



Media Representation of Islam: Analysing Bias, Misrepresentation, and the Rise of Islamophobia in Western and Indian Contexts

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Abstract: The media is often considered the fourth pillar of democracy and plays an essential role in influencing public opinions and discussions. Nevertheless, how Islam and Muslims are portrayed in media outlets in the West and India has often been plagued by prejudice, distortion, and Islamophobia. Research suggests that Muslims are frequently portrayed in a far more negative light compared to other religious groups. For example, an analysis of over 784,000 newspaper articles published between 1996 and 2016 showed that 80% of articles mentioning Muslims in the U.S. were negative, a trend that is similarly evident in the U.K., Canada, and Australia. In-depth case studies further illustrate this issue. In the West, following the events of 9/11, Muslims were largely depicted as potential security threats, resulting in widespread fear and suspicion. The media tended to generalize the actions of extremists to the entire Muslim population, ignoring their diversity and complexity. Such biased coverage contributed to the rise of Islamophobia, affecting social unity and the rights of minorities, particularly in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Media narratives normally align with Israeli perspectives while downplaying the experiences and suffering of Palestinian Muslims. Critical facts and contextual information are often distorted or omitted, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Voices of Muslims from conflict zones are frequently marginalized or excluded, leading to a simplistic narrative. In India, the Kashmir conflict has seen media outlets unjustly targeting Muslims, leading to wrongful accusations and manipulated reporting. Kashmiri Muslims are often portrayed as aggressors rather than victims. Political motives often dictate the coverage, obscuring the complex realities present on the ground. Partial reporting by the media further alienates Muslim communities and breeds distrust. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Muslims in India faced significant targeting, illustrated by various instances where the media spread baseless accusations blaming Muslims for the virus's transmission. Such portrayals resulted in a rise in hate crimes and stigmatization throughout the pandemic. The situation was exacerbated by irresponsible media reporting, especially regarding the Tablighi Jamaat, which was incorrectly identified as the primary source of COVID-19 spread, leading to false allegations and biased coverage. Entertainment media also plays a role in perpetuating stereotypes about Muslims. Films from both Hollywood and Bollywood have received criticism for largely depicting Muslims as terrorists or villains, leading to entrenched harmful stereotypes and an environment of fear and misunderstanding. Similarly, in India, certain movies and television programs have been scrutinized for their negative portrayal of Muslims, influencing public perception and increasing communal tensions. Given the considerable influence of media in a democratic society, it is crucial to scrutinize and address these issues of bias and distortion. Promoting ethical journalism, encouraging a variety of perspectives, and holding media organizations accountable are vital steps toward achieving a more inclusive and accurate representation of all communities, thereby enhancing the democratic structure, basic reforms must be taken in context of media to improve the media role and media authenticity.

IndexTerms- Islam, Muslims, Media representation, Islamophobia, Western & Indian context

Introduction

This research will examine the consciousness on Islamophobia and media portrayals of Muslims and Islam in national and international level. The fourth pillar of democracy, commonly known as the "Press" or "Media" it serves as a foundation stone in the establishment of democratic governance, playing a vital & crucial role in validating the principles of accountability, transparency, and informed society or citizen of a

particular state (Kaplan A. and Michael. H. ,2010). An independent and free media is very crucial & essential for encouraging a developing & flourishing democracy, acting as a watchdog that examines the actions of the government, informs the public, and ensures smooth running and balances in the political system. However, in the contemporary time marked by rapid technological advancements and an evolving progressive society, the fourth pillar faces several challenges that threaten to degrade its fundamental role (Abosedo et al.,2012).

Media may be considered as the fourth functional unit of independent organization i.e. a democratic system, In the modern era, media (especially news media) play significant & vital roles in changing people's opinions and ways of thinking. It has impact on their critical thinking and Human minds are complex and not rational & logical in most situations, and their opinions are constantly influenced by the input they take in and media such as TV, newspaper through social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, twitter. In the past, broadcast media featuring one-to-many information acted as gatekeepers of the information flow the role of media in society is essential. It informs, educates, and influences the public. However, with great power comes great responsibility. Media narratives have the potential to either build bridges or widen the gap (Quattrociocchi et al. 2014).

