

# Intellectual Discourse

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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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Volume 31

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## Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

## Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		اَ، اِيَّ	an
اُ	u		اُو	un
اِ	i		اِي	in
اَ، اِ، اِيَّ	ā		اُو	aw
اُو	ū		اِيَّ	ay
اِي	ī		اُو	uww, ū (in final position)
			اِيَّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

*Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>*



## **Faith in The Time of Coronavirus: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Analysis**

**Siti Aeisha Joharry\***

**Abstract:** This article explores language used in online writings on the Coronavirus from an Islamic research institution compared to those written for a more general audience. Using the corpus linguistic approach, keywords analysis of a collection of these articles against the Covid-19 corpus on Sketch Engine reveals salient words that are more faith-based in terms of discussing the topic like words referring to God, acts of devotion and martyrdom. Further analysis showed that the main difference in language use between the two corpora is noticeable in the way that there are more words referring to God and the Prophet as well as words related to faith/the religion. Accordingly, these articles “tackle” issues relating to the virus in terms of the concept of Tawakkul, which means reliance on or trust in Allah (or God), whether the virus is a punishment or a mercy, as well as how to deal with grief.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus, Covid-19, Corpus Linguistics, Sketch Engine, Islamic Views

**Abstrak:** Makalah ini meneliti perbandingan penggunaan bahasa antara penulisan atas talian berkenaan Coronavirus daripada institusi penyelidikan Islam dengan penulisan kepada khalayak umum. Berdasarkan pendekatan linguistik korpus, analisis kata kunci terhadap koleksi artikel-artikel ini telah dibandingkan dengan korpus “Covid-19” daripada Sketch Engine. Kata kunci yang menonjol adalah berkenaan dengan kepercayaan dalam membincangkan topik Coronavirus seperti kata-kata yang merujuk kepada Tuhan, perbuatan penghambaan dan konsep mati syahid. Analisis lanjutan juga menunjukkan bahawa perbezaan utama dalam penggunaan bahasa antara kedua-dua korpus ini adalah ketara, misalnya terdapat lebih banyak kata-kata yang merujuk

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\*Senior Lecturer, Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, UiTM Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. Email: aeisha@uitm.edu.my.

kepada Tuhan dan Nabi serta kata-kata yang berkaitan dengan kepercayaan atau agama (Islam). Oleh itu, artikel-artikel ini “menangani” isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan virus dalam konteks berkonsepkan tawakul, iaitu bergantung kepada atau mempercayai Allah (atau Tuhan), sama ada virus itu merupakan hukuman atau rahmat, serta cara menghadapi kesedihan apabila berhadapan dengan dugaan seperti Coronavirus.

**Kata kunci:** Coronavirus, Covid-19, Korpus Linguistik, Sketch Engine, Pandangan Islam

### **Coronavirus or COVID-19 Discourse**

In a recent meeting with the International Health Regulations (IHR), the World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General concurred that COVID-19 “is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern” (WHO, 2023, Statement, para. 3). Three years on talk surrounding the pandemic can be seen as globally widespread and until only recently that the end of the Coronavirus pandemic has been officially declared. Nevertheless, COVID-19 discourse has sparked much interest that it could even be ongoing given the rise of variants and reproduction rate across many countries. A simple check on research between four countries (Japan, United States, Germany, and Brazil) by Mathieu et al. (2020) reveals new Covid-19 cases per one million that indicate the virus as still present and a threat to global citizens (<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>).

Since the unprecedented COVID-19 unravelled, information or discussion on the novel coronavirus can be described as a specific or specialised discourse. From early 2019, various news and information on COVID-19 can be found on the Internet. This includes governmental actions on preventive/safety measures surrounding the pandemic, public outcry of the certain resistance to governmental solutions, evidence of language change/invention that was necessary during this time as well as social expressions on the new norm as more people were instructed to work from home (WFH), observe social distancing and even face potential lockdown (quarantine). Interest on COVID-19 research has revolved around communication strategies that range from presenting evidence relating to the psychosocial and behavioural aspects involved during the pandemic and how various population groups understand and

react to the pandemic in particular (Généreux et al. 2021). Généreux and colleagues assert that:

[i]nterdisciplinary and international studies could contribute to improve our understanding and management of risk information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic (how it is delivered by authorities and media, and how it is received, understood and used by the public). Such knowledge is urgently needed to support the widespread social measures already in place to encourage PHB [preventive health behaviours] and mitigate the negative psychological and behavioral consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Généreux et al., 2021, p. 1181).

