

# Emergence of false realities about the concept of “Silaturrahim”: an academic social construction perspective

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness among tourism and business scholars and professionals to avoid using socially constructed academic artifacts (such as “Silaturrahim”), which do not describe their real meanings but reflect false realities constructed by scholars over a period of time. In the last decade, academic research on identifying false information has played a significant role to raise awareness among electronic and social media users so that they may distinguish between false and true reality. In contrast, studies on misleading devices, such as false information reporting and citations in published academic literature, and their pejorative consequences are rare and scant. This paper, therefore, viewed the underexamined and relatively obscure issues of false information reporting and citations in published business and tourism research by highlighting a wrongly perceived concept “Silaturrahim” from the theoretical lens of social constructionism. It has been established that factors like false information, false information citation chains and falsely attributed meanings of academic artifacts pave the way for myths and urban legends which in turn formulate socially constructed academic artifacts. These artifacts are impulsively entrusted by the academic community but, in reality, their meanings are socially constructed, therefore, represent false realities. This paper calls the experts to invest their time and efforts to further explore the proposed concepts of “academic social construction” and “academic social artifacts.” Lastly, it is suggested to develop strategies to minimize or eradicate the dreadful psychological impacts of “academic social construction” on academic communities.

**Keywords** *Silaturrahim*, False information, False citations, Academic social construction, Academic social artifacts, Tourism research

**Paper type** Viewpoint

## Introduction

This commentary critically discusses the concept of “Silaturrahim” misapprehended by Din (1989). The author introduced this concept in the business and tourism research domains by publishing an article in the *Annals of Tourism Research*. In this article, the author presented “Silaturrahim” as a compelling religious factor, *inter alia*, to rationalize his proposed framework on Islamic tourism. Besides the merits of this article, it has become a clear source



of false information perpetuated in the academic and research communities. This false information has emerged false realities in the domains of business and tourism which I will discuss in detail. It is difficult to believe that the falsehood was deliberately promulgated by [Din \(1989\)](#) rather the author mistakenly attributed false meaning to a purely Islamic concept which could only be defined and interpreted by certified Islamic verdict issuing authority. It is clear that [Din \(1989\)](#) did not consult with Malaysian certified Islamic verdict issuing authority before presenting the said concept in his paper. Unfortunately, the raised issue lies under the parasol of false information, therefore, must be addressed to counter the false narrative on *Silaturrehman* that has been built over three decades. In the current era, the research on false information has seen a notable boom in the journalism and information industry ([Yerlikaya and Aslan, 2020](#)). Whether it be within the domains of journalism and information industry or academic research, the researchers are consistently endeavouring to raise public awareness, so that they may distinguish false information from true information and avoid following mythical beliefs and urban legends ([Buchanan, 2020](#); [Letrud and Hernes, 2019](#); [Molina et al., 2021](#); [Tredinnick and Laybats, 2019](#); [Vandenberg, 2006](#)).

Literature reports that the outcomes of false information reporting and its impact on human psychology and society are detrimental. The frequent intentional or unintentional attempts to propagate false information not only develop people's perceptions and beliefs about a story and/or its actors but also instigate real world events such as Pizzagate, numerous events in 2016 presidential elections of the USA ([Lee, 2021](#)), war on terror ([Pfohl, 2008](#)). Although the negative impacts of false information reporting are difficult to experience as hard realities in the domains of business and tourism academic research, the contemporary research has acknowledged the negative psychological impacts of false information reporting on human society and its wide scale dissemination in the context of journalism ([Molina et al., 2021](#)), social media ([Buchanan, 2020](#)), mainstream media ([Tsfati et al., 2020](#)), politics ([Tredinnick and Laybats, 2019](#)), etc. However, formal studies investigating false reporting in business and tourism research contexts are rare. It is obvious that academic research and academia not only impact a wide cross section of society but also influence economy, policy making, businesses and organizations, governments, people's psychology and behaviour, etc. ([Economic and Social Research Council, 2021](#); [Fecher and Hebing, 2021](#)). Keeping the significance and impact of academic research on nations in view, I believe that accentuating the stigma of false information in the published academic business/tourism research would definitely contribute to the ongoing debate on false information and reporting.

This paper views false information reporting in the published business and tourism research through the theoretical lens of social constructionism that embarks a *sui generis* contribution to the business and tourism literature. This paper, therefore, calls the experts to address the emerging issue of false information reporting which has stigmatized the credence of academic research in the domains of business, management and tourism. This work not only identifies false information pertaining to the concept of "Silaturrehman" but also attempts to extend the application of the theory of social construction by harnessing it to the process of academic social construction which ultimately forms false realities in the academic and research communities.

