

THE QURAN BEYOND BOUNDARIES: A STUDY OF NON-MUSLIM ENGAGEMENT IN MALAYSIA^(*)

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ABSTRACT

Allah SWT has designated the Quran as a universal scripture for all humanity, in contrast to earlier scriptures revealed exclusively to specific communities. However, in Malaysia, some Muslims express discomfort and unease when non-Muslims quote Quranic verses, utilize them as an argument, or share them publicly. Grounded in this context, the primary aim of this study is to examine the ruling on non-Muslims referencing the Quran and disseminating its message. The research also investigates the methodological guidelines that non-Muslims are required to observe when engaging with the Quran and its interpretations. Furthermore, it evaluates the perspectives and attitudes of non-Muslims toward their engagement with the Quran. Employing a mixed-methods approach, qualitative interviews with 15 participants and quantitative surveys with 84 respondents reveal significant findings. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, thematic analysis, and descriptive analysis. The study found while non-Muslims express curiosity about Quranic themes, misconceptions persist, particularly regarding its rulings on women's rights, racial equality, and religious engagement. The study underscores the Quran's universal message and highlights its role in fostering interfaith understanding. However, gaps in knowledge about the Quran, particularly among non-Muslims, limit the potential for meaningful engagement.

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Notably, non-Muslims demonstrate varying levels of interest in topics like science, morality, and interfaith interaction. The study advocates for clear guidelines on non-Muslim interaction with the Quran to uphold its sanctity while encouraging respectful and informed engagement. This research provides critical insights for *da'wah* efforts and contributes to enhancing interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding in a multireligious context.

Keywords: *Quranic Themes, Non-Muslim, Interfaith Engagement, Misconception, Interaction*

1. INTRODUCTION

Muslims today encounter numerous problems in economics, politics, society and community life. These include issues related to sensitivity, and religious use and interpretation of Quranic verses and Hadiths. The Muzakarah of the National Fatwa Committee has identified cases of Quranic misuse, where verses were manipulated for personal or specific agendas (JAKIM, 2015). This situation is further compounded by the growing misuse of Quranic verses by companies and traders to enhance sales, such as reciting Quranic verses over specific products (Suraiya, O et.al., 2019). Among the commercial products that exploit Quranic verses are mineral water bottles that have been infused with Quranic recitations, either the complete 30 chapters or selected portions (Mynewshub, 2024). These products are subsequently sold at a premium price compared to regular ones. Moreover, Quranic verses are misused in the form of talismans or amulets, love charms for couples facing marital issues, and incantations employed by shamans or traditional healers (Abd Razzak, M et.al., 2019). Even more alarming is the misuse of Quranic verses as song lyrics, as witnessed in South Korea (Arrahmah, 2024). These instances show that some Muslims have deviated from the true teachings of Islam. Misuse of Quranic verses led to government intervention through the Printing of Quranic Texts Act 1986, which prescribes penalties for such actions. While these issues concern misuse among Muslims, an important question arises: how does this extend to misuse by non-Muslims?

Recently, there has been a growing trend of non-Muslims quoting Quranic verses, causing dissatisfaction among Muslims. A notable controversy involved Howard Lee Chuan How, a DAP leader and Member of Parliament for Ipoh Timur, who cited Surah An-Nisa, verse 59 which emphasizes obedience to Allah, the Prophet, and those in authority to encourage Muslims to support the government (Berita Harian, 2023; Kosmo, 2023). He further criticized

opposition parties for persistently opposing the government while using religion, race, and nationalism as propaganda to gain votes.

His actions drew widespread criticism for allegedly insulting Islam and misinterpreting a Quranic verse. He defended himself by stating that he only quoted the verse after consulting scholars on its context (Sinar Harian, 2023). Several police reports were filed, the Mufti of Penang responded firmly, and the Minister of Religious Affairs summoned the Ipoh Timur MP, advising greater caution in quoting Quranic verses. The issue of non-Muslims using Quranic verses is far from trivial. If not addressed appropriately, it could have serious implications for national security, as demonstrated by the massive protests in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2016. These demonstrations were sparked by the then-Governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (commonly known as Ahok), who cited a verse from Surah Al-Ma'idah in relation to the issue of appointing non-Muslims as leaders. In this context, there is also the Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment 1988, which prohibits non-Muslims from using terms associated with Islam (Enakmen Agama Bukan Islam (Kawalan Pengembangan Di Kalangan Orang Islam), 1988).

The question arises: does Islam forbid non-Muslims from quoting Quranic verses, or are there exceptions that allow it? If prohibited, would this not contradict the Quran's universality for all humanity? Moreover, if non-Muslims cite the verses accurately, are they still restricted? Such prohibitions may affect dakwah efforts, especially since Muslims also quote from other scriptures such as the Bible, Hindu, and Buddhist texts. Notably, Zakir Naik often uses this method in his preaching, effectively leading many non-Muslims to embrace Islam (Hakim A.N. et al., 2024).

There are also opinions suggesting that the issue of non-Muslims using Quranic verses is merely a political ploy by opposition parties in Malaysia to garner votes (Shahabudin.S, 2023). This is evident as several opposition leaders from among non-Muslims have also quoted verses from Surah Al-Baqarah during political campaigns. What has been discussed above reflects the reality of non-Muslim interactions with the Quran. This raises another question: what about Muslims who use Quranic verses for political purposes to justify that their party is on the right path while portraying opposing parties as being in the wrong?