Nevertheless, much less were reported on how people of faith responded to the pandemic. In their paper on reflecting the pandemic in terms of theology, Xiong, Isgandarova and Panton (2020) provide practical resources and theological reflections from the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian point of view. Building from their spiritual care provider backgrounds, there seems to be a multi-perspective view on COVID-19 and that as faith practitioners, this contributes to the dynamic response of the public to the pandemic. Other type of research includes situated case studies like Osei-Tutu et al.'s (2021) that examined perceived impacts of the virus and restrictions of religious gatherings on congregants in Ghana while another examined the Jesuit perspective on metaphors for COVID-19 in an online journal (Pasaribu, Dewi & Bram, 2021). Other similar studies discussed ways in which spiritual-religious coping is a mechanism when people face with COVID-19 related fear and anxiety as well as practicing hygienic and wellness (e.g., Prazeres et al., 2021; Edara et al., 2021; Amin et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, a search on studies related to the crisis in terms of spiritual-religious views resulted in a number of qualitative or critical (theoretical) analysis that range from specifying former COVID-19 patients and how they endured such an experience (Ab Rahman et al., 2020), investigating preventive measures from an Islamic perspective (Hedayatul Islam, Md Saidul Islam & Fadzli Adam, 2020), and examining resilience and patience in terms of the Islamic view during a community wide containment (Kamarudin Salleh et al. 2020). These studies have in a way, emphasised the significance and importance of

the religious approach in rejuvenating patients' mental health as well as promoting the spiritual-religious approach as a psychological healing system for illnesses (including COVID-19). From this existing pool of research on the virus with a focus on the spiritual-religious perspective, several examined this discourse linguistically. In times of uncertainty, spiritual-religious sources are referred to when it comes to seeking advice, counsel or even comfort and assurance. One of these sources includes online religious focused websites that can be accessible from anywhere in the world during a period of mass lockdown surrounding most countries.

In this paper, interest lies in the ways online faith-based articles are written by one specific type of organisation that offer researched and credible means of information and content from the Islamic scholarship view. These articles are highly specific in that they are written with the focus on readers during the COVID-19 pandemic from the discussion grounded within the Islamic faith and was further compared against a comparable reference set of articles –one that is more generic in terms of readership on the internet, through use of the corpus linguistics approach that is more empirical. Findings reveal that the faith-based articles point to a more frequent discussion of the pandemic in relation to God, i.e., these articles “tackle” issues surrounding the virus in terms of the concept of *tawakkul*, which means reliance on or trust in *Allah* (or God), whether the virus is a punishment or a mercy, as well as how to deal with grief.

### **Corpus linguistics and Discourse Analysis: A Methodological Synergy**

Corpus linguistics can be considered a sub-branch of linguistics, one that employs use of computerised software to analyze language data (Lee, 2010; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). These corpus-based studies usually make use of language data (also known as a corpus; corpora for plural) and employ sophisticated computerised software to extract words or phrases that would then be explained about how the language was used in the corpus (see McEnery & Hardie 2012 for a comprehensive description of the history and development of corpus linguistics). More importantly, a corpus represents attested data of real world spoken and/or written discourse, which is then investigated empirically. Among the

many benefits of using corpus to explore language use is its “growing ease and cheapness of data collection [that] has led to an explosion in the compilation of ad hoc “bespoke” corpora, compiled to investigate a particular research question, often several corpora to study a single one” (Partington, 2018, p. 5).

In recent corpus trends, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)—which Mautner (2019) acronymised to solidify and make prominent the approach as a “shared scholarly identity” (p2)—have been gaining popularity mainly for its synergy between marrying corpus linguistic approaches that are highly quantitative, with discourse analysis that is more qualitative in nature. By “discourse” here, it would be sufficient to operationally define it as what Mautner describes: “that discourse and society are mutually constitutive; that meaning is “a product of social practices” (Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak, 2014, p. 3); and that social phenomena can be usefully studied through the textual fall-out they generate” (2019: p. 4). This means investigating language used in a particular discourse would reveal sociolinguistic features and other ideologies relevant to the said interactants of that particular discourse, and therefore worthy to be studied using corpus methods. On a similar note, Rebechi (2019) argues that:

semi-automatic analyses of corpora can play an important role in discourse analysis, as they lead researchers to identify patterns in authentic texts with greater objectivity, besides helping them to emphasise patterns of association (collocations), which, in general, surpass the interpretative ability that results from the close reading of a small number of texts (ibid: p. 147).

In this paper, the collection of selected articles for the purpose of the current study represents the target corpus in that they will be compared to another set of similar topic-related articles online and are analysed according to the typical methods in corpus studies. Normally, these are carried out by investigating frequency lists, significance testing of salient words and their co-occurring words (also known as collocates) as well as examining use of words in context via corpus tools such as the web-enabled one, known as Sketch Engine. In sum, the present study adopts CADS as a research framework that will underpin the overall research design methodology (which will be explained under section

“Methodology”) as well as guide the analysis of the following research objectives: 1) to examine differences in the way faith-based articles on COVID-19 discuss about the topic compared to another more general set of articles and 2) to explore these differences in terms of Islamic teachings.

