur, affecting the overall effectiveness of Internet religious governance, and thus restricting the smooth implementation of Saudi Arabia's diplomatic strategy of adaptation.

4.2 Complexity of International Cooperation

Differences in religious policies in different countries. There are significant differences in religious policies and values among the countries of the world. Some Western countries emphasize the absolutism of religious freedom and misunderstand and question Saudi Arabia's relatively strict religious management policy; while some Asian countries have their own unique models and experiences in the harmonious development of religion and society, but also have different religious and cultural backgrounds from Saudi Arabia. These differences have made it difficult for countries to quickly reach agreement and take unified action in jointly addressing the issue of religion on the Internet. In seeking international cooperation, Saudi Arabia needs to spend a great deal of time and effort communicating and consulting with other countries in order to bridge policy differences and establish effective cooperation mechanisms.

Geopolitics and the impact of great power games. The geopolitical complexity of the Middle East region and the game of interests of major powers in the region have had a significant impact on Saudi foreign policy. Competition and contradictions among major powers are also reflected in the areas of Internet religious governance and diplomatic cooperation. For example, certain big powers may intervene in or restrict Saudi Arabia's cooperation with other countries out of their own geopolitical interests. At the same time, the big powers have greater influence in Internet technology, international public opinion and other aspects, and in the process of promoting the weakening of sectarianism and dealing with the influence of religious factors on the Internet, Saudi Arabia needs to seek a balance in the complex pattern of the game of big powers and avoid becoming a victim of competition among the big powers, which undoubtedly makes it more difficult for Saudi Arabia to carry out international cooperation.

4.3 Sociocultural Adaptation

Conflict between domestic traditional concepts and network culture. The traditional religious and cultural concepts of Saudi society are deep-rooted, and some conservative forces are wary of the openness and pluralism of the dissemination of religious information on the Internet^[6]. They fear that Internet culture will impact traditional religious values and trigger a moral slide in society. This conceptual conflict has led to some internal resistance from the government in the process of adjusting its Internet religious governance and diplomatic strategies. For example, some conservatives oppose certain Internet activities that promote interdenominational exchanges, believing that this may lead to confusion about religious beliefs. In addition, there are interface problems between the traditional religious education system and the modern online religious education model, which need to be reformed and adjusted to meet the development needs of the digital age.

People's Internet literacy varies. There is a large gap in Internet literacy among the Saudi population. On the one hand, some of the younger generation and well-educated people are able to skillfully use the Internet to obtain information and participate in exchanges, but they may lack sufficient discernment when confronted with vast quantities of complex religious information, and they are vulnerable to the influence of undesirable religious ideas. On the other hand, some older groups or less educated people are less receptive to the Internet and less motivated to participate in

online religious activities, which limits the effectiveness of the government's religious education and cultural exchanges through online channels. The unevenness of the population's cyber literacy has affected the effectiveness of Saudi diplomatic strategy in the country, and has also brought some uncertainty to the international community's evaluation of Saudi Arabia's religious governance capacity^[7].

Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the interaction between the weakening of sectarianism and Internet religious factors in Saudi foreign policy in the digital age. Internet religious factors have a dual impact on the weakening of sectarianism in Saudi Arabia, providing opportunities for spreading moderate religious concepts and promoting sectarian exchanges, as well as posing challenges of spreading extremist ideas and polarizing online public opinion. The Saudis have actively responded to the impact of religious factors on the Internet through a series of diplomatic strategies to adapt to the situation, such as strengthening religious governance on the Internet, carrying out online public diplomacy, and promoting religious education and cultural exchanges on the Internet. However, in implementing these strategies, Saudi Arabia faces many challenges, including technical and managerial difficulties, the complexity of international cooperation, and social and cultural adaptation.

Despite the many challenges it faces, Saudi Arabia still has great prospects for development in terms of weakening sectarianism and dealing with the influence of religious factors on the Internet. Saudi Arabia should continue to increase its investment in research and development of cyber technology and training of human resources, and improve its ability to cope with the challenges of newer cyber technology. It should strengthen communication and consultation with the international community, and adopt a more open and flexible stance to seek a broader consensus on international cooperation on the basis of respect for differences in religious policies among countries. Domestically, it has promoted social and cultural reforms, strengthened the integration of religious education with modern cyberculture, improved the people's cyberliteracy, and fostered a harmonious symbiosis between traditional religious concepts and modern cyberculture. Through sustained efforts, Saudi Arabia is expected to further weaken sectarianism in the digital age, enhance its international image, and make greater contributions to regional peace and stability and international cooperation. At the same time, this study also provides useful lessons and references for other countries in dealing with the relationship between religion and diplomacy and coping with the influence of religious factors on the Internet. In the future of accelerating globalization and digitalization, the international community should pay attention to and study the impact of Internet religious factors on international relations, and work together to build a more harmonious and inclusive international religious order and diplomatic cooperation model.

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