Based on these facts, a study on the rulings, methods, and perceptions of non-Muslims engaging with the Quran could provide important guidelines. The Quran, unlike the Torah and the Gospel which were revealed to specific communities and time periods, is a universal scripture for all humanity. It serves not only as guidance for Muslims but also holds value for non-Muslims, many of

whom have discovered the truth of Islam after reading and reflecting upon it. Thus, the Quran is not exclusively for Muslims but offers benefits to all people.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method methodology, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the views and perceptions of non-Muslims towards the Quran. According to Mathison and Denzin, this method aims to gather more robust and comprehensive data due to its diverse techniques in data collection and analysis (Darusalam, G., & Hussin, S. 2021). The design of this study follows the Sequential Exploratory Design. The exploratory sequence begins with qualitative methods conducted first through semi-structured interviews, followed by quantitative methods in the form of surveys using questionnaires. This approach allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of key issues before obtaining broader data through the survey study (Ghazali & Sufean, 2021). Purposive sampling is a technique used to select study participants based on specific criteria determined by the researcher. This method ensures that the data collected is highly relevant and accurate for the particular study being conducted, as participants are chosen for their knowledge, experience, or characteristics that align with the research objectives (Sugiyono, S, 2010).

At the initial stage of the study, 15 informants were selected for in-depth interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), a sample size of 15 is adequate for qualitative research, especially when the focus is to explore specific experiences or issues in depth (Braun, V., & Clarke, V, 2013). These informants consist of non-Muslims with diverse backgrounds. The interviews aim to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and views regarding the Quran. Additionally, the interviews help the researcher identify key issues or important themes that can serve as a guide for the next phase of the study.

The interview findings were used to develop questionnaire items aligned with the main themes, which were then administered to 84 non-Muslim respondents to obtain broader insights into their perceptions of the Quran. This quantitative phase aimed to capture general patterns of perception and interaction. Consistent with Gorsuch's (1983) guideline of five respondents per item for factor analysis, the sample size of 84 was considered adequate to assess both understanding of the Quran and inclination to engage with it.

For the analysis, qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated through a between-method triangulation approach, which minimizes the limitations of individual methods and enhances validity (Denzin, 2009). Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to identify patterns and tendencies in

the data (Mwansa et al., 2022), providing a balanced foundation for integrating qualitative narratives with quantitative results and strengthening the overall interpretation.

This study focused on the Malaysian context as a multi-ethnic nation, considering historical, cultural, and political narratives in shaping non-Muslim perceptions of Islam. The research questions were intentionally framed around sensitive Quranic themes. Acknowledging that the researcher's background in Quranic and Hadith studies could influence interpretation, contextual reflexivity was employed to mitigate bias and situate the data within Malaysia's socio-cultural environment (Walsh, 2003). Ethically, the study aimed to contribute meaningfully to its context while generating new insights into how participants' engagement shaped their practices and social realities (Bishop et al., 2022).

3. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF NON-MUSLIM INTERACTION WITH THE QURAN

The Quran has been a source for dawah to non-Muslims since its initial revelation in Mecca, where the primary purpose was to invite humanity to embrace Islam (Wan Abdullah et al., 2021). Many early revelations were universal, as reflected in Surah Ibrahim, verse 52, which emphasizes guidance for all people. The use of *lil-nās* ("for humanity") highlights this universality. After the migration to Medina, however, the audience shifted, with verses increasingly directed toward Muslims and the People of the Book, namely Jews and Christians.

1. The Era of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) conveyed the Quranic message while spreading Islam, which drew both acceptance and rejection. Many relatives and companions embraced Islam, including Saidina Umar al-Khattab, whose heart was softened upon hearing the Quran's recitation, leading to his conversion. This highlights the Quran's transformative power in guiding individuals toward the truth (Patmawati, 2016).

From a negative perspective, Quranic da'wah in Mecca faced strong opposition, culminating in a boycott by the Quraysh leaders. A major cause of resistance was their rejection of verses on resurrection after death, reflecting deeply ingrained beliefs and traditions (Donner, 2007). This rejection, documented in several Quranic chapters, underscores the challenges encountered by the Prophet in conveying the divine message. Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Isra, verse 98: "That is their recompense because they disbelieved in Our verses and said, "When we are bones and crumbled particles, will we [truly] be resurrected [in] a new creation?"

According to Tafsir Ibn Kathir (2010), this verse illustrates the astonishment and disbelief of the polytheists regarding the accusations of their disbelief and the concept of resurrection in the Hereafter as presented in the Quran. The dissatisfaction also arose from questions and disputes regarding the concept of the Hereafter, or life after death and the fate of the polytheists in Hell. This led them to accuse Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) of being the author of the Quran (Azmi, et.al., 2017).

2. The Era After The Demise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

The passing of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not halt the spread of the Quran; instead, it was vigorously continued by the Prophet's companions and has persisted through to the present generation. However, this dissemination of Quranic knowledge did not deter Islam's adversaries from distorting and criticizing the Quran. As a result, during the era of the Rashidun Caliphs, restrictions were imposed on non-Muslims studying the Quran. These restrictions led to the absence of written critiques of the Quran from that period, with such works only emerging during the Umayyad dynasty when non-Muslims gained greater access to Islamic texts (Ahmad Sanusi, et.al., 2017).