Linguistic research on the Coronavirus has shown numerous corpus-based type of studies such as Yang and Chen (2021), Schweinberger, Haugh and Hames (2021), and Sardinha (2020) to name a few. The specialised type of discourse has been particularly examined with regard to the secular view of either a political, economic or social problem, but rarely are there corpus research exploring how the virus is viewed or communicated from the Islamic lens/point of view (Maravia et al. 2021 is an exception, where their paper investigated Islamic documents that are entitled either “fatwas,” “other,” and “guidance,” which were circulated in the UK during the COVID-19 outbreak using corpus linguistics methods and tools). In response to Génèreux et al. (2021) who called for more international studies to examine how COVID-19 information is delivered by authorities and media, this paper acts as a case study that described one Islamic-based institution and its efforts to compile writings on scholarly view of the pandemic for their online readers, which will be analysed through corpus-assisted discourse analysis (CADS). Findings in turn, provide a snapshot of how this particular population group (Muslim scholars and their readers) make sense and react to the pandemic.

### **Sketch Engine as a web-based corpus tool**

Sketch Engine, which is a web-based corpus tool, is not only used for data extraction and analysis, but also for data visualisation (Kilgarriff et al., 2004). This form of approach is otherwise known as query language for corpora or CQL (Corpus Query Language). Some of the main features that will be incorporated and highlighted in this paper are keywords automatic extraction (under “Keywords” tool), “Word Sketch” for collocation or word combinations analysis and “Concordance” (to see examples used in context), which help to detect linguistic patterns in the articles studied. The web-based corpus tool can be accessed at <http://www.sketchengine.eu/>

More importantly, Sketch Engine was chosen because comparisons can be made between the selected articles used in the study with a large comparable word database that is the “Covid-19” corpus listed as part of their available online corpora. This corpus consists of over 50,000 texts (scientific papers on COVID-19 and related historical coronavirus research) that were released as part of the COVID-19 Open Research Dataset (CORD-19) (see [https:// www.semanticscholar.org/cord19](https://www.semanticscholar.org/cord19)) and accumulated into some 280 million running words (tokens). This makes the corpus suitable to be used as a reference corpus particularly for extracting keywords—words that are unusually more frequent and/or infrequent in one (target) corpus relative to its occurrences in another (often bigger in size). To put simply, by using Sketch Engine, the articles collected from the target corpus (articles compiled from Yaqeen Institute) can easily be compared against the reference corpus, i.e., “Covid-19” to examine how the former type of corpus is more specialised in nature.

### **Yaqeen Institute as a Case Study (Target Corpus)**

Yaqeen Institute is a non-profit research initiative that makes all of its content free and accessible on the Internet. Based in Irving, Texas, its aim is to “actively participate in the current day discourse touching on all topics that are related to establishing conviction in the hearts and minds of young Muslims” (Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, “About Yaqeen Institute”). The institute promotes reliable, well-researched Islamic content that is presented in various formats (e.g., articles, infographics, animations, videos), which are also integrated into curricula that can be used by various educators and community leaders to educate the society (Muslim youth specifically).

In keeping with the pandemic, Yaqeen Institute launched a reflection series in April 2020 in “an effort to provide timely, thoughtful, and Islamically grounded perspectives by its Research Fellows surrounding the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19” (Khan, “Return to the Maskan”). This was argued to be a reliable platform for obtaining critical and sound viewpoints related to the Coronavirus, particularly by Islamic scholars in the West. Below is a screenshot of their website and where articles were taken from.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the Source of Articles

Source: [yaqeeninstitute.org](http://yaqeeninstitute.org)

## Methodology

To reiterate, this study adopts the CADS approach, where the integration of discourse analysis using techniques and tools from corpus linguistics is highly advocated (Partington, 2010; Mautner, 2019). To begin, selected articles were firstly collected and built into a corpus (henceforth, Yaqeen Institute Corpus or YIC). Given the specific aim to examine how the faith-based institution communicates about the Coronavirus to its viewers, only reading files or articles that are compiled under the section or heading “Faith in the Time of COVID-19” (as shown in Figure 1) were chosen.

