

Muslim's Portrayal in International Media: A Case Study of Islamophobia

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Abstract

Present is shaped by the past, especially when it comes to media representation of minority groups and issues related to ethnicity, race, multiculturalism, and identity politics. Scholars had conducted extensive research to explore the complex relationships between the media and minority representation, and how media coverage can shape public perception and attitudes towards these groups. The finding of this research study showed that international media more often presented Muslims as the key players of terrorism. This portrayal resulted in Islamophobic narratives. Further, it was boosted by the language and framing adopted in news. The Muslims portrayal was negative especially the known events like 7/7 bombing, the 9/11 attack, Paris attack and Christchurch attack of march 15, 2019 had received coverage linking Muslims and Islam to terrorism and intolerance. This resulted in wide spread Islamophobia in the globe. The research work recommends that media professionals as well as organizations must be well aware of the result of coverage. Hence, they need to be neutral while presenting things in media.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Islam and Terrorism, Muslim Discrimination, Islam a religion of peace, BBC and CNN Portrayal of Muslims

1.Introduction:

"Submission" or "surrender" of one's will to the one and only true God, also known as "Allah," is what the Arabic word "Islam" means. "Muslim" in Arabic refers to a person who submits their will to God. This word and the Arabic word "salaam," which means "peace" in its literal meaning, both come from the same ancestor. Consequently, Islam teaches that one must submit to Allah and live in accordance with his divinely revealed laws in

order to truly experience peace and security. The fact that only Almighty Allah is divine and deserving of worship, and that everyone should submit to Him, is the most significant truth that Allah revealed to humanity. A Muslim by definition is a person of any race, nationality, or ethnicity who submits to Allah's will. Living as per Allah's message and stiff-necked accommodation and dynamic dutifulness are expected of Muslims. It is a widespread misunderstanding that only Arabs practice Islam, but this is far from the truth (Lewis, B.1990).

There has been a lot of academic research done over the past few decades on the relations between issues related to ethnicity, race, multiculturalism, identity politics, and media representation of minorities. However, Muslims and Islam are currently the focus of much criticism and discussion, out of all the minorities involved in global affairs. West and Muslim nations had been represented in the world by media as two separate nations (Ahmed, S., & Matthes, J. 2017) As for as the definition of Oxford Dictionary is concerned, Islamophobia is "fear of Islam and called it as hatred against Muslims. The history word Islamophobia was first time coined in 1976 in a journal of known as Middle East. Abu Dhabi Gallup Center & Gallup (2011).The debate about Islamophobia began in 1997, and a British think tank was recognized for its focus on multiculturalism when it published "Islamophobia: a Struggle for All of Us." They presented Islamophobia as a term that was accepted by a number of people and even the British Muslims or even the Muslims of entire world facing the consequence of such report presented in journal. The Western media's negative portrayal of Muslims started with the Iranian Revolution and the US hostage crisis in 1979, and it became even more hostile during the conflicts in Libya and the Middle East in the 1980s, according to Olmos Alcaraz and Politzer (2020). The discourse became more intense in the following decades, particularly with the wars in Iraq during the 1990s and the events of 9/11 in 2001, as noted by Meer and Modood (2012). West believes that Islam is against democracy and danger to west. Additionally, this idea of west prevailed since 1970. However, Presenting Islam in such way by West was raised in Media post Runnymede Trust's report publication regarding Islamophobia (Edvardsson, L. 2008).

Further, in recent time research work started on said topics. Many scholars worldwide have conducted research on the connections among media, Muslims, and Islam. It's an indisputable fact that, from its inception, Islam has been subject to a pervasive atmosphere of manipulation and conspiracies that impact Muslims globally, whether in Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Burma, Rohingya, Algeria, Kashmir, or due to the manipulation and conspiracy of nations such as the United States, France, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, and China. Islam and Muslims are being targeted in numerous regions. Academic questions about Islam, such as polygamy, divorce, the veil, fornication, severe punishment for fornication, theft, (whipping and cutting of hands) Otherness of Muslims, and subjugation of

women, were raised by anti-Islam forces in an effort to accomplish their desired goals. However, in each era, the intricate webs of these questions have been successfully unraveled(Jalil, M. R. 2021).