At the end of the Umayyad dynasty, John of Damascus wrote *Pēgē gnōseōs* (*Fount of Knowledge*), which criticized aspects of the Quran such as polygamy (Glei et al., 2017). Similarly, a letter by Leo III (717–741 CE) expressed open criticism, claiming that the Quran was fabricated by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Alī Abū Ṭālib, and Salmān al-Fārisī (Swanson, 2010). During the Abbasid era, criticism of the Quran became more widespread, leading to works such as *Tafnīd al-Quran* (Swanson, 2010) and *Risalah 'Abd al-Masih al-Kindī* (Troupeau, 2017; Bottini, 2017), alongside writings by Niketas of Byzantium. This period also saw frequent public debates between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars over the Quran's authenticity. A central point of contention was its authorship, with critics portraying it as a human composition rather than divine revelation. One notable debate occurred between Timothy I (d. 823) and Caliph al-Mahdi, focusing on the Quran's authenticity and divine origin (Heimgartner, 2010).

Not all encounters with the Quran were marked by opposition; many were inspired by its miraculous nature and embraced Islam. Maurice Bucaille, a French surgeon, was impressed by verses containing scientific facts, concluding that the Quran's alignment with modern discoveries proves it could not have been authored by a human (Bigliardi, 2012). Similarly, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe emphasized that understanding the Quran requires ethics and deep reflection rather than a hasty reading (Hodkinson, 2016).

4. ISLAMIC RULINGS ON NON-MUSLIMS'S INTERACTIONS WITH THE QURAN

Islam does not prohibit non-Muslims from engaging with the Quran, but specific limitations exist to preserve its sanctity. Scholars have long deliberated rulings on various forms of interaction, including touching, reading, debating, and practicing its teachings. Such engagement must be guided by sincere intention, proper etiquette, and respect, recognizing the Quran as a sacred scripture and universal source of guidance. Among the key issues debated by scholars are:

a. The Ruling on Holding or Touching the Quran

i. The Quranic Mushaf Without Translation and Interpretation.

Islamic Scholars maintain that non-Muslims are not permitted to handle or touch the Quran in its original Arabic form without translation. This ruling is derived by analogy to the requirement for Muslims themselves, who must be in a state of purity from both minor and major ritual impurities (*ḥadath*) before holding or touching the Quran. This is mentioned by some scholars in the book *Al-Mawsū'ah al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kuwaytiyyah*, which states that a complete Quranic mushaf, without interpretation or translation, cannot be touched except by those who are in a state of ablution (*wudu*) (*Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah* 2010). This is further reinforced by the words of Allah SWT in Surah Al-Waqi'ah, verse 79, which means: “None touch it except the purified.”. According to the interpretation of Ibn Kathir, this verse emphasizes that the Quran can only be touched by those who are pure and clean (Ibn Kathir, 2010).

ii. The Quran with Translation and Interpretation.

Imam Nawawi, in his book *Al-Majmu' Syarh Al-Muhadzab*, states that non-Muslims are permitted to touch or hold the Quran that contains translations and interpretations, as it is not considered an original mushaf (Al-Nawawi, 2010). This is supported by the opinion of scholars from the Shafi'i school of thought, which states that it is permissible to touch the Quran that contains more interpretation than Quranic verses (*Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah* 2010). The reasoning is that such a Quran has become a mix of the original text and external texts in the form of its translation and interpretation. The justification for allowing the holding of translated and interpreted Quran is to facilitate Islamic outreach efforts through the dissemination of Quranic translations and interpretations.

iii. Quran Translation.

There are Quran translations printed without including the Arabic Quranic text, such as *The Clear Quran* by Mustafa Khattab, which is one of the English translations of the Quran. This translation greatly facilitates non-Muslim readers from various backgrounds in understanding the content of the Quran. Non-Muslims are permitted to touch or hold such Quran translations, as if a Quran with translations is allowed, then a standalone translation is undoubtedly even more permissible.

b. The Ruling on Reading the Quran.

There are two perspectives regarding non-Muslims reading the Quran. Scholars agree it is impermissible if done with mockery, but permissible when approached with sincerity and the intention to learn. This view is supported by the Prophet's letter to Heraclius, which included Quranic verses, and by Imam al-Nawawi, who allowed teaching the Quran to non-Muslims in the hope of guiding them to Islam (Al-Nawawi, 2010). Such engagement serves as da'wah, consistent with Surah al-Nahl (16:125), which emphasizes wisdom and good instruction. Imam al-Tabari also highlighted that dialogue with non-Muslims must be truthful and conducted wisely (At-Tabari, 2010). If non-Muslims read the Quran in Arabic, they are required to uphold proper etiquette and respect its sanctity.

c. The Ruling on Using the Quran as Evidence or Argumentation.

The use of Quranic verses by non-Muslims is permissible if they do not mock or distort the meaning of the verses in a way that deviates from their original context. Therefore, quoting Quranic verses in the context of interfaith dialogue is allowed, provided there are no elements of insult and the intention is to understand Islam. According to Wahbah az-Zuhayli in his book *Al-Fiqh al-Islami wa Adillatuhu*, non-Muslims are permitted to study the Quran, as well as fiqh and other similar Islamic sciences (Al-Zuhayli, n.d). Debating using the Quran is permitted under the following conditions:

- i. Intended to seek truth.
- ii. No distortion of the original meaning.
- iii. Referencing recognized quranic interpretations or scholars.
- iv. Free from personal interest and malicious intent.

d. The Ruling on Practicing the Teachings of the Quran.