This paper objective is show how media represents Islam and Muslims in this contemporary era it aims to highlight the presence of biasness and misrepresentation towards Islam and Muslims, and it will convey how these portrayals have contributed to the rise of Islamophobia. By examining examples from both Western contexts and Indian contexts, this study will reveal the consequences of such representation and suggests ways for more balanced media coverage.

One of the most sensitive issues in contemporary times is the representation of Islam and Muslims. Whether in the West or in India, media portrayals often shape public opinion towards Islam in ways that are biased or misleading. Through this complete paper I will be discussing media narratives in association with Islam and Muslims, and through examples I will be showing how media defames Islam and Muslim, denouncing Muslims many a times and at last I will be suggesting few reforms to overcome this problem

Understanding Media and Its Influence Media serves as a mirror of society but also as a glass for Bespectacled that shapes how we view the world. Through films, reports, news, social media, and other forms, media communicates narratives that become part of public responsiveness (McQuail, 2010). However, these narratives are not always neutral, they may be bias sometimes and it is an important tool that shapes cultural, political, and economic factors of the society.

Methods

The method in writing this paper is study and review of literature in context of current analytical research article & paper, the goal is to examine how Islamophobia is presented in the media and how Muslims are portrayed in national & international news outlets. This study aims to uncover the true nature of global media; it employs a qualitative approach and offers a comprehensive overview of Islamophobia by analysing existing literature. Involving theoretical framework which provides a structured way to connect existing theories to real-world research.

This analysis is informed by two primary theories: *Orientalism theory and framing theory*.

According to framing theory, given by Entman (1993), media frames play a significant role in shaping audience understanding, perception, and opinion. These frames influence details what details are neglected in coverage, what aspects are emphasized, thereby guiding public perception. In post 9/11 attack, media representations commonly portrayed Muslims through a national security lens, concentrating on the connections between Islam and terrorism.

The idea of Orientalism, was given by Edward Said (1978), also plays a vital role in this discussion. Said stated that the West has historically depicted the East—and Islam in particular—as an exotic, primitive, and threatening "Other." These orientalist themes re-emerged after 9/11 attack as media narratives revived colonial-era contrasts between the civilized West and the barbaric East. (Said, 1978).

Findings

Islamophobia through Media in the west

This is very clear in TV, movies and any other type of web series, where Muslims are often shown as terrorists or villains in Hollywood stories, Muslims are often shown as negative figures of the society and a harm to society (Shaheen, 2001). These portrayals has tremendously increase public fears and contribute to Islamophobia .through different mode and medium it has been continuously and repeatedly portrayed Muslims as ill and negative figure of the society and through this there perception towards Muslims had been changed , there is psychologist “emayu Kue” his theory methods of “conscious Autosuggestion “that depending on the notion that any thought solely occupying one's mind manifests into reality, though only as far as the concept is achievable. This means that what is seen and what is heard Is often considered as reality (Yeates, L. B.,2016).

After the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S., Western media often associate Islam with terrorism. Research shows that Muslims are often portrayed as threats to the society in news. For example, a study of over 784,000 articles from 1996 to 2016 found that 80% of U.S. media coverage about Muslims was negative (Saleem et al., 2019). Similar results show a strong biasness of media portraying of Muslims as ill figure and disgrace for the society (Ahmed and Matthes 2017). Another similar study shows the same result that 784,000 U.S. newspaper articles

from 1996 to 2016 and found that 80% of stories about Muslims were negative. Similar patterns were found in the U.K., Canada, and Australia, where Muslims are often linked to terrorism, extremist group, radical or cultural differences (Saeed, 2007).