#### *The pioneer's view on Silaturrehman*

[Din \(1989\)](#) thrust the concept of *Silaturrehman* into the limelight by publishing an article titled "Islam and tourism: Patterns, issues, and options". The author proposed the notion of Islamic tourism by mentioning "the social goal [of travel] which follows is to encourage and strengthen the bond of *silaturrehman* (Muslim fraternity) among the *ummah* (Muslim

community) (p. 552)". Besides its fancy look, the statement is most disturbing for the religious circles having deep understanding of Islamic concepts. The author presented *Silaturrahim* as a bond of friendship among Muslim fraternity or Muslim community. This false notion was further endorsed by many researchers as mentioned in the next section.

#### *False endorsements of false information*

As far as significant academic literature is concerned, [Adzmi and Bahry \(2020, p. 275\)](#), [Busyro \(2017, p. 531\)](#), [Jafari and Scott \(2014, p. 8\)](#), [Krishnapillai and Kwok \(2020, p. 218\)](#), [Naim and Qomar \(2021, p. 160\)](#), etc. have endorsed the false dogma presented by [Din \(1989\)](#). These authors considered *Silaturrahim* as bond of friendship among Muslim fraternity/community, the bond of friendship between the local settlers and local people who live or work in different regions, fellow travellers and new friends found during travel, Malaysian diaspora, hospitality with fellow teachers, Islamic leaders and Muslims.

In addition to the above-mentioned literature, few scholars falsely included sellers–buyers relationships ([Abjadi et al., 2018, p. 71](#)), friendship and brotherhood with buyers ([Santoso, 2020, p. 1491](#)), friendships in Islamic boarding schools ([Saleh, 2019, p. 279](#)), communication between Islamic schools leadership and other stakeholders ([Nadhirin, 2017, p. 488](#)), etc. within the concept of *Silaturrahim*. Over a period of three decades, a number of authors have defined the concept of *Silaturrahim* according to their own wishes and associated the false notions with the concept. I would call this a snowball effect. However, it is crystal clear that associating *Silaturrahim* with Muslim fraternity among Muslim ummah as presented by [Din \(1989\)](#) opened the doors to these misconceptions in business and tourism literature.

#### *What is Silaturrahim, then?*

*Silaturrahim* is purely an Islamic concept misunderstood by [Din \(1989\)](#). [Adzmi and Bahry \(2020\)](#) pointed out that the concept of *Silaturrahim* is unique to the Malays, ergo, to understand an Islamic concept that had been originated from Malay Archipelago; it is better to consult with a Malay Islamic scholar qualified to Issue Islamic verdict, i.e. Fatwa.

During online search, I found that the [Mufti of Federal Territory of Malaysia \(2019a\)](#) (Pejabat Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan, Jabatan Perdana Menteri) had already issued a Fatwa titled "Al-Kafi #1374: The Meaning of Silaturrahim." After precise and conclusive arguments, the Mufti concluded:

Hence, according to the above discussion and evidences, it can be understood that the meaning of joining silaturrahim is with family members whether through lineage or marriage by various means such as visiting them, offering help when they are in need and caring for their well-being and others.

To fix false beliefs about the concept of *Silaturrahim* that have been commonly seen among the public, the [Mufti of Federal Territory of Malaysia \(2019b\)](#), Government of Malaysia, had issued another fatwa titled "Irsyad-al-Fatwa Series 312: Warning Against Those Who Sever Family Ties". The honourable Mufti not only mentioned "Third: Maintain silaturrahim with our close relatives" but emphasised the significance of the concept by mentioning "silaturrahim is a commandment in Islam", therefore, punishable if not abide by the order of Allah and his Prophet Muhammad, the honourable Mufti signified "Severing silaturrahim is among the reasons why the punishments for a person is hastened in this world even before the Day of Judgement." Based on this fatwa, we can easily infer that, first, concept of *Silaturrahim* is applicable to family relations only; second, it is a commandment in Islam; third, severing *Silaturrahim* is a punishable offence.

After reading the above-mentioned Fatwas, one can notice that the concept of *Silaturrahim* is only applicable to family members i.e. consanguinity and affines. *Silaturrahim* cannot be applied to Muslim fraternity as reported by Din (1989) or dealing with strangers from different backgrounds, meeting new people and making new friends as presented by Krishnapillai and Kwok (2020) or other aforementioned phenomena such as friendship with buyers, seller-buyer friendship, etc. The concept of *Silaturrahim* presented by Din (1989) is apocryphal but many scholars are citing and using this as a “construct” to tap social encounters with strangers during domestic or international travel which is *in toto* wrong and misleading.