These series of papers or reflections began in April 2020 and out of the 18 papers found on the website, 16 were deemed appropriate (the remaining ones consisted papers on a compilation of supplications that were mostly in Arabic and purpose was to provide Muslims a list of prophetic prayers for relief and protection as well as list of books and infographics that were not part of the purpose of the current study). YIC therefore represents a specific (or specialised) corpus that contains faith-based reflections, particularly from the Islamic perspective during the pandemic that contains 69,095 running words (tokens). At the time of writing, the research was conducted during a worldwide lockdown and collection of articles was only made up of the ones mentioned here. An expansion of this particular dataset was not found from the website as the world gradually moved from pandemic to the endemic stage.

Meanwhile, the reference corpus – COVID-19 Open Research Dataset (CORD-19) – as mentioned earlier, has over three billion running words (3,371,382,556) and this is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Corpora Description

<b>Corpus</b>	<b>Size (tokens/ running words)</b>
Yaqeen Institute Corpus (YIC)	69,095
Covid-19 Corpus (on Sketch Engine)	3,371,382,556

The second step was to conduct a keywords analysis to examine differences between lists of salient words from YIC and the reference corpus (“Covid-19”) available from Sketch Engine. A keywords list is essential to identify words that are statistically significant in YIC relative to their occurrences in the “Covid-19” corpus (known as key words) in order to explore what is unique in the first (target or YIC) corpus compared to the second (reference or “Covid-19”) one. These were done automatically through use of the Sketch Engine feature, “Keywords.”

On Sketch Engine, keywords are calculated and extracted by comparing normalised (relative, per million) frequencies in the focus and reference corpora, called “Simple maths.” The keyness score of a word is calculated according to the following formula:

$$\frac{fpm_{focus} + n}{fpm_{ref} + n}$$

*fpm<sub>focus</sub>* is the normalised (per million) frequency of the word in the focus corpus, *fpm<sub>ref</sub>* is the normalised (per million) frequency of the word in the reference corpus, and *n* is the simple Maths (smoothing) parameter (*n* = 1 is the default value) (see Kilgarriff 2009). Table 2 presents top 50 key words that are particularly more and less salient in YIC compared to its occurrence in the “Covid-19” corpus (Reference) that will be explained further in the next section.

Table 2: YIC Keywords

	Word	Focus	Reference	Focus	Reference	Score
1	allah	7,714.02	0.06	15	11	7,299.10
2	الله	2,113.03	< 0.01	15	1	2,106.50
3	عليه	2,084.09	0	15	0	2,085.10
4	صلى	2,011.72	0	15	0	2,012.70
5	جسرو	1,997.25	0	15	0	1,998.30
6	evil	2,576.16	0.43	7	89	1,801.00
7	prophet	2,011.72	0.26	16	47	1,601.90
8	god	2,257.76	0.64	12	102	1,373.40
9	ibn	1,042.04	0.22	10	32	856.9
10	tawakkul	810.48	0	1	0	811.5
11	ramadan	998.63	0.25	7	47	802.4
12	mercy	940.73	0.21	12	40	780.5
13	masjid	752.59	0.01	5	3	745.6
14	abū	723.64	0	11	0	724.6
15	blessings	723.64	0.01	12	4	714.5
16	hadith	651.28	0	9	0	652.3
17	punishment	1,230.19	0.92	6	127	642.8
18	ن	636.8	0	5	0	637.8
19	ل	636.8	0	5	0	637.8
20	grief	868.37	0.44	6	78	603
21	م	593.39	0	5	0	594.4
22	worship	636.8	0.15	11	28	553.1
23	muslims	1,027.57	0.93	12	136	533
24	believer	535.49	0.02	8	7	523.4
25	salamah	492.08	< 0.01	1	1	491.3
26	wisdom	1,099.93	1.27	9	282	485.4
27	him	2,937.98	5.26	15	841	469.4
28	islamic	998.63	1.26	10	156	442.8
29	ي	434.18	< 0.01	5	1	432.1
30	du'ā'	405.24	0	5	0	406.2
31	ا	405.24	< 0.01	4	1	404.8
32	و	390.77	0.01	5	2	387.6
33	paradise	434.18	0.13	5	31	384.5
34	blessing	434.18	0.17	8	41	372.8
35	whoever	405.24	0.14	9	35	357.8
36	believers	376.29	0.07	9	17	351
37	prayer	419.71	0.21	9	52	346.6
38	muslim	781.53	1.26	14	195	345.6
39	umm	347.35	0.05	3	8	332.9
40	love	796.01	1.42	9	256	329.2
41	pray	332.88	0.07	7	17	311.7
42	marriage	506.55	0.67	2	127	304.6
43	yourself	463.13	0.61	7	123	289.1
44	eternal	303.93	0.07	5	20	284.7
45	evidential	303.93	0.08	1	23	281.8
46	ر	274.98	0	5	0	276
47	أ	274.98	< 0.01	5	1	275
48	martyrdom	274.98	< 0.01	4	2	274
49	faith	535.49	0.97	11	194	272
50	divine	332.88	0.24	6	51	268.8