This bias is strengthened by the language that is used. Phrases such as "Islamic terrorism" frequently appear in the news, while violent actions committed by non-Muslims are seldom associated with their faith (e.g., "white supremacist" is used rather than "Christian terrorist" (Powell, 2011). This type of framing simplifies Islam into a single narrative of violence, neglecting the wide range of Muslim identities and practices.

Media Representation of Muslims Post-9/11

The carrying out of media narrative following 9/11 portrayed Muslims as equivalent to Radical and comparing to "terrorist". This connection was reinforced by the frequent use of phrases like "Islamic terrorism," "jihadist," and "radical Islam," which were provided with clarification or context (Powell, 2011). Coverage in the news often neglected to differentiate between many Muslims and the violent actions of a small number of extremists. Consequently, Muslim identity was reduced to a singular, menacing stereotype.

A meta-analysis conducted by Ahmed and Matthes (2017) examined over 300 media articles and found that more than 80% of mentions of Muslims in Western media were tied to terrorism, violence, or conflict. This distorted representation develops the belief that violence is intrinsic to Islam, a notion widely contested by Islamic scholars and sociologists and scholars.

Muslims were frequently portrayed in a negative light, and their voices were largely missing from the development of their narratives. When Muslims were interviewed, they were often placed in a defensive position—denouncing terrorism or trying to clarify their faith (Alsultany, 2012). This minimal representation led to a narrow understanding of Muslim experiences, failing to showcase the diversity, culture, and contributions of Muslim communities. The visual portrayal of Muslims after 9/11 was similarly significant. News reports and articles regularly featured images of bearded men wearing kufis, veiled women, mosques, or devastated Middle Eastern settings when discussing terrorism. This visual shorthand fostered a subconscious link between Muslim symbols and danger (Shaheen, 2008). Such cues further solidified Islamophobic views among audiences and readers who were not familiar with Islam.

Media representation of Muslims had a substantial impact on public perception. After 9/11, polls revealed a significant drop in favourable opinions about Islam among Americans. According to the Pew Research Centre (2001), nearly 59% of Americans associated Islam with violence and extremism. This change was echoed in a notable rise in hate crimes. The FBI (2001) documented a 1,600% surge in anti-Muslim hate crimes in the year following the attacks—from 28 incidents in 2000 to 481 in 2001.

The atmosphere of fear also enabled the introduction of regulations that disproportionately affected Muslims. The USA PATRIOT Act, enacted in October 2001, escalated government surveillance authority and permitted the detention of immigrants (specially Muslims) based solely on suspicion, often without formal cause (Akram & Johnson, 2002). These actions were partly rationalized by media narratives that boosted the perception of an imminent Islamic threat.

The rise of Islamophobia post-9/11 also revealed how religion could be racialized. Muslims—especially middle eastern, South Asians, and even Sikhs—were frequently grouped together as a uniform category subjected to racial profiling. This trend illustrates how Islam, despite being a religion, was treated as a racial identifier through cultural and ethnic labels (Naber, 2008).

In the aftermath of 9/11, there was a significant rise in the coverage of Islam and Muslims in newspapers. Whittaker's research (2002) identified a remarkable surge in the number of articles that included the term 'Muslim' before and after 9/11. The Islamic Human Rights Commission summarized these findings (Saied et al. 2007, 15), which are presented in Table While there were moments when this increase in reporting featured supportive and more nuanced perspectives on Islam and Muslims, overall, the increase in representation did not necessarily reflect a more favourable view of Islam or British Muslims. (Karim 2003) argues that Western media tends to treat the Muslim population as a monolith, neglecting the diverse characteristics and differences within the global Islamic 'ummah'. In addition to the points out that this misrepresentation is further exacerbated by the media's focus on Muslim extremists and fundamentalists (Alvari et al., 2019).

