

Representation of Muslims by the Media: Psychological and Criminological Perspective

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1. Introduction

Media is regarded as a key source of information across the globe. Where it brings numerous benefits, one can not ignore the threats it poses to society in general. Biased representation of religious minorities by various media platforms not only shapes the perception of the society but also adversely impacts the members of the targeted population. Although discrimination of the religious minorities is a widely explored phenomenon, the stereotyping of the Muslim community and Islamophobia are majorly the source of concern for researchers. The research aims at exploring the impact of international media on Muslim minorities. It is intended to conceptualize the criminological and psychological impacts of biased media reporting on society. Further, the Ahmadiyya group will be specifically focused in terms of stigmatization by media. To accomplish the research objectives, a qualitative research approach is proposed under which documentary method will be used for data collection. An in-depth review of already established literature will be conducted to draw findings. The collected data will then critically analyzed to interpret the reality. The study envisions adopting all the instructed ethical norms of secondary qualitative research.

2. Literature Review

Today, people rely greatly on various media platforms to stay updated and connected and learn about communities, cultures, and events all across the world. Unfortunately, we fail to recognize the impact of media on our lives and unconsciously become accustomed to its biased opinions and stereotyping tendencies. Social attitudes and perceptions are shaped by theoretical media portrayals. Despite the fact that the freedom to practice religious beliefs, as established by the ECHR, is a basic human right, biases and stereotyping against people due to their religious preferences are still widely spread in our society (Orton, 2016). Evidence suggests that the phenomenon of stereotyping has been modified and now religious prejudice, media based discrimination, and unquestioned practices, conventions, symbols, and attitudes are various factors that contribute to this new kind of discrimination (Orton, 2016). Discrimination is a social psychology construct and it refers to the biased treatment of individuals and groups on the basis of their religion, culture, race, age, or gender. Recently, this psychological phenomenon has gotten a lot of

attention from academics, notably in regards to personality and social psychology , criminology, physical and psychological well-being, political dynamics, organizational behaviors, legislative frameworks (Wintemute, 2017). A plethora of researches has laid focus on the religious minorities from various perspectives (Wen, Aston, Liu, & Ying, 2020). , this study will highlight how representation of these groups by media can act as an antecedent for their psychological and criminological stereotyping.

The theoretical underpinning of this phenomenon can be found in social identity theory and social cognitive theory. Social identity theory advocates that every individual tends to establish a positive sense of self in society. For this purpose, people feel the need to associate themselves with a particular group (in-group). During this process, they naturally develop beliefs about those who do not belong to their group (out-group), based on ideologies or norms. The increased sense of belongingness makes people very sensitive about the in-group and they try to protect their groups from all the potential harms (Turner & Pratkanis,1998). People who strongly identify with the Dutch in-group have an increased likelihood of regarding the ethnic minorities as a danger to their social and cultural values (Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998). The social cognitive theory, on the other hand, highlights the impact of environmental factors on behavior. As per Bandura (2001), media is viewed as a tool of the environment. Individuals are incredibly influenced by their social condition through both textual and optical signals which influence the thinking process and behavioral consequences (Bandura, 2001). Since media is a major source of information nowadays, media portrayal can not only strengthen social identities but the representation of various groups in a certain way but can also shape the public's perception.

The current trends of literature indicate concerns regarding increased Islamophobia and the marginalization of various religious minorities. However, among all the minorities, Muslims are the major focus right now (Orton, 2016) The major cause for these concerns is the shift in social dynamics in Europe where after Christians, the number of people who are not affiliated with any religion is drastically increasing, and Muslims, are the greatest religious minority (Orton, 2016). The Muslim community is frequently the subject of debate in the West and is frequently perceived as social outcasts distinguished from non-Muslims communities by "bright" lines, with their faith perceived as an "obstacle" for integration

(Foner & Alba 2008). Researchers in the United Kingdom are quite keen on this topic, and studies show that Muslims are shown from a negative perspective, especially by the print media in Britain (Wen, Aston, Liu, & Ying, 2020). However, According to Khan and Eid (2011), the key source of information regarding Muslims for the Western audience is the mainstream media. The broadcast of skewed headlines in the news could probably have negative consequences for focused populations, such as intolerance and misconceptions. People belonging to these groups can also develop psychological issues that are likely to worsen under the current social milieu (Wen, Aston, Liu, & Ying, 2020).