Non-Muslims are not restricted from practicing Quranic teachings, as its principles are universal and aligned with human nature. Values such as honoring parents, avoiding theft, and helping those in need are applicable to all, fostering social harmony. This universality is reflected in Surah Al Anam (151–153), which emphasizes moral conduct including kindness to parents, prohibition of unlawful killing, adultery, and exploitation of orphans. These teachings serve as guidance not only for Muslims but can also be a moral framework for non-Muslims.

The Quran prescribes specific rulings for Muslims, including acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, zakat, and memorization, which are not obligatory for non-Muslims. Without faith and the proper intention (*niyyah*), such acts are not valid forms of worship. Nonetheless, non-Muslims are not prohibited from observing or learning about these practices, as this can enhance understanding of Islam and promote interfaith awareness.

5. NON-MUSLIMS' PERCEPTIONS AND VIEWS ON THE QURAN

To gather information about the perceptions and views of non-Muslims toward the Quran, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 non-Muslim individuals. Table 1 presents the demographic profile data of the respondents.

5.1 Respondents' Demographics

A total of 15 interview informants participated, representing diverse backgrounds. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the informants.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Informants (2024)

Demographic Background	Item	Number
Gender	Male	6
	Female	9
Age	19-25 years old	13
	26-30 years old	1
	30 years old and above	1
Religion	Christian	1
	Hinduism	7
	Buddhism	5
	Sikh	1

	Atheism	1
State	Johor	2
	Kelantan	1
	Negeri Sembilan	1
	Perak	1
	Pulau Pinang	2
	Sabah	1
	Selangor	4
	Kuala Lumpur	1
	Melaka	1
	Beijing, China	1

Note. table presents the demographic characteristics of the informants (N = 15), including gender, age, religion, and state of origin. Source: Researcher’s Analysis (2024).

The data in the table reveals that the informants comprise 6 males and 9 females. In terms of age, 13 informants fall within the 19-25 age range, while only 2 are aged 26-30. Regarding religious affiliation, the majority of informants identify as Hindu (n=7), followed by Buddhist (n=5), with Sikhism, Christianity, and Atheism each represented by one individual. Geographically, the informants are distributed across Malaysia, with one non-citizen informant originating from Beijing, China.

Meanwhile, the total number of respondents involved in the survey was 84, comprising 69 respondents from the non-Muslim group and 15 respondents from the *muallaf* (converts to Islam) group. Table 2 provides a more detailed overview of the respondents' backgrounds.

Table 2
Demographic Background of Respondents (2024)

Demographic Background	Item	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	36	42.9
	Female	48	57.1
Age	18 years and below	2	2.4
	19-25 years old	50	59.5

	26-30 years old	16	19.0
	30 years old and above	16	19.0
State	Johor	6	7.1
	Kedah	4	4.8
	Kelantan	3	3.6
	Negeri Sembilan	2	2.4
	Pahang	2	2.4
	Perak	6	7.1
	Pulau Pinang	6	7.1
	Sabah	5	6.0
	Sarawak	8	9.5
	Selangor	19	22.6
	Terengganu	2	2.4
	Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur		
	Melaka	1	1.2
	Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan		
	Lain-lain	7	8.3
Education	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)	1	1.2
	Diploma	2	2.4
	Bachelor's Degree	62	73.8
	Master's Degree	16	19.0
	PhD (Doctor of Philosophy)	1	1.2
	Others	2	2.4
Religion	Christian	13	15.5
	Hinduism	16	19.0
	Buddhism	23	27.4
	Islam (Muallaf)	15	17.9
	Others	17	20.2

Note. table summarizes the demographic background of respondents (N = 84) in terms of gender, age, state, education, and religion. Source: Researcher’s Analysis (2024).

Based on the interviews and surveys conducted, there were diverse responses regarding their knowledge and perceptions of the Quran in general. Tables 3 and 4 below present the detailed findings.

Table 3
Knowledge Question Section on Non-Muslims General Views Toward the Quran

Question	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Have you ever heard about the Quran?	Yes	82	97.6
	No	2	2.4
Did you know that the Quran's content is universal, addressing all of humanity regardless of religion, race, or nationality?	Yes	39	46.4
	No	45	53.6
Did you know that the Quran has other books that explain its verses?	Yes	46	54.8
	No	38	45.2

Note. table presents non-Muslims’ general knowledge about the Quran, focusing on awareness of its existence, universality, and explanatory texts. Source: Researcher’s Analysis (2024).

All informants reported familiarity with the Quran, either through household translations, discussions, or references from friends, though their level of understanding varied. Survey data indicates that 97.6% (n = 82) had heard of the Quran, while 2.4% (n = 2) had not. Most respondents’ awareness was attributed to Islam’s status as Malaysia’s official religion, whereas non-Malaysian respondents were less familiar due to limited exposure to religious diversity.

The informants expressed a range of views regarding the Quran's universal nature. A small number of informants acknowledged their lack of awareness about this aspect of the Quran. In contrast, some informants recognized the Quran as a guide for life, relevant to all of humanity, regardless of religious affiliation. These responses align with the concept of the Quran's

universal applicability. The survey reveals that 46.4% (n=39) of respondents were aware of the Quran's universal nature, while 53.6% (n=45) were not. The percentage distribution between both response options appears relatively balanced.

On the topic of the interpretation (*tafsir*) of the Quran, most informants indicated that they were either unaware of it or had never encountered the concept. Only a small number of informants knew or had heard about the existence of *tafsir* books. However, survey findings showed a slight difference, with 45.2% (n=38) of respondents being unaware of the existence of Quranic interpretations, while 54.8% (n=46) were aware of them.