Israel-Gaza conflict

The protracted conflict between Gaza and Israel continues to be a significant subject in international media discussions, often featuring narratives that influence how the public perceives the situation. After the tensions escalated, particularly due to the events on October 7, 2023, there has been a noticeable rise in Islamophobic discourse, observable in both mainstream media and online environments (Al Jazeera, 2023). This paper intends to explore the influence of media on the development of Islamophobic attitudes during the Israel-Gaza conflict, employing framing theory and critical discourse analysis to reveal the fundamental mechanisms at play.

Media Portrayal of Muslims in the Context of the Israel-Gaza Conflict

Western media institutions frequently face criticism for biased reporting that depicts Muslims and Palestinians in a negative light. A critical discourse analysis of the BBC's coverage indicated linguistic choices that dehumanize Palestinians while framing Muslims as aggressors (Irfan et al., 2023). Such narratives contribute to the belief that Islam is violent. The western media in this context played a significant role in building up the narrative and diverging the reality the news most of the time especially by the press news the message that has been portrayed to the world were often presented in corrupted and distorted form. Many such example will be mentioned below

BBC: Language, Framing, and Accusations of Dehumanization

The BBC has been widely criticized for its refusal to label Hamas as a "terrorist" organization, opting instead for terms like "militants" or "fighters." While this is part of the BBC's editorial guidelines aimed at neutrality, critics argue that this downplays the violence against Israeli civilians and may reflect double standards when compared to other conflicts. BBC News has faced sharp criticism for its avoidance of the word 'terrorist' when describing Hamas, especially after the October 2023 attack on Israel. Critics, including UK officials, accused the network of moral relativism and bias." (Foster,2023) In November 2023, a group of UK-based BBC journalists anonymously criticized the organization for its Gaza coverage. They alleged that BBC's reporting lacked historical context and disproportionately focused on Israeli suffering while failing to humanize Palestinian victims. "We feel the BBC's coverage of Israel-Palestine is biased and fails to contextualize the suffering of Palestinians... The discrepancy in the way civilian deaths in Gaza and Ukraine are covered is glaring." (MiddleEastEye,2023). The BBC launched an internal investigation into its Arabic service following accusations that some of its reporters shared pro-Palestinian sentiments or anti-Israel rhetoric on social media. Some critics took this further, suggesting the posts reflected broader anti-Israel and potentially Islamophobic editorial slants. "BBC has launched a probe into whether its Arabic-language reporters' comments crossed ethical lines amid accusations of partiality in Gaza coverage." (Kingsley, 2024)

The New York Times: Editorial Framing, Leaks, and Racist Tropes.

. In 2024, a leaked editorial memo from *The New York Times* advised reporters to avoid using terms such as "genocide," "ethnic cleansing," "mass killing" or "occupied territory" in reporting on Israel's actions in Gaza. Critics viewed this as suppressing Palestinian voices and sanitizing Israeli military actions. "The leaked memo from The New York Times management instructing staff to avoid politically charged words reflects an institutional bias that marginalizes Palestinian narratives and contributes to Islamophobic public perceptions." (Ali, 2024) Racist and Islamophobic Op-Eds Columnist Thomas Friedman published a piece that referred to chaos in the Middle East as "insect-like." Critics slammed this language as dehumanizing and orientalist, arguing it reflected long-standing tropes that portray Muslim societies as backward or irrational. "Friedman's metaphorical descriptions of Arab societies reflect Islamophobic and orientalist stereotypes that reinforce Western superiority." (Said, 2023). **Journalist's Anti-Palestinian Social Media Activity** In late 2023, a *New York Times* journalist, Anat Schwartz, came under fire after it was revealed that she had liked social media posts advocating for the "flattening" of Gaza and branding Palestinians as terrorists. Critics argued that her continued reporting on the conflict showed a lack of journalistic impartiality and risked contributing to Islamophobic and dehumanizing coverage. "Liking posts that advocate for violence against Muslim populations or favouring the post and encouraging such post raises serious ethical questions for a journalist covering a conflict zone." (Abunimah, 2023)

Social Media and Misinformation

Social media platforms have turned into hotbeds for Islamophobic content. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue noted a 132% rise in anti-Muslim hashtags on X (formerly Twitter) following the escalation in October 2023 (ISD, 2023). Misinformation campaigns often portray Muslims as terrorists, reinforcing harmful stereotypes (The Conversation, 2023).