Although the sole reliance on the aforementioned Fatwas cannot be challenged, I would further till the soil to exhume the truth about the origination of the word and original meaning of *Silaturrahim* in the next section.

### *Etymology of Silaturrahim*

In language studies, etymology plays a vital role to understand the origin and meanings of words. According to *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*, etymology refers to “the study of the origin and history of words and their meanings”. To understand the original concept of *Silaturrahim*, it is essential to look at its etymology. Exploring the Islamic authentic religious sources such as The Holy *Quran* and Six Canonical Books of Hadith, the exact word *Silaturrahim* cannot be found anywhere. Nevertheless, this Arabic word was actually originated from Malaysia as reported by Adzmi and Bahry (2020). Because The Holy *Quran* is considered as the superior book of Arabic grammar, it is best to find the real meanings of the word *Silaturrahim* in The Holy *Quran*. The word *Silaturrahim* is a closed compound word formed by adjoining two independent Arabic words *Sila* and *Raham* following the standard Arabic grammatical rules. This is the word *Raham* which actually needs attention, therefore, refer to The Holy *Quran*, the following verses are reported:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ

Be wary of Allah, in whose Name you adjure one another and [of severing ties with] blood relations. (Part of verses, Al-Nisa: 1 and Al-Ahzab: 6).

وَأُولُوا الْأَرْحَامِ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلَىٰ بِبَعْضٍ فِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ ۗ

But the blood relatives are more entitled to inherit from one another in the Book of Allah. (Part of verse, Al-Anfal: 79).

In the aforementioned three verses (the under-consideration concept is mentioned only three times in The Holy *Quran*). In total, the word *Al-Arhaam* is mentioned seven times in The Holy *Quran* which also means wombs [of mothers]), word *Raham* is used in plural form in which the appellative *Raham* was made a proper noun by adding the article (Al). This means that *Al-Arhaam* only refers to a specific group of people i.e. blood relations. Hence, all other meanings associated with *Silaturrahim* are innately wrong, misleading and lie under the umbrella of false/fabricated information. The presented etymological analysis provides an additional support to my position on *Silaturrahim* and the Islamic verdicts i.e. Fatwas issued by honourable Malay Islamic scholars.

### *False information citation chain*

At this juncture, I want to spotlight a very important phenomenon i.e. “false information citation chain.” Once a false concept is frequently cited in research papers, it would

ultimately be considered as a truth because more and more researchers cite such “false information” without exhuming its credence. As I have already mentioned that, for instance, [Krishnapillai and Kwok \(2020\)](#) see and report *Silaturrahim* as bond of friendship among local Muslim Leisure Tourists and their fellow travellers or other strangers they encounter while travelling or at different tourist attractions. The authors narrated *Silaturrahim* terminology and understood its latent concept as coined by [Din \(1989\)](#), and supported by [Jafari and Scott \(2014\)](#). [Jafari and Scott \(2014\)](#) cited [Din \(1989\)](#) to understand and include the meaning of *Silaturrahim* in their study.

This creates a devastating problem of “false information citation chain.” [Letrud and Hernes \(2019\)](#) held that false, unsubstantiated and garbled conceptions are widely distributed in academic publications. These unreliable conceptions become scientific myths over a period of time. Contemporary scholars such as [Guide and Ketokivi \(2015\)](#), [McIntosh et al. \(2014\)](#), [Rönkkö and Evermann \(2013\)](#) and [Vandenberg \(2006\)](#) revealed many statistical and methodological myths and urban legends being followed by students and authors in a range of social sciences disciplines. I believe that continued proliferation of false information in the form of scientific, statistical and methodological myths and urban legends through academic publications, doctoral training, instructors’ benightedness and low-quality peer review process form “false realities”. Such mythical beliefs are constituted in the academic communities because the members of the communities often adopt conceptions originated via false information reporting and citations published in academic journals. With the passage of time and exponential growth, the emerged false realities ingrain in the academic communities would make difficult to challenge the status quo.