Table 4
Perception-Based Question Section on Non-Muslims General Views Toward the Quran

Question	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
As you are aware, Malaysian society is a pluralistic community consisting of various ethnicities and religions. In your opinion, is it necessary for each group in the community to get to know one another, including learning about each other's religions and sacred texts?	Yes	64	76.2
	No	20	23.8
Are you interested in learning about the content of the Quran?	Yes	56	66.7
	No	28	33.3
If your answer above is "No," would you be interested if I explained the Quran to you?	Yes	12	14.3
	No	16	19.0

Note. table summarizes non-Muslims' perceptions of the Quran in the Malaysian pluralistic context, including views on interreligious understanding, interest in learning, and openness to explanation. Source: Researcher's Analysis (2024).

Based on the surveys, 14 informants agreed on the concept of interfaith understanding. This statement was supported by the survey results, where 76.2% (n=64) of respondents answered "Yes" as a sign of agreement, while 23.8% (n=20) of respondents answered "No." These findings are reinforced by interview data, which highlighted the importance of understanding each other's sacred texts and religions as a crucial step in fostering mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for one another's beliefs. This, in turn, helps to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, particularly within the context of Malaysia's multireligious society.

The informants demonstrated varying levels of interest in the Quran. The majority expressed a desire to learn more about its content, while a smaller group showed limited interest, seeking only general information. This is supported by survey results, which revealed that 66.7% (n=56) of respondents were interested in learning about the Quran, while the remaining 33.3% (n=28) were not. Interestingly, of the 33.3% (n=28) who were initially not interested, only 14.3% (n=12) expressed a willingness to receive further explanations about the Quran. Among those who showed interest, they specified that any explanation should be concise and not feel overly imposed upon them. In terms of interest in themes within the Quran, the majority expressed interest in topics such as family, science, women, technology, the afterlife, crime in Islam, self-motivation, and Islamic guidelines.

This study also explores participants' understanding of rulings on non-Muslims' interaction with the Quran, particularly holding, reading, and debating its contents. Most informants saw no issue with non-Muslims holding the Quran if done respectfully, while a few (n = 2) had never done so but did not view it as problematic for educational purposes. Some, however, refrained due to uncertainty or advice from others. Overall, participants regarded the matter as non-controversial when approached with respect for the sacred text.

On the issue of reading the Quran, most informants viewed it as not being a significant issue as long as it is done with good intentions and full respect. Several informants (n=11) emphasized that non-Muslims reading the Quran should aim to gain knowledge or understand Islamic teachings, not to mock or ridicule it. The study also found that some informants (n=2) expressed admiration when non-Muslims show an interest in reading the Quran, considering it a sign of their willingness to understand other religions.

On the issue of non-Muslims using the Quran as evidence or argumentation to support their interests, perceptions varied depending on the context and purpose of its use. The majority of informants (n=13) expressed no objection to the use of Quranic verses in daily discussions, provided they are employed with good intentions and in an appropriate context. Some emphasized

that such verses must be used correctly and respectfully, particularly in the presence of those who understand the content of the verses. A few informants found it intriguing or admirable when non-Muslims used Quranic verses, while others expressed uncertainty or felt they lacked sufficient knowledge to offer a well-formed opinion on the matter. Overall, informants agreed that the context, intention, and manner in which Quranic verses are used are crucial factors in determining their appropriateness.

This study also examines non-Muslims' views and perceptions on specific issues and themes found in the Quran. Interviews and surveys with the informants revealed varied feedback and differing viewpoints concerning particular issues addressed in the Quran. Table 5 and 6 below detailing the findings:

Table 5

Knowledge Question Section on Non-Muslims' Views Toward Issues in the Quran

Question	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you know that there are verses in the Quran that elevate and honor the status of women?	Yes	31	36.9
	No	53	63.1
Do you know that there are verses in the Quran that oppose racism?	Yes	24	28.6
	No	60	71.4
Do you know that there are verses in the Quran that do not differentiate the rewards for men and women for the same actions?	Yes	19	22.6
	No	65	77.4

Do you know that there are verses in the Quran that emphasize being kind to non-Muslims?	Yes	27	32.1
	No	57	67.9
Do you know that the Quran mentions the prohibition of certain foods and drinks due to their significant harm?	Yes	54	64.3
	No	30	35.7
Do you believe in the scientific facts mentioned in the Quran?	Yes	48	57.1
	No	36	42.9

Note. This table presents non-Muslims' knowledge of specific Quranic teachings, including women's status, anti-racism, equal rewards, kindness toward non-Muslims, dietary prohibitions, and scientific facts. Source: Researcher's Analysis (2024).

The study explored respondents' awareness of selected Quranic verses across several thematic areas. With respect to verses that elevate and honour the status of women, only 36.9% (n = 31) of respondents reported awareness of Quranic passages concerning women, while 63.1% (n=53) were unaware of them. The majority of informants, nonetheless, appeared unaware of specific Quranic verses addressing women.

A similar pattern was observed in relation to verses opposing racism, with 71.4% (n=60) of respondents were unaware of such verses, while the remaining 28.6% (n=24) were aware of their existence. Most informants were unaware of Quranic verses opposing racism, although a few recognized that the Quran advocates the principles of equality and justice.