Effects on Muslim Communities

Global Rise in Islamophobia The way media depicts Muslims during the conflict has real-world implications. In the UK, incidents of anti-Muslim hate crimes surged by 335% in the months after the escalation (The Guardian, 2024). Likewise, in the US, the Council on American-Islamic Relations has recorded a marked increase in incidents related to Islamophobia (Anadolu Agency, 2024).

Policy Consequences

Media narratives shape policy decisions that impact Muslim communities. For example, the Australian government's perceived bias towards Israel has raised issues regarding social cohesion, leading to increased funding for community support, which underscores the necessity for balanced media representation (The Guardian, 2025).

Islamophobia through Media in the Indian context

The representation of Kashmir in Indian media

It has historically been viewed through the prism of national security and territorial sovereignty. Since the rise of insurgency in 1989, Indian news reports have predominantly highlighted militant actions and cross-border terrorism, often associating these with a wider "global Islamic threat." This focus has pushed aside the civil voices from the region and treated Kashmiri Muslims uniformly as either violent separatists or Pakistan sympathizers (Zia, 2019). Research indicates that media framing of Kashmir usually lacks nuance, commonly failing to differentiate between civilian protesters, armed insurgents, and the broader Kashmiri populace. This blending creates a perception that all Kashmiri Muslims pose potential threats (Chadha & Sreekala, 2020). The frequent use of charged phrases such as "terrorist haven," "jihadi recruitment hub," and "Pakistani sympathizers" is especially prevalent in Hindi-language news outlets like Republic TV and Zee News.

Portrayal of Kashmiris as Perpetrators After Article 370

The annulment of Article 370 in August 2019 amplified this depiction. Rather than addressing the human rights consequences of a prolonged lockdown, communication blackout, and arbitrary detentions, national media mainly aligned with the government's narrative regarding "integration" and the removal of "separatist elements" (Rashid, 2020). Kashmiri resistance—whether through peaceful demonstrations or

political opposition—was often termed seditious or anti-national. Prominent media figures compared expressions of sorrow or anger from Kashmiris to support for terrorism. For instance, during the early weeks following the clampdown on Article 370, discussions on Indian news channels featured sensational headlines like "Kashmir Cleansed of Separatists" and "Freedom from Terrorism Begins" (Scroll.in, 2019). The suppression of Kashmiri voices in these discussions, frequently replaced by right-wing commentators, reinforced the duality of "nationalist vs. anti-national," invariably positioning the Muslim Kashmiri in the latter category.

Cinema and Islamophobic Stereotypes: The Kashmir Files and More

Bollywood has a longstanding tradition of utilizing Kashmir as a cinematic backdrop, often idealizing the scenery while demonizing its inhabitants. This Islamophobic undertone was particularly pronounced in *The Kashmir Files* (2022), which dramatized the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley. While it is important to acknowledge the suffering of the Pandit community, the film has faced criticism for its simplistic depiction of Kashmiri Muslims as the enactments of genocide, neglecting the political context and the Indian state's role (Ali, 2023). The film received significant backing from ruling political leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who commended it for revealing the "truth" about Kashmir. However, screenings led to an increase in hate speech, with attendees shouting anti-Muslim slogans and calling for retaliatory violence (Al Jazeera, 2022). The film fails to differentiate between militants and ordinary Muslim civilians, crafting an image of collective culpability and inherent violence—a typical Islamophobic narrative (Junaid, 2022).