## Findings and Discussion

Based on the findings, this section is separated into two main subsections. It begins with presenting recurring salient patterns in the corpus that demonstrate guided use of corpus techniques, which in turn, facilitates the second part that is the close readings of concordance lines. As mentioned in the methodology earlier, the former demonstrates use of corpus methods and tools as empirical while the latter highlights the technique as more qualitative in nature (CADS approach). For the purpose of this corpus-assisted discourse analysis, findings are discussed in terms of Ahmad and Ahad's (2021) related paper on Islamic and Scientific perspectives to deal with pandemics such as COVID-19.

### *Repeating lexical features as recurring themes of the Islamic perspective*

Table 3 presents classifications of the keywords shown in Table 2 earlier. Keywords were firstly categorised in terms of English and Arabic (loan) words where nouns in Arabic were found to mainly refer to proper nouns like the name of God: *Allah*, the prophet, and the honorary phrase "Peace and blessings of *Allah* be upon him" (PBUH hereafter), written either in English or as an Arabic symbol, the month of *Ramadan* as well as names of other people like *ibn*, *abū*, *salamah*, and *umm*. English nouns were more generic in that they did not refer to any particular proper noun but could still be subcategorised into nouns related to Islam like "prophet," "god," and "muslim(s)," while others did not necessarily have an Islamic association at face value: "believer(s)," "him," "whoever," and "yourself."

The main difference in language use between YIC and "Covid-19" is firstly noticeable in that the former presents more Islam-related words and these are further highlighted in the next group of Arabic words that are sub-classified as words pertaining to Islamic concepts or terminologies (*tawakkul*, *masjid*, *hadith*, *du'ā*). The English words that similarly relate to this sub-category could still be described as spiritual in nature where notions of "evil," "blessing(s)," "punishment," "worship," "paradise," "prayer," "martyrdom," "faith," and the "divine" for instance, can be argued to be associated with the religious or spiritual discourse even further. Other keywords found in YIC that were less frequent (or not found) in the reference corpus were Arabic letters pointing to the reference made to the Quran and abstract concepts like

“grief,” “wisdom” and “marriage” that are topics, which may be more likely discussed in YIC compared to in “Covid-19.”

More importantly, first observations of these keywords indicate a focus on God (*Allah*), His messenger or the Prophet PBUH and concepts of mercy, blessings and worship related to Islam that is not as significant in the reference corpus (“Covid-19”). This is not surprising as lexical analysis was primarily conducted on a corpus of faith-based articles from an Islamic website compared to a website on COVID-19 targeted for a more generic audience, but what is interesting would be how this particular source of information make sense of the COVID-19 discourse through highlighting issues concerning the religion, which would deem it an area worthy to be studied.

Table 3: Classifications of Keywords in YIC

	<i>Sub-categories</i>
<b>Arabic words/loanwords (23)</b>	
<i>Names (proper nouns)</i>	<i>Allah, الله, عليه, وسلم, prophet,* ibn, ramadan, abū, salamah, umm</i>
<i>Islamic concept or terminologies</i>	<i>tawakkul, masjid, hadith, du‘ā’</i>
<i>Quranic characters</i>	ند، لد، م، ي، ا، و، رد، أ
<b>English words (28)</b>	
<i>Names (nouns/pronouns)</i>	prophet, god, muslims, believer, him, whoever, believers, muslim, yourself
<i>Spiritual-religious concepts</i>	evil, mercy, blessings, punishment, worship, Islamic, paradise, blessing, prayer, pray, eternal, martyrdom, faith, divine
<i>Abstract concepts</i>	grief, wisdom, love, marriage, evidential

According to Ahmad and Ahad (2021, p. 36), both “Quranic and Biblical narratives suggest that plagues most likely strike when commandments of God are not followed” and therefore, “continuity of evil practices may result in the emergence of plagues and disasters such as COVID-19.” They further assert that the emergence of a plague (or disaster) can be

found more documented in the Prophet's stories (known as *hadiths*) and are referred to as Islamic teachings on how to manage or respond to such events (Ahmad & Ahad, 2021: pp. 35-36).