When asked about Quranic verses that emphasize equal rewards for men and women who perform the same deeds, the findings revealed a limited level of knowledge. A significant majority, 77.4% (n=65) of respondents answered "no"

when asked whether they were aware of such verses. The majority of informants, however, seemed unaware of the specific Quranic verses that emphasize equal rewards for men and women.

Furthermore, the informants' knowledge about Quranic verses emphasizing the treatment of non-Muslims is low, as 67.9% (n=57) of respondents were unaware of their existence. Awareness about verses prohibiting certain foods and drinks due to their harmful effects was considerably higher with 64.3% (n=54), of respondents were aware of these verses, while 35.7% (n=30) were not. Only a small number of informants were aware of the Quranic verses related to the prohibited foods and drinks in Islam.

One proof of the Quran's miraculous nature is its alignment with modern scientific facts. Informants' perceptions varied, though most acknowledged a relationship between the Quran and science, often contingent on supporting evidence. Some emphasized that scientific references in the Quran affirm God's majesty and the truth of Islam. Overall, belief was relatively balanced, with 57.1% (n = 48) affirming and 42.9% (n = 36) rejecting the scientific facts mentioned in the Quran.

Table 6

Perception-Based Question Section on Non-Muslims' Views Toward Issues in the Quran

Question	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What is your view on women's rights in Islam?	Islam holds women in high esteem and regards them with honour and dignity.	31	36.9
	Islam does not uphold women's rights and discriminates against them.	6	7.1
	Islam places the position of men higher than women.	44	52.4
	Islam opposes racism	19	22.6

What is your view on racism in Islam?	Islam is for all of humanity	43	51.2
	Islam practices racism	13	15.5
What is your view on equality between men and women in terms of the rewards for their actions?	Men and women receive equal rewards for the same actions	60	71.4
	Men receive greater rewards than women for the same actions	7	8.3
	Women must perform more actions than men to receive rewards equal to those of men	12	14.3
What is your view on how Islam treats non-Muslims?	Islam emphasizes good treatment toward non-Muslims	49	58.3
	Islam forbids being kind to non-Muslims	-	-
	Islam prioritizes the rights of Muslims over the rights of non-Muslims	29	34.5
What is your view on the prohibition of certain foods and drinks in Islam?	Islam is a religion that prohibits various types of food and drink	25	29.8
	Islam is a religion that restricts freedom in food and drink consumption	11	13.1
	Islam prioritizes the safety and health of its followers	45	53.6

Note. This table summarizes non-Muslims' perceptions regarding issues in the Quran, specifically on women's rights, racism, equality of rewards, treatment of non-Muslims, and dietary prohibitions. Source: Researcher's Analysis (2024).

Theme 1: Women's Rights in Islam

Regarding the issue of women's rights in the Quran, some informants (n=5) expressed the belief that Islam views women as inferior, granting men preference over women. A few informants (n=2), however, highlighted the presence of numerous Quranic verses that uphold women's rights, though they emphasized these are often subject to misinterpretation. Survey results revealed that 36.9% of respondents (n=31) agreed that Islam holds women in high regard and honors them, whereas 7.1% (n=6) believed that Islam discriminates against women and fails to protect their rights. Interestingly, 52.4% (n=44) of respondents believed that Islam places men in a higher position than women.

Theme 2: Racism in Islam

On the issue of Islam's view on racism, the majority of informants (n=15) believed that Islam is not racist, while some held the opposite view depending on their personal experiences with racial discrimination. According to the survey results, the majority, 51.2% (n=43) of respondents, stated that Islam is for all of humanity. 22.6% (n=19) of respondents agreed that Islam opposes racism, while only 15.5% (n=13) of respondents stated that Islam is racist.

Theme 3: Equality of Rewards for Men and Women

This item examines non-Muslims' perspectives on gender equality in spiritual rewards. While some informants associated inequality with inheritance rights, most believed men and women receive equal rewards for religious deeds. Survey findings support this, with 71.4% (n = 60) agreeing that rewards are equal, 8.3% (n = 7) believing men receive greater rewards, and 14.3% (n = 12) suggesting women must perform more deeds to attain equivalent rewards.

Theme 4: Islam's Treatment of Non-Muslims

From the perspective of how Muslims treat non-Muslims, the majority of informants stated that Islam treats non-Muslims well as long as they do not engage in warfare against Muslims. Some believed that Islam teaches good treatment of all people, regardless of their religion. Most informants' views align with the survey findings. 58.3% (n=49) of respondents chose that Islam emphasizes good treatment toward non-Muslims, while 34.5% (n=29) stated that Islam prioritizes the rights of Muslims over those of non-Muslims.

Theme 5: Prohibition of Certain Foods and Drinks in Islam

Another perception measured in this study was the issue of the prohibition of certain foods and drinks in Islam. Many informants understood and accepted this concept, with the awareness that the prohibition is rational, especially in terms of hygiene and health. This aligns with the survey findings, where 53.6% (n=45) of respondents believed that Islam prioritizes the safety and health of its followers. Some informants linked this concept with similar prohibitions in other religions, which also have their own regulations. Overall, the informants did not view this prohibition as a major issue and understood the reasons behind it.