Media Sensationalism and the Stigmatization of Kashmiri Youth

Indian media has also played a role in criminalizing Kashmiri youth. In instances where Kashmiri students have been arrested or accused of celebrating Pakistan's cricket victories, the media often tags them as "traitors" without allowing for legal due process. For example, in October 2021, a number of Kashmiri students were charged with sedition for reportedly celebrating Pakistan's win in the T20 World Cup. News channels promptly branded them as "anti-nationals" and demanded severe punishment (The Wire, 2021). Such media trials seldom revisit cases that ended in acquittals or were dropped, resulting in enduring harm to reputations. This situation has led to heightened surveillance, harassment, and the exclusion of Kashmiris from educational institutions and job opportunities throughout India (HRW, 2020).

The portrayal of Kashmiris as aggressors is part of a larger narrative within Indian nationalism: depicting them as an "internal enemy." This perspective not only pathologizes the resistance of Kashmiris but also casts suspicion on Indian Muslims by association. The Islamophobic notion that Muslims lack loyalty to India is perpetuated when the media suggests that Kashmiri Muslims are untrustworthy, funded by foreign entities, or inherently violent (Ahmed, 2021).

This narrative is in line with the Hindutva ideology, which stresses a uniform Hindu identity while frequently sidelining Muslims and Christians. Within this context, Kashmir becomes a symbolic battleground where the "nation" must establish its dominance over a Muslim-majority area that actively resists integration.

The Tablighi Jamaat Incident: A Summary

The Tablighi Jamaat is a worldwide Islamic missionary organization that promotes a return to religious practice among Muslims. In early March 2020, the group held its annual gathering in Delhi, attracting thousands of attendees, including participants from abroad. As the pandemic worsened, many people who attended tested positive for COVID-19. The government faced challenges in tracing and isolating all attendees, many of whom had already spread out across India. Almost immediately, prominent news outlets such as Times Now, Zee News, Republic TV, and News18 began providing continuous coverage of the Jamaat, often using alarming and sectarian terminology. Phrases like "corona jihad," "virus bomb," and "super spreaders" were employed to characterize the group and, by extension, the Muslim community as menacing and subversive (Mukherjee, 2020; Scroll.in, 2020).

Media Coverage and Islamophobia

Media reports disproportionately highlighted the Tablighi Jamaat compared to other mass gatherings that took place at the same time, such as political rallies and Hindu religious events. A content analysis conducted by the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS) revealed that 68% of news coverage regarding COVID-19-related events in April 2020 was focused on the Tablighi Jamaat, while merely 4% addressed other violations (CSSS, 2020). The tone of this coverage was heavily communal. Articles with headlines like "Corona Jihad: Tablighi Jamaat's Sinister Plot Exposed" (Zee News, April 2020) and "India's Islamic Missionaries Spread Virus" (Republic TV) portrayed Muslims as biologically perilous and ideologically threatening. By depicting the incident as stemming from religious defiance rather than administrative negligence or ignorance, the media redirected culpability away from the state towards an already marginalized group (Yasir, 2020).

Visual and Verbal Cues

News channels often showcased images of Muslims engaging in prayer or gathering, accompanied by ominous music and inflammatory captions. These visual elements helped reinforce negative stereotypes of Muslims as conspirators who disregard national laws or public health regulations. The Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) reported an increase in viewership for such content, indicating a commercial motivation behind sensationalized reporting (BARC, 2020).

On the other hand, breaches of lockdown measures by Hindu majority members were frequently minimized or overlooked. For instance, the significant crowd at the Kumbh Mela in April 2021 faced minimal criticism, even though it contributed to a severe surge in COVID-19 cases (Jha, 2021). This imbalance in coverage highlights a systemic bias in media narratives.

Misinformation and Disinformation

False information about Muslims purposely spitting in food, refusing quarantine, or assaulting healthcare workers spread widely on WhatsApp and Facebook. Many of these inaccurate reports were amplified by mainstream media without verification. A study by Alt News, a fact-checking organization, found that over 60% of the communal misinformation during the first wave of the pandemic was associated with the Tablighi Jamaat (Alt News, 2020).