This could be made sense in relation to the keywords in Table 2 that point to Islamic-based concepts such as *tawakkul* – i.e., to have faith in God or trust in God's plans, and “*hadith*.” Other keywords like “blessings.” and “martyrdom” exemplify how “*Allah* made epidemics as a source of mercy for the believers (*mu'minīn*). If a *mu'min* dies due to a plague, s/he will be considered as a martyr (*shahīd*)” (Ahmad & Ahad, 2021, p. 36), which in turn, is considered a blessing. In a similar vein, Suyadi et al. (2020) argue that a disaster [such as the Coronavirus] is a form of love from *Allah* SWT and a medium of introspection (Suyadi et al., 2020: p. 2), and therefore explains how YIC keywords indicate abstract concepts like “love,” “wisdom” and so on.

This first observation into YIC keywords has shown how there are more mention or reference to a theology degree and that examinations of these words in context would further tell us how these faith-based articles discuss COVID-19 in more detail. As Brookes and McEnery (2020, p. 352) point out, language is viewed as ideological when text creators' (in this case the website content of these YIC articles) lexical and grammatical choices serve to promote a particular perspective – in this case, evaluating COVID-19 discourse from an Islamic perspective.

#### *Contextualised reading of the articles from the Islamic perspective*

The next part focuses on the three most significant keywords, i.e., reference to God/*Allah* (7,299.10), on the authority of the Prophet PBUH (1,601.90), and faith-based concepts that were found to be more salient in YIC compared to the reference corpus (i.e., “mercy” – 780.5). By focusing on verbs that occur immediately to the right of the keyword *Allah*, Table 4 presents types of verb collocates (or co-occurring words) that show how it is used in relation to *Allah* as a subject such as lexical verbs that are transitive (e.g., *answers, changed*), linking (e.g., denoted by the expression “surely is!”), dynamic and static (e.g., *deems, depicts*), and auxiliary verbs that illustrate God's attributes (e.g., *al-Bāṭin, the Knower of the Hidden*), actions (e.g., *is with us, has brought*), and forms of negation where He is not doing something without purpose/reason (e.g., *Allah does not send us trials/ charge a soul*).

Table 4: Verb Collocates of *Allah*

Verb collocates (focus on verbs occurring immediately to the right) <i>Lexical verbs</i>	Examples from the corpus
<p><b>Transitive (expressing action and requires a direct object) and intransitive</b> e.g., <i>Alice sees the candle;</i> <i>Alice dances</i></p> <p><b>Linking (joins the subject of sentence –word/phrase that tells something about the subject)</b> e.g., <i>The boss is unhappy</i></p> <p><b>Dynamic and static (action verb; describing state or situation)</b> e.g., <i>They throw the ball;</i> <i>We are what we believe we are</i></p> <p><b>Regular and irregular (conjugation of base forms)</b> e.g., <i>looks –looked;</i> <i>bring –brought</i></p>	<p>answers, changed, commands, CREATE, executes, GIVE, grants, GUIDE, indicates, intends, MAKE, promises, protect, refers, reminds, removes, revealed, reward, subjects, used</p> <p>Tomorrow is not certain, but <i>Allah</i> surely is!</p> <p>deems, depicts, describes, dislikes, elaborates, FORGIVE, fortify, KEEP, knows, loves, MENTION, responded, SAY, SEND, tells, wants, warns</p>
<p><b>Auxiliary verbs (be, have, do)</b></p>	
<p><i>IS</i></p>	<p><u>Describing qualities/attributes to God</u> –e.g., <i>al-Bāṭin</i>, the Knower of the Hidden; All-Encompassing, Wise; Knowing of all things</p> <p><u>Sense of being (action)</u> –e.g., <i>Allah</i> is with us; <i>Allah</i> is with you too</p>



referred to by English-speaking Muslims as the Prophet and Messenger of Allah and therefore, look to him as an unconditional authority in their faith (or role model), which supports the writers’ arguments when making a certain claim.

doc#4	a number of hadiths that someone who dies from a plague (30:36) will receive the reward of a martyr	The Prophet	“Whoever dies from a plague is a martyr”
doc#4	to alleviate	The Prophet	“Whoever dies of an illness is a martyr.”
doc#4	were authentic, in light of other evidence, this hadith refers to an illness resulting from the plague	The Prophet	“The one who dies from [plague] (dabt al-janā) is a martyr.”
doc#4	the side of the boat would be a clever shortcut to avoid registering voter from those in the upper deck	The Prophet	“If those in the upper deck leave them to do as they please, they will all be destroyed together
doc#4	the active action of the kind that could save lives and alleviate suffering	The Prophet	“How could contagion be true if God’s
doc#5	urgent and comprehensive expression	The Prophet	“Assuring his beloved wife, the Mother of the Believers Aisha, the
doc#5	and possible punishment for others	The Prophet	“In a hadith now obfuscated for its alignment with scientific advice, the
doc#6	it be the end of the world	The Prophet	“Yet, for the most part, they were not paralyzed by apocalyptic fear
doc#6	of Damascus had a dream in 749 AH when the plague was striking nearby Anatolia	The Prophet	“Whoever is marked on earth will be marked in paradise”
doc#6	die	The Prophet	“Whoever is marked on earth will be marked in paradise”
doc#6	and recte online	The Prophet	“A person who recites the Qur’an and masters it by heart will be with the noble upright records
doc#7	most Muslims are encouraged to remain optimistic even during challenging and unprecedented times	The Prophet	“I am amazed by optimism, the good word, the kind word”
doc#11	cry and was questioned about this	The Prophet	“This is mercy”
doc#11	care for others with the intent of your loved one sharing in the reward	The Prophet	“The best of what a man leaves behind are three: a righteous child who supplicates for him,
doc#11	a young children	The Prophet	“What can I do if Allah has taken away mercy from you?”
doc#11	that they have a messy home or need your help as this may make them feel self-conscious or guilty	The Prophet	“when the news of the death of Ja’far bin Abi Tālib came, ‘Prepare food for the family of Ja’far