#### *Heading towards more destruction*

Over the past three decades, the falsely attributed meanings of *Silaturrahim* were continued to nurture as a subjective phenomenon by means of academic publications in the domains of business and tourism. However, in the past couple of years, the problem has become severe because contemporary researchers have started to include the *Silaturrahim* as a proper construct in their quantitative ([Krishnapillai and Kwok, 2020](#); [Supian et al., 2020](#)) and qualitative studies ([Adzmi and Bahry, 2020](#)). Due to page length limitations of this paper, I will only discuss [Krishnapillai and Kwok \(2020\)](#) because they included *Silaturrahim* as a construct in their study framework and operationalized it. The authors captured *Silaturrahim* with five items (p. 222), i.e. I am willing to mingle with others from varied cultural backgrounds during tours, I can build good relationships with other travellers, I can initiate a good relationship with people around me during tours, I feel a sense of belongings to the people surrounding during tours, I can interact with other Muslims in the mosque or prayer room during worship. Apart from unscientific construction of this scale, it can easily be inferred that none of the items reflect the real meaning of *Silaturrahim*. All items tap building relationships with fellow travellers who are in fact strangers.

No doubt the translation of false subjective concepts into empirical studies is exclusively corrupting the academic research and minds of researchers. [Vandenberg \(2006\)](#) featured some, among many, myths and urban legends being followed in academia in his eye-opener article. He questioned the credibility of academic research training and evaluation processes which are considered as the most trusted and reliable learning and research evaluation mechanisms by contemporary academia. The author shared his personal editorial experiences to indicate that students, authors, reviewers and editors frequently apply legendary criteria to report and evaluate the research. The most unfortunate situation emerges when they believe that they are following “what they have been taught”, therefore,

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absolute truth. But unbeknown to them, they actually apply mythical criteria to report and evaluate the research which ultimately deteriorates the research process holistically.

### *Theory of social constructionism*

Social constructionism conjectures that the world is understood in terms of social artifacts produced as a result of historical interactional interchange among people (Gergen, 1985). Instead of determining the meanings of objects or categories by natural forces, constructionism argues that the meaning of objects or categories are determined by people i.e. socially constructed (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Social construction is an intended or unintended product of social practices and cultural paradigms (Haslanger, 2006). Social constructs are firmly entrenched in our society, so they feel natural and their meaning are impulsively entrusted by the members of society, but in fact they are invented by society, i.e. their meanings are historically and culturally constructed, therefore, do not reflect true reality (Vinney, 2019; Zhao, 2020). This overall position is contrary to the epistemological and ontological philosophical assumptions because epistemology puts a focus on validity and distinction between justified belief and opinion (Cooksey and McDonald, 2011), whereas ontology helps to make believe that something or a social phenomenon makes sense or is existent (Scotland, 2012). In addition, constructionism also stands in contrast to the philosophical positions of biological realism and anti-realism (Diaz-Leon, 2013).

Social constructionism is everywhere in the taken-for granted world – whether in daily life, science, religion, education, politics, information industry and journalism (Gergen, 1985; Andrews and Chapman, 1995; Hermans, 2002; Thompson, 2019). The outcome of the social construction process is a social artifact which is called “socially constructed reality” (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Zhao, 2020). It is called reality because people firmly believe in the meanings of social artifacts because they learned them from their society, specifically, parents, teachers, friends and other social circles, without striving to dig out the origin of those artifacts. The socially constructed realities are formed through social processes and interactions (historically and culturally). With the passage of time, the differential elements of an under-construction artifact (for instance, development of falsely attributed meanings of *Silaturrahim* over a period of three decades) integrate to form a strong and influencing social artifact (*Silaturrahim* as an operationalized construct) which is believed to be true by the elements of that society (*Silaturrahim* concept published in reputed journals as aforementioned).

Whatever the protagonists of social constructionism may conjecture or reckon the benefits of social artifacts, they have been largely taken with pejorative connotations. These unreliable simulations bewitch the public in a way that they could not differentiate between social phantasm and true reality (Pfohl, 2008). This connotation is theoretically aligned with my position on academic social construction by dint of false information reporting and citations which is explicated in the next section.

### *Academic social construction*

Previously, I have explicated how false information reporting and citations in published academic articles construct “false realities” in academia. Although instances of false information reporting and citations can be found in engineering, natural sciences, medical sciences, etc., I have only focused on “false realities” emerging in business and tourism schools by debunking the falsely perceived meanings of *Silaturrahim* in business and tourism research communities. Based on above explication, I would define academic social construction as “the process of construction of false meanings of different academic artifacts to create false realities in academia”, whereas the academic socially constructed reality is defined as “an academic artifact emerged in academia over a period of time that is believed to

be true but in fact it doesn't reflect the true reality". In our taken-for-granted world we, as academicians, encounter a commonplace phrase "We are only human" (Vandenberg, 2006), although this phrase has some merit, we often use it to blanket our wrongdoings, nescience and mythical beliefs. In reality, most of us never struggled to till the soil to exhume the truth of many socially created academic artifacts we impulsively believe.