Some viral videos claimed to show Tablighi members intentionally coughing in public or misbehaving with hospital personnel. Most were later confirmed to be unrelated or manipulated, yet they had already shaped public perceptions and influenced policy responses. In several instances, local authorities denied burial rights to Muslims who died from COVID-19, fearing backlash from the community (The Hindu, 2020).

State Complicity and Legal Consequences

The media's portrayal of the Tablighi Jamaat incident legitimized harsh state actions. Hundreds of Jamaat members and foreign nationals were arrested, detained, or charged under strict laws such as the Epidemic Diseases Act and the Foreigners Act. Many were held for extended periods without trial. However, in August 2020, the Bombay High Court concluded that much of the media coverage was "targeting" Muslims and criticized the police for responding to media pressure instead of evidence (The Indian Express, 2020).

The court dropped charges against 35 foreign attendees of the Tablighi Jamaat, asserting that they had been "made scapegoats" (Indian Express, 2020). This decision underscored the influence of media on judicial and administrative processes, frequently compromising justice.

Societal Impact of Media-Fuelled Islamophobia

The media portrayal of the Tablighi Jamaat incident strengthened vigilante groups and hate-speakers. Indian Muslims experienced heightened harassment, social ostracism, and acts of violence. Muslim vendors faced assaults, labelled as virus spreaders, and were barred from entering certain neighbourhoods. Public spaces echoed with chants like "go back, corona jihad" (The Wire, 2020).

The resulting stigmatization led to enduring economic repercussions. Muslim-owned businesses, especially in the informal sector, encountered diminished customer support. A survey by the Indian Muslim Council-USA (IMC-USA) indicated that over 74% of Indian Muslims reported rising discrimination during the pandemic, a significant amount rooted in Tablighi-related media narratives (IMC-USA, 2021). In the midst of this media storm, some independent media platforms and civil society groups countered the Islamophobic coverage. Outlets such as The Wire, Scroll.in, and Article 14 engaged in fact-checking and released investigative articles debunking the misinformation surrounding the Tablighi Jamaat. Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, also condemned the Indian media and government for blaming Muslims (Amnesty International, 2020). Certain courts also acted as limitations. Apart from the Bombay High Court, the Supreme Court of India in 2021 challenged the government's silence on Islamophobic hashtags and news reports, declaring that the communalization of a health crisis was "unacceptable in a secular state" (LiveLaw, 2021).

Discussion

The media's ability to shape narratives suggests that when Muslims are primarily portrayed as threats or "others," it strengthens stereotypes and exacerbates social divides. This trend is apparent across news reports, entertainment media, and even in the portrayal of global conflicts, such as the Israel-Palestine situation or the Kashmir conflict, where Muslim perspectives are often sidelined or misrepresented. In India, biased media portrayals during events like the COVID-19 pandemic further marginalized Muslims, resulting in increased animosity and social exclusion. Research shows that media is not uniform; there are differences among countries, outlets, and formats. Nonetheless, the prevailing trend persists: negative and sensationalist portrayals of Muslims are prevalent and have tangible effects, including mental distress, discrimination, and a sense of alienation within Muslim communities. To tackle these challenges, various reforms are essential. Media organizations should adhere to ethical journalism standards, promote diversity within their newsrooms, and be open about their editorial policies. Independent watchdog organizations can assist in monitoring media bias, while media literacy initiatives can empower the public to identify and confront stereotypes and misinformation. Furthermore, legal safeguards against hate speech are vital, although they must be balanced with the need to safeguard free expression.