This study also identified respondents' tendencies toward the themes of the Quran, which were found to be at a moderately high level, with a mean value of 3.69 and a standard deviation of 0.83. This indicates that respondents have a curiosity about the themes in the Quran. The two themes with the highest mean scores are the theme of interaction with non-Muslims, with a mean value of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 1.02, followed by the theme of scientific facts, the Big Bang Theory, and Embryo, with a mean score of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.99. The lowest mean score, with a value of 3.32 and a standard deviation of 1.29, is for the theme of the concept of God's Mercy. However, all themes are ranked at a moderately high level for their respective mean scores. The following table 7 presents the findings statistically:

Table 7
Respondents' Tendency Toward Themes in the Quran

No	Item	STB	TB	TP	B	SB	Score Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
D1	The Quran praises and elevates the status of women.	2 (2.4)	4 (4.8)	14 (16.7)	44 (52.4)	20 (23.8)	3.90	.90	MH
D2	Scientific Facts, Big Bang Theory, Embryo	3 (3.6)	4 (4.8)	11 (3.1)	38 (45.2)	28 (33.3)	4.00	.99	H
D3	Concept of God's Mercy	13 (15.5)	8 (9.5)	15 (17.9)	35 (41.7)	13 (15.5)	3.32	1.29	MH
D4	Islam does not practice racism	5 (6.0)	3 (3.6)	14 (16.7)	41 (48.8)	21 (25.0)	3.83	1.03	H

D5	Equality of rights between men and women	4 (4.8)	4 (4.8)	11 (13.1)	38 (45.2)	27 (32.1)	3.95	1.04	MH
D6	Interaction with non-Muslims	4 (4.8)	3 (3.6)	7 (8.3)	38 (45.2)	32 (38.1)	4.08	1.02	H
D7	The Quran as therapy for anxiety and depression	6 (7.1)	9 (10.7)	18 (21.4)	26 (31.0)	25 (29.8)	3.65	1.21	MH
D8	The Concept of Hope	7 (8.3)	7 (8.3)	14 (16.7)	40 (47.6)	16 (19.0)	3.61	1.14	MH
D9	Community Life	6 (7.1)	6 (7.1)	13 (15.5)	39 (46.4)	20 (23.8)	3.73	1.12	MH
D10	Respecting parents and women	6 (7.1)	4 (4.8)	11 (13.1)	36 (42.9)	27 (32.1)	3.88	1.13	MH
D11	The Concept of Marriage	9 (10.7)	12 (14.3)	6 (7.1)	32 (38.1)	25 (29.8)	3.62	1.33	MH
D12	Food, drink, and gambling	9 (10.7)	10 (11.9)	16 (19.0)	31 (36.9)	18 (21.4)	3.46	1.25	MH
D13	Death, Afterlife, and Heaven	11 (13.1)	5 (6.0)	17 (20.2)	29 (34.5)	22 (26.2)	3.55	1.30	MH
D14	Work and Business (Riba/Interest is prohibited)	9 (10.7)	13 (15.5)	20 (23.8)	22 (26.2)	20 (23.8)	3.37	1.29	MH
D15	Adam, Eve, Humans, and Nations	9 (10.7)	8 (9.5)	17 (20.2)	35 (41.7)	15 (17.9)	3.46	1.20	MH
Total							3.69	.83	MH

Note. STB = Strongly Disagree; TB = Disagree; TP = Neutral; B = Agree; SB = Strongly Agree. Interpretation categories are based on scale indicators: L = Low, ML = Moderately Low, MH = Moderately High, H = High. Source: Researcher's Analysis (2024).

Interestingly, some respondents also highlighted additional themes from the Quran that were not explicitly included in the survey form such as the concept of charity (*sadaqah*), environmental sustainability, the concept of sin, the position of mothers and husbands in Islam, the relationship with God, the Islamic perspective on Jews, as well as a detailed exploration of the concept of miserliness

in Surah al-Humazah, verses 1-4. Other themes mentioned were the concept of food in Islam in Surah al-An'am, verse 145, the story of Moses and Pharaoh in Surah al-Qasas, verses 5 and 6, the concept of Islam as a monotheistic religion in Surah al-Mu'minin, verse 52, and the concept of the strength and weakness of nations in Surah al-Ra'd, verse 11.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal variations in non-Muslim perceptions regarding the rulings, themes, and issues presented in the Quran. While some perceptions align with the teachings of the Quran, others stand in contrast to them. Accordingly, the discussion will concentrate on key areas such as the status of women, Islam's treatment of non-Muslims, equality of rewards for men and women, and scientific facts mentioned in the Quran. Issues such as dietary prohibitions and racism in Islam are not addressed in detail, as they generally align with non-Muslim understandings.

Islam is the most highly discriminated religion in Western countries compared to other religions (Lindemann & Stolz, 2021). Negative perceptions of Islam among non-Muslims are influenced by various factors, including misinformation, distorted media representation, and societal stigma. Many media portrayals are deliberately orchestrated to fuel hatred toward Islam and its adherents. Consequently, a pervasive stigma has developed within non-Muslim societies, portraying Muslims as prone to violence, intolerant, gender-unequal, and as followers of a religion that does not promote harmony (My Metro, 2019).

The media plays a powerful role in shaping public opinion. In China, state-controlled media has perpetuated negative portrayals of Muslims, reinforcing stereotypes that contribute to discrimination and severe human rights abuses against the Uyghur minority, including detention, torture, and the destruction of mosques (Luqiu & Yang, 2018; Yaacob & Rahman, 2021). In today's digital era, where fake news spreads easily, media influence on religious sensitivity is evident; a study in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, found social media to be the main factor fostering prejudice between Muslims and non-Muslims (Abdul Rahman & Muhammad Shah, 2020).