Figure 2: Concordance Lines of “Prophet” and “said”

We can infer from the above instances (Figure 2) that the prophetic teachings and stories have been referred to when analysing issues related to the pandemic as well as reassurance of ways in conducting oneself during a pandemic that relates back to how similar incidences happened to the Prophet and therefore are used as a guideline (Ahmad & Ahad 2021 refer to it as “Scientific protection” based on teachings of the Prophet). In fact, it was found that the four highest occurrences of these collocations occurred in documents that were titled or on the topic of grief (32 times); “how to rely on God;” “punishment vs mercy;” and “prophetic wisdom on contagion.” Recurring mentions of the prophetic *hadith* such as:

“...if a person in time of an epidemic plague stays in their home [“stays in their land,” as per al-Bukhari] patiently hoping for God’s Reward and believing that nothing will afflict them except what God has written for them, they will get the reward of a martyr” (Al-Bukhārī, 60, 141).

Among others, it suggests that exemplifying the Prophet and his responses during similar events would not only be the simplest resolution but in fact, illustrates a reward (in afterlife) in disguise.

YIC mentions numerous sayings of the Prophet PBUH and these range from the adherence to rely on Allah (“Tie her and trust in Allah” – doc#0; doc#13), reminder of death and that life is temporary (“Remember often the destroyer of pleasures”–by which he meant

“death” – doc#15), to seek forgiveness that would attain *Allah*’s mercy during trials (“If anyone constantly seeks forgiveness, *Allah* will create a path out of every distress and relief from every anxiety” – doc#3), but one specific *hadith* on plagues was cited in more than one YIC article:

“The closest precedent to this question may be when ‘Āishah, the wife of the Prophet PBUH asked him about the plague. He responded, “It is a punishment that *Allah* sends upon whomever He wills, but *Allah* has made it a mercy for the believers. Any servant who resides in a land afflicted by plague, remaining patient and hoping for reward from *Allah*, knowing that nothing will befall him except what *Allah* has decreed, will be given the reward of a martyr.” (Al-Bukhārī, 60: 141).

Ahmad and Ahad (2021, p. 36) highlight that this *hadith* indicates the emergence of an epidemic in that a plague is a form of ‘adhāb (i.e., punishment), which is controlled by *Allah* and that He can inflict it upon anyone He wishes. However, Ahmad and Ahad assert that examples of such incidents or punishments can be found in the Quran too (e.g., it was sent to the Egyptians due to their disbelief, and to the Israelite nation because of transgressions and breaching promises with God). The authors also point to Biblical literature that confirms these Quranic accounts – “The Book of Exodus notes ten disastrous plagues that were sent to the Egyptians because they refused to free Israelites” (Ahmad & Ahad, 2021: p. 36). In terms of martyrdom, another saying of the Prophet PBUH was quoted in YIC: “Whoever dies from a plague is a martyr” and “Whoever remains in a plague-ridden land patiently and hopeful of reward, knowing that only what *Allah* decrees will reach him, will get the reward of a martyr” (doc#4), which is also discussed next.

In terms of the faith-based concepts, close readings of the concordance lines were focused on the keyword “mercy” since it was ranked quite highly (#12) and occurred across 75% of the articles (12 out of the total 16), and therefore was considered interesting to be explored further. On the topic of punishment versus mercy, doc#3 refers to the prophetic *hadith* (Al-Bukhārī, 60: 141) on opinion of the plague. It was found that reference to the *hadith* supports the argument made that mercy is described as “reward of a martyr.” The writer concludes that “[thus], the coronavirus (or the plague) may be a great mercy and blessing for

the believer who exercises patience, appropriately quarantines him or herself, hopes in reward” (doc#3).