2. Islam and Teaching

Islam provides clear guidelines that govern both individual and societal aspects of life. The first foundation is Aqidah or faith, which defines the relationship between man and Allah. Belief in the Oneness of Allah, the God of Ibrahim, Nuh, Musa, and Isa, is a crucial aspect of entering Islam and becoming a Muslim. The second set of rules, derived from the primary source of Shariah or Islamic law, transforms beliefs and faith into practical actions and daily practices. The Quran and Sunnah provide guidance for Muslims to follow Shariah in their daily lives. Ibadah is the practice of rituals that involves the practicality of ways to perform them and understanding the relationship with Allah. The second component, Muamalah, deals with the world and living things and describes the practical aspects of day-to-day life. It lays out guidelines for social, political, and economic activities and provides answers to all aspects of human life, including business, commercial, financial, and banking systems. The third set is Akhlaq, which is concerned with personal moral behavioral disposition and guides Muslims on how to act, think, and conduct themselves at work. Following the guidelines of Aqidah and Shariah helps Muslims transform themselves into individuals with good Akhlaq (Sadia, S. 2019).

3. Terrorism and Islam

The Quran is a holy scripture in the Islamic religion and is written in Arabic. The Quranic verses explicitly prohibit extremism and terrorism, and there are several verses that highlight the importance of peace, justice, and mercy. Below are some of the Quranic verses that address the issue of extremism and terrorism: "We decreed to the children of Israel that whoever kills a person, unless it is as punishment for murder or spreading corruption, it will be as if he had killed everyone. On the other hand, if someone saves a life, it will appear as though they have saved the lives of everyone. Indeed, our disciple arrived at them accompanied by all evidence of the truth: However, notice that despite all of this, many of them continue to engage in a wide range of excesses on Earth". (Quran 5:32 Muhammad Asad). This verse highlights the importance of valuing and protecting all human life, regardless of their beliefs, ethnicity, or background. It emphasizes that taking an innocent life is a heinous act and is equivalent to killing all of humanity. "O You who have reached faith, you! People who are not your kind should not be taken as your intimate friends. They will stop at nothing to sway you; they love to see you in trouble. Their words have already expressed vehement hostility, but what their hearts conceal is even worse. We have indeed made the signs clear to you, if you would but use your reason" (Quran 3:118, Sahih International). This verse warns against forming friendships or alliances with individuals or groups who intend to harm Muslims. It warns Muslims

to be wary of those who spread hatred and hostility toward them and to seek relationships that are peaceful and just."Help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and transgression. Fear Allah, for the accountability of Allah is indeed severe."(Quran 5:2 Ala-Maududi) This verse shows the importance of cooperating in an act of righteousness and piety but warns against cooperating in acts of sin and aggression. "whereas Allah does not love those who spread mischief." (Quran 5:64, Ala-Maududi)

4. World Extremism and Terrorism

International security is in danger as a result of Islam's acceptance of extremism and terrorism. Terrorists are people who don't know much about religion, even the fundamental principles of Islam. These extremists' terrorist acts are in direct contradiction to Sharia. All-powerful Allah instructed the Muslims not to go past as far as possible. Injustice, ignominy, and bloodshed are all forbidden by Allah. The All-Powerful Allah commands, "And do not kill yourselves or one another, in the Holy Quran. Indeed, Allah is always kind to you. (Quran 4: 29).

This verse is frequently cited as a reminder that suicide and self-harm are forbidden in Islam and that human life is sacred. Additionally, it serves as a reminder of Allah's compassion and mercy toward his creation. The following Resolution, which will serve as the foundation for the discussion of fatwas in Central Asia's territory, is accepted by the participants in the Ulema Forum of Central Asia: Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) strictly against Suicide and the murder of innocent people. During a war, it is haram to kill people who are not involved in the conflict. The world's peace and tranquility are promoted by Islam. These Islamic principles are completely at odds with terrorist actions. Deliberate acts against Islam are extremist actions disguised as Islamic.(October 30, 2015. Almaty, Kazakhstan)