Additionally, opinions regarding social identities not just impact the minority groups but rather the whole societies and restrict cohesion and justice (Bleich et al., 2015). Muslims are frequently presented as a group afflicted by criminal offending that differs in kind and scope from that experienced by other minorities in the UK. Such victimization has left the community terrified and anxious (Spalek, 2002). From a criminological viewpoint, victimization accounts in relation to discrimination and hate crime, as well as stigmatization by certain British media platforms and governmental authorities, seems to have taken precedence over those that consider the importance of socio-economic issues such as employment and socioeconomic status in influencing crime victimization within numerous Muslim communities. The Muslim community is West often considered “under pressure” (Abbas, 2004) and its members are described as victims of groundless hostility (Runnymede Trust 1997). Individuals and communities are frequently depicted as being under pressure (Abbas, 2004) and as victims of "unfounded animosity". This theme recurs in narratives of criminal victimization, inappropriate governmental intervention (Fekete, 2009), hatred, and prejudice represented by the term "Islamophobia" (Allen, 2010 as cited in Hargreaves, 2015).

Another major aspect is that the general population in the United Kingdom views Muslims as a homogeneous group, despite the ideological schisms, distinctions, and conflicts within the community. But in reality, there is enormous evidence that highlights the discrimination within the community. The criminological scholars are quite keen to explore the representation and victimization of Muslims in general as well as within the community. One major example of this is conflicts with Ahmadiyah (a minority that claims to be Muslim where other sects refuse to accept its claim) (Wade, 2019). While depictions of crime victimization within the community may center on physical assault or damage to

property (Wade, 2019), the prime emphasis is on crimes against religious minorities due to bigotry. The findings of a study shows that Ahmadis face prejudice and persecution on a daily basis, at the governmental as well as the societal level (Ali, 2010). In Bangladesh, this left a significant impact on the Ahmadiyah sect since owing to the fear of violence, educational institutions refused to grant fellowships to Ahmadi students; in regards to transport, even after being injured, many Ahmadis were unable to reach the clinic given the lack of public transit; and women experienced abuse and threats of being ripped away in the absence of their husbands. There appears to be a link between antagonism toward Ahmadis and religious rulings by religious councils. Attacks on the community erupted in Indonesia, once the Indonesian Council of Religious leaders deemed them to be blasphemers. Countless houses and mosques belonging to the Ahmadiyah sect have been set ablaze ever since (Hargreaves, 2015). It's interesting considering these examples to see how much impact scholars have had on anti-Ahmadiyya discrimination. It's also important to consider what's keeping anti-Ahmadiyya hatred from being confrontational in British society (Hargreaves, 2015).

2.1 Research questions

The study will has following research question:

- How Muslim minorities are represented by the international media?
- Does bias exist in media reports based on Muslims?
- How is media reporting impacting Muslim minorities?
- Are Ahmadiyyas stigmatized by mass media?
- What are the social criminological and psychological consequences of biased media reports?

3. Proposed Methodology

In the proposed study, the prime concepts or terminologies are explained as follows:

- *Religious minorities*

The term minority is generally used to characterize a specific group that is numerically inferior to the majority of a nation and is potentially subjected to the alienation of economic, social, or political rights (Tasch, 2010). According to article 1 of the United Nations

Minority Declaration, adopted in 1992, minorities have been categorized on the basis of linguistic and ethnic identity, culture, and religion. While the categorization criteria overlap, religious minorities are the group of minorities who have been internationally offered both religious freedoms along with other minority rights (Ghanea, 2012) and are allowed to practice their religion according to their culture and language.