Meanwhile, on the topic of grief, doc#13 also referred to the prophetic *hadith* on opinion of the plague. Mercy was described as *Allah*'s protection except for what He has written as the concept of *al-qada'* (the divine decree) and *al-qadar* (divine fore-ordination), which Isgandarova argues that “[a]lmost all theological schools in Islam agree with [...] and suggest that the existence of evil and suffering has some *hikmah* (wisdom) or function” (Xiong, Isgandarova & Panton, 2020: p. 19). This was found in the below excerpt taken from the article:

During this unprecedented time, you are following the prescription provided by the Prophet PBUH when asked about the plague. He said, “That was a means of torture which *Allah* used to send upon whomsoever He wished, but He made it a source of mercy for the believers, for anyone who is residing in a town in which this disease is present, and remains there and does not leave that town, but has patience and hopes for *Allah*'s reward, and knows that nothing will befall him except what *Allah* has written for him.” (doc#13).

This resonates with how Xiong, Isgandarova and Panton (2020) summarise in their paper that Islam in general –as reflected in the teachings of the Quran, “respond to the dilemma of the existence of evil and suffering in the context of finding a spiritual lesson in every suffering, for a believer needs to be tested in order to discover his/her true essence” (p. 19). They further argue that this is central to the fostering or building of self-awareness and constructive attitude among Muslim believers on how to behave in accordance with the self and society. In this way, for Muslims, “an epidemic becomes a source of mercy for *mu`minin* [believers] by not only bringing them closer to *Allah* but also ensuring their success in this world and the Hereafter” (Ahmad & Ahad, 2021: p. 36).

## Conclusion

In this study, faith-based articles related to the COVID-19 discourse from the Yaqeen Institute were examined compared to wider and more generic reading of scientific articles taken from the “Covid-19” corpus available on Sketch Engine. The corpus-assisted discourse analysis of these texts led to a discovery that there are many perspectives when it

comes to making sense of COVID-19, this one in particular revolved around discussions based on the Islamic discussions put forth by writers from the institute. The analysis revealed that there are three main highlights with regard to the discussion of the Coronavirus, mostly relating to God, the sayings or guidance from the Prophet PBUH and faith-based concepts like mercy, blessings and martyrdom, which were not salient in the reference, more generic COVID-19 corpus. This highlights the specialised or stylistic use of Arabic loanwords or words relating to Islam in YIC that resonate more with readers of the Islamic faith and to a certain extent could be argued for why it could appeal to Muslims in general.

More specifically, findings echo other Islamic views on how best to respond to pandemics such as the Covid-19, namely: 1) that to earn the mercy and reward of God, one must stay in his house or his town and trust the infinite wisdom of *Allah* (having *tawakkul*), 2) that any plague, including the Coronavirus, can be either a punishment or mercy for someone depending on if one is patient and trusting in *Allah*, 3) that to make a plague (or any deadly contagious disease) a source of mercy and reward, one must believe in the Oneness of *Allah* and that all good and bad happens because of *Allah's* will, 4) that the importance of being patient during this struggle with Coronavirus is highlighted such that it is an important trait of the creed/deen, and finally 5) that martyr, according to the *hadith*, means the one whose actions serve as a witness to his patience (by not leaving his house/town) and trust in *Allah*, which in turn, alleviates a person's station in the Hereafter should he or she be tested by the effects of the pandemic (Hirani n.d.). As Muslims, the response to worldly conditions are structured according to the Islamic theology and Prophet Muhammad PBUH' guidance (*hadith*) and therefore, this study has shown that platforms like Yaqeen Institute provide the means for its users to obtain relevant information with regard to COVID-19 that is specific to their beliefs/needs.

Text producers, including authors of web-based content are now more relevant than ever as consumers of modern-day technology look to the Internet for well-informed (researched) content that they may depend on for the right information to surf their way through rough times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. During a global widespread community containment (or lockdown) as we have seen in the past few years, readers turn to the Internet for reliable content and Muslim

scholars are no different to provide the source and platform for their viewers, especially in terms of the religion. This small-scale study is limited by the data, because only COVID-19 related articles were included in the YIC. Further examination of other faith-based websites on COVID-19 discourse may prove to be useful in order to gain additional insights into how this is discussed (mainly by and for Muslim viewers) on the Web. It is also hoped to have shown the qualities of adopting a corpus linguistic approach to discourse analysis, and that social scientists may want to explore the COVID-19 discourse through use of the CADS methodology as Mautner rightfully points out: “[s]ocial cause and linguistic effect – or linguistic cause and social effect – are fiendishly difficult to match up, and rarely can a single discovery procedure do the trick” (2019: p. 4).

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