The Role of Alternative Media and Resistance

In response to mainstream narratives, several alternative media outlets and Muslim journalists began to challenge Islamophobic framing. Platforms like Al Jazeera English, The Intercept, and independent blogs offered more nuanced takes on Muslim identity and issues facing Muslim communities. These counter-narratives sought to humanize Muslims and offer platforms for authentic self-representation. Social media also emerged as a powerful tool for Muslim activists. Hashtags like #MuslimLivesMatter and #NotInMyName sought to decouple Muslim

identity from terrorism and highlight the humanity and diversity within the Muslim world. However, the reach and influence of alternative narratives remained limited compared to dominant corporate media outlets.

Ethical Responsibility and the Path Forward

The principles of media ethics are essential for effective broadcasting, preventing the distortion of information, and upholding fundamental values such as honesty, responsibility, and adherence to the law. (Nandagopal, N.2022). The post-9/11 media environment serves as a stark reminder of the media's power to shape social realities. Ethical journalism requires a commitment to fairness, accuracy, and representation. This includes consulting a wider array of sources, contextualizing information, and avoiding loaded or stereotypical imagery. Media literacy education is also crucial in helping the public critically evaluate news sources and understand how framing affects perception. In a multicultural society, fostering empathy and understanding through balanced media coverage is not just a journalistic responsibility—It is a civic necessity.

Some reforms that should be applied to safe guard the authenticity of media:

1. Apply Ethical Journalism

The media works best and responsibility when it is ethical. Outlets in the media should stick to codes that help prevent stereotyping people due to their religion, race, ethnicity, or nationality. Organizations should set out clear ethical standards and punishments for those who make biased or extreme reports. A company's actions should be monitored by regulators and if necessary, they must use penalties to make sure companies follow the rules. Arranging workshops and passing on training in ethical journalism can improve the practice of being responsible in journalism.

2. Ensure there are watchdogs not controlled by the government.

Independent organizations or groups should have the right and authority to monitor media content unbiased. They must operate independently and not face influence from politicians or companies. Ombudsmen should pay attention to media reporting, uncover fake news, save examples of hate speech, and often produce summaries on media behaviour. Discoveries they make can improve society by telling the public and informing new laws for journalists and media.

3. Regularly run Media Literacy Campaigns

People must learn to be active users and judges of media messages. By taking part in media literacy, individuals can find out how to detect biases, examine the origins of information and judge whether something is news or propaganda. The campaigns should reach people through schools, universities, social media, and public announcements. Groups like NGOs, schools and governments might team up to create user-friendly and multilingual resources for youth and people living in rural areas.

4. Work on publishing your policies about content curation.

Being clear about their funding, who owns them and what their editorial rules are boosts the public's trust in media organizations. Being honest in this way enables people to identify biases or conflicting interests in what journalists report. Journalists' outlets should routinely give information about their owners, where their money comes from, how they go about verifying sources, correcting mistakes, and their political views. The website of every business should have this information ready for visitors.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that the representation of Islam and Muslims in media—particularly following the September 11 attacks—has frequently been skewed, negative, and overly simplistic. In both Western and Indian settings, the media has significantly influenced public opinion by consistently associating Muslims with violence, terrorism, or social problems, while neglecting the diverse and intricate nature of Muslim communities. Post-9/11, media portrayals in the West broadly generalized the actions of a handful of extremists to encompass the whole Muslim population, resulting in increased fear, suspicion, and a rise in Islamophobia. Such detrimental representations have not only fuelled a surge in hate crimes and discrimination but have also complicated the recognition of Muslims as integral members of broader society

In conclusion, altering the depiction of Islam and Muslims in the media is vital for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic society. Accurate, diverse, and respectful reporting can contribute to diminishing prejudice, enhancing understanding, and reinforcing social cohesion.

The media's presentation of the Israel-Gaza conflict often perpetuates Islamophobic narratives by spotlighting Muslim aggression while minimizing Palestinian suffering. This selective portrayal cultivates public fear and legitimizes discriminatory policies. Furthermore, the dissemination of misinformation on social media amplifies these concerns, making it essential for media organizations to implement responsible reporting practices

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