- ***Media bias***

Bias is generally the result of attitudes or mental processes of an individual which results in prejudiced opinion. Waldman and Devitt have defined bias systematic inclination that prefers one ideology or individual to another (Waldman & Devitt, 1998). Media bias is defined as the bias introduced by news producers and journalists in the field of mass media regarding the interests of variable social groups during the selection and reporting of stories and events (Aggarwal, Sinha, Kukreti, & Shikhar, 2020).

- ***Stereotyping***

Stereotyping is characterized as a cognitive process under which certain characteristics are ascribed to a group which mostly leads to a unique or aggravated reaction from other classes towards stereotyped people (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). According to Saroglou, four facets of religion are responsible for its stereotyping by the distinct majority group, with different religious inclination: firstly and most importantly belief, the religious rituals, the extent of difference between the teaching of religion or personal beliefs, and the existence of atheism in the majority society (Saroglou, 2011).

- ***Criminological aspects***

The research delineates the impact of media reporting of religious minorities on the criminological behavior of the society, therefore different related behaviors are considered in this regard. The proposed study has talked about hate crimes which are defined as every delinquent behavior or crime which is appraised as, by the society, to be aggravated by prejudice or hostility (Perry, 2001).

3.1. Data Collection

The proposed study is intended to be based on qualitative research design to investigate, comprehend, explain, and analyze the situation, incidences, media actors, and their behavior is impacting the criminological and psychological aspects of the society through impacting their religious minorities.

Among numerous research methods, the proposed research will assume a documentary approach in the construction of qualitative research design. The Documentary

method allows analyzing an object or situation systematically through understanding the contextual meaning with the assistance of already established literature on the under-investigation research area. The documentary method advocates meaning, representativeness, credibility, and authenticity of the information presented (Ahmed, 2010); therefore it is the most appropriate data method for our proposed study. Documentary methods begin with the identification of concerned established data on the research study under consideration. It is followed by categorization and division of that data in compliance with the research questions or objectives. The next step is to critically review the established literature on the chosen research area. Afterward, the collected data is analyzed multi-dimensionally based on literature review and research findings. The last step is all about interpreting the analysis to make suitable recommendations. In regards to the documentary method, the collection of the data will be based on both primary and secondary data sources which will further be organized based on their content, history, chronology, commentaries, and their present relevance to the research questions under consideration. Primary data will be in the state of already published interviews, official documents, official records, and transcripts while secondary data will be in the state of periodical articles, commentaries, web sources, books, and research article journals. The search such as Google scholars, PubMed, Scopus, and Refseek will be majorly used. Emphasis will be laid incorporate literature published in the last two decades.

3.2. Data Analysis

As above described, in a documentary method the analysis is constructed on the basis of collected and organized data from existing resources. The qualitative data analysis specifically demands a critical approach. While interpreting the abundant literature, the researcher is expected to build an insightful analysis in the lieu of research questions. Documentary research design doesn't require the use of any statistical software to draw the findings and their analysis, instead they totally rely on the understanding and interpretation of the researcher (Johnston, 2017). Therefore in order to build the credibility of our research, the analyses of the study will also be compared with already constructed analysis on the topic under discussion.

3.3. Ethical consideration

Since in documentary data collection method human participants are not directly involved, so “ethical code of conduct” is not relevant (Johnston, 2017) However, secondary research is also expected to follow certain ethical norms which will be addressed in our study. It is perceived that if the information is available on a public platform or is conveniently accessible online, it is allowed to be used in the future. However, ethical values dictate that ownership must always be ascribed. Therefore, the literature review and other segments of the study will be well-referred. Similarly, if such a study is sought that is still under-conduction and the findings are not fully exposed, a written consent, dictating authorization, will be acquired by the real team of researchers which will later be attached with the ethical clearance application (Tripathy, 2013). Similarly, the subjects or actors discussed will be kept anonymous, where required. The data about the identity of such subjects will be stored separately in the anonymized file. The values of honesty and truthfulness will be strictly followed throughout the research. The religious and moral sentiments of every discussed subject and society will be taken care of. Lastly, all the contributions in the research conduction will be properly recognized.

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