Many non-Muslims perceive women as being positioned as a second-class group in the Quran. Such perceptions arise because some non-Muslims view the obligation of wearing the hijab as a form of oppression, perceiving it as restricting women's freedom to express modesty and fashion (Mateen, 2022). Some aspects of Islamic teachings are also misinterpreted in ways that suggest male dominance and limit the role of women, such as the notion that "a woman

is merely a companion to her husband” (Aziz et al., 2020). Consequently, some informants expressed the perception that Muslim women are not allowed to voice their opinions in family matters and are expected only to submit to their husbands.

Surah al-Ḥujurat (49:11) highlights that men and women are not distinguished in terms of commandments or prohibitions, as both are equally accountable in accordance with their inherent nature and roles (Sakinah & Ahmad, 2023). While certain contexts reflect a precedence given to men’s opinions, Islamic teachings consistently acknowledge the dignity of women and affirm their rights in line with their natural roles (Mohamed, 2022). The Quran underscores that the true measure of human status lies not in gender or social background but in the level of piety. As stated in Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13: “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted”. This verse serves as compelling evidence that Islam upholds equal rights for both women and men, emphasizing that an individual’s ultimate status is determined by their level of piety and righteousness. This verse also conveys a universal principle of equality, affirming that dignity and distinction are grounded in moral integrity rather than biological or social differences.

In the issue of Islam’s treatment of non-Muslims, there is a view that Muslims tend to label non-Muslims as disbelievers (*kafir*) in a negative connotation. In reality, such labeling does occur when certain political groups misuse the term *kāfir ḥarbī*, which poses a risk to social sensitivity (Berita Harian, 2024). Nurturing a culture of *ta’āyush al-silmī* (peaceful coexistence) is crucial in a multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation. The Quran explicitly prohibits oppression and injustice toward non-Muslims, emphasizing instead the principles of fairness and kindness toward all people, as stated in Allah SWT’s words in Surah Al-Mumtahanah, verse 8: “Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly”. In Malaysia, the rights and interests of adherents of other religions are safeguarded as part of the privileges of citizenship. The articulation of these rights is essential for maintaining harmonious interreligious and interethnic relations in the country (Zahalan et al., 2019)

Equality in rewards for deeds, regardless of gender, is a principle consistently emphasized in the Quran. In the context of Malaysia, where Islam is designated as the religion of the Federation, the national constitution upholds the principles of freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion,

ethnicity, or gender. Islam similarly emphasizes the principles of justice and equality, asserting that an individual's status is not determined by social rank or class but rather by the extent of their piety and righteousness (*taqwa*) (Khairul Azhar, et.al., 2022). This demonstrates that Islam is not solely a religion concerned with spirituality but also one that strongly upholds the principles of social justice.

The study also show that non-Muslims accept scientific facts in Quran when supported by evidence. In fact, several scientific facts that have been discovered have been corroborated by the Quran through scientific studies conducted by both Islamic and non-Islamic scholars (Abdul Ghani, R., & Zainuddin). In the issues of women's rights, racism, gender equality, and treatment of non-Muslims, the findings revealed that the majority were unaware of the Quranic verses related to these topics.

This lack of knowledge could be a contributing factor to their misunderstandings of the Quran and its issues. A study in Germany involving 424 non-Muslim students across five universities revealed that those with lower levels of knowledge about Islam expressed more negative attitudes toward Muslims compared to their more informed counterparts (Ata & Baumann, 2021). Knowledge is thus a fundamental driver in cultivating harmony in interreligious relations (Mat Zain et al., 2024). When individuals fail to understand and internalize the principle of tolerance in religion, misunderstandings and confusion may arise, potentially leading to conflict in a multi-religious nation (Mustafar, 2021).

Furthermore, there is a prevalent misconception regarding the ruling on non-Muslims interacting with the Quran, as most non-Muslims believe they are permitted to hold and touch the Quranic *mushaf*. According to scholarly opinion, non-Muslims are not permitted to touch or hold the Quranic muṣḥaf unless it is accompanied by a translation. Although the issue of handling the Quran may be regarded as trivial by some, the Quran's status as not only a sacred text but also the word of God grants it a position of profound sanctity and significance that must be carefully upheld.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides critical insights into non-Muslims' interaction with the Quran, highlighting rulings, perceptions, and challenges. While reaffirming the Quran's universality, the findings reveal gaps in understanding and interpretation, particularly misconceptions about rulings such as the prohibition against touching the mushaf without translation. These issues stem from limited knowledge and the lack of clear guidelines for respectful engagement.

The study reveals non-Muslims' diverse perceptions of Quranic themes such as women's rights, racial equality, and science, shaped by limited awareness and misunderstandings of its verses. Lack of familiarity with tafsir further constrains deeper understanding. Nonetheless, respectful dialogue and education were found to enhance appreciation of the Quran, with respondents showing interest in interfaith interaction, science, and morality, highlighting its potential to foster mutual understanding and bridge divides.

To address these challenges, the study calls for comprehensive guidelines on non-Muslims' engagement with the Quran, covering proper handling, reading, and interpretation while preserving its sanctity. Strengthening da'wah initiatives is also essential to provide accurate knowledge, reduce misconceptions, and promote a more inclusive understanding of the Quran's universal message.

In conclusion, the Quran is a universal source of guidance for all humanity. To realize its potential in fostering interfaith harmony, efforts must focus on bridging knowledge gaps, clarifying rulings, and promoting respectful engagement, so that its message of justice, equality, and piety can be more widely appreciated.

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