## Results

This study effectually established that the meaning of *Silaturrahim*, injected by Din (1989) in the business and tourism literature, was innately wrong and misleading because it does not reflect the true latent meaning of this religious concept, therefore, falls inside the boundaries of false/fabricated information realm. Without exhuming the true meaning of this concept, a number of aforementioned research studies adopted the said miscomprehended concept to develop their studies' frameworks and propose hypotheses. This blind following and false citations of the said misunderstood concept in business and tourism literature not only caused distress among literary religious and academic circles but also contaminated the published corpus of literature and bewitched academic minds. Keeping the significant academic and psychological destruction of scholars and professionals in mind, present study endeavoured to rectify the miscomprehended concept of *Silaturrahim* by presenting its real meaning using Islamic verdicts and etymological analysis.

In contrast to the traditional views on misinformation or false information, I decided to look into the phenomenon through the theoretical lens of social constructionism, which is, *per se*, a neoteric approach in business and tourism critique research. This study subjectively introduced the process of "academic social construction" and the concept of "academic socially constructed realities" also called "academic social artifacts" which could be helpful to study false information reporting and citations and investigate their consequences.

## Discussion and conclusion

The ultimate objective of this article was to invigorate the forsaken and taken-for-granted issues of false information reporting and citations that are being perpetuated in business and tourism research communities. The problem has become so serious as I found these issues ensconced in published corpus of literature in social sciences, e.g. Din (1989), Jafari and Scott (2014), Krishnapillai and Kwok (2020), etc. As the findings of this study imply, false information reporting and citations have not only poisoned peoples' perceptions of research methods and instrumentation, but they have also plagued theoretical development and new constructs which are considered as highest degree of theoretical contributions in social sciences (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007).

This study indicates different categories of "anomalies" spuriously shaping overall perceptions of readers and ultimately end up in socially constructed academic artifacts. These categories include false information reporting, false information citation chain and falsely attributed meanings of academic artifacts. Without exception, the outcomes of this study reinforce the position of Guide and Ketokivi (2015), Letrud and Hernes (2019), McIntosh *et al.* (2014), Rönkkö and Evermann (2013) and Vandenberg (2006). In addition, this study, besides the traditional views on misinformation, strived to look at misinformation from the perspective of social constructionism and extended the theory to better understand how academic social artifacts are formulated.

## *Recommendations and future directions*

The most important advice to my readers is to educate themselves on academic social construction and academic social artifacts ingrained in the academic communities. Trusting

any element of the academic community is not bad but one should be able to distinguish between authority figures and regular elements of academia. Authority figures in academia comprise only those elements of the academic communities who not only have certitude about something, but also have a right to that certitude. It is worth mentioning that egoistic behaviour would only worsen the stigma of academic social realities, supporting the suggestions of Vandenberg (2006), researchers, teachers, reviewers, and editors should give up the legendary conceptions and evaluation criteria by attending available resources and authority figures in related fields.

If an academic figure is interested in or has proposed any theoretical or religious concept (such as Din, 1989), new construct, algorithm, routine, statistical method, etc. he/she should seek advice and approval from the authority figure(s) in the related domain. This advice and approval should not be confused with the doctoral training process or peer review system. Please note that having a PhD in marketing, organizational behaviour or supply chain management would not confer you the right to the certitude about statistics, religious artifacts or binary logic. I would further suggest that authors should follow standard new construct development and validation practices (Anwar, 2020; Tierney and Farmer, 2002) to propose new constructs, concepts or develop scales instead of relying on unscientific and mythical methods. All the authors who are willing to study “building relationships with strangers among Muslim fraternity during travel” can adopt and follow other Islamic concepts dealing with such phenomenon, for instance *ikhwaan*, because Islam instructs to maintain friendly and harmonized Muslim society.

It is expected that future studies will explore “academic social construction”, its antecedents and consequences in detail. To do so, a series of editorials, commentaries and reviews could be published by experts. Academics are further suggested to conduct systematic search of literature to identify socially constructed academic artifacts ingrained in academic and research communities. In future studies, “false information citation chains” could be identified by conducting the citation network analysis.

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