5. The Role of International Media & Its Implications

In the 1990s, the word "Islamophobia" had been coined, and it gained recognition through the report Islamophobia: A Challenge for all of us. This report was launched by Jack Straw, who was the British home secretary at the time. The report revealed Islamophobia as anti- Islam and Muslims. This resulted from the negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam. Further, reported mentioned that Islamophobia was encouraged by the media as terrorist activities had been linked by media and even some other issues like politics, immigration, education, and employment. Despite the term's widespread use in various contexts, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) produced the first significant report after 9/11 on Islamophobia. The report, titled Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after September 11, 2001, documented acts of racism and discrimination against Muslims in fifteen EU member states. The report's findings demonstrated that Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups have

become targets of increased hostility since 9/11 (Moosavi, L. (2013)). Pre-existing aggression, harassment, and prejudices have been further fueled by a greater sense of offense among the general population in many European Member States. Efforts to address concerns about Islam have occasionally sparked a new interest in Islamic culture and practical interfaith initiatives. The Runnymede Report, which was most recently updated in 2004, has documented some positive developments. However, despite these efforts, discrimination against Muslims and Islam has continued to rise, as well as hate crimes. The Danish cartoon crisis and its aftermath are still fresh in people's minds worldwide. The most powerful Christian leader in the world's 2006 address to Regensburg University is still viewed as a severe attack on Islam. Furthermore, former President George W. Bush's use of the term "Islam-fascism" surprised social and political scientists in both the United States and the Muslim world, as it only served to bolster anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world. In the 2008 U.S. presidential election campaign, erroneous religious exclusives and cultural racism were fueled by allegations of Barack Hussein Obama's "Muslim identity" and "Muslim past." This further demonstrated the prevalence of Islamophobia and the negative impact it has on individuals and society as a whole. Despite some positive developments, it is clear that Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims remain significant issues that need to be addressed. The resistance of some European countries to Turkey's admission to the European Union reflects the West's apprehension towards Islam. In 2004, when the EU Commission released a report highlighting Turkey's progress towards EU membership, Frits Bolkenstein, the EU's internal market commissioner, expressed unease about Europe turning into "Eurabia," echoing the words of Bernard Lewis. Bolkenstein did not present any political or economic arguments against Turkey's membership but instead chose a culturalist and essentialist argument to exclude Turkey from Europe. The various forms of Islamophobia range from overt physical and verbal attacks on Muslims, Islamic centers, and their properties to subtle and implicit discrimination, such as stigmatization, rejection, and denial of access to goods and services. Social media platforms are often used for hate speech targeting Muslims, which can directly affect the individual's health and well-being (Fekete, L. 2008).

In 2013, a report presented to the House of Commons showed how hate groups were exploiting online spaces to intimidate and threaten Muslim communities. The Home Affairs Select Committee in 2015 raised the issue of Islamophobia on social media, urging companies like Twitter and Facebook to take action against online hate speech. Recent data from Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) indicates that there were 548 confirmed incidents of anti-Muslim abuse reported to them. Almost one-fifth of service users reported experiencing repeated offline encounters with anti-Muslim hatred, with Muslim women more frequently targeted than men. The

victims usually wore traditional Islamic clothing, and the perpetrators were predominantly white men. These attacks tend to be committed more often by men and tend to target women. (Crowley, M., and Agly, A. H., 1986).

6. BBC and CNN Reporting Islamophobia

As Walter Lippmann (1922) observed, the pseudo-reality created by media coverage primarily reflects the images and representations in our minds. Cottle (2006) argues that the media plays a significant role in articulating, conveying, and explaining specific discourses that contribute to the misrepresentation and representation of minority groups. Van Dijk (2000) similarly contends that media discourses are the most significant source of people's ideologies, attitudes, and knowledge.

According to Ameli, the media's role as the primary source of information becomes even more crucial when these discourses specifically target minority groups and have limited contact with these groups. It is widely believed that negative and stereotypical media coverage of Muslims in news, cartoons, movies, talk shows, and other media is shaping Western perceptions of Muslims. Muslims are frequently portrayed as the "other" in these media, which can be linked to the rise of bigotry, particularly Islamophobia. Said (2007) argues that this negative portrayal of Muslims has its roots in cultural depictions of the "other." The hostility between Muslims and the West is not a new phenomenon, as historians have traced the war of words and weapons between Islam and the West back to the 7th century during Prophet Muhammad's time, the defeat of the Spanish, the fall of Constantinople, the Crusades, the colonial era, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War era (Ernst, 2003). Presently, a variety of stories about Islam and Muslims in the media are founded on historical portrayals. European historians in the 12th century C.E. discovered more about Islam and Muslims for various detrimental reasons. These historians spread false information regarding the death of Prophet Muhammad, alleging that he was killed by swine or was intoxicated. Additionally, in the French song Roland, he is portrayed as a pagan deity "worshiped like a Greek God." According to another account. He was a counterfeit cardinal who veered away from the Catholic Church and subsequently established a new religion known as "Islam." The occurrences of September 11, 2001, altered the course of history. It was a tragic incident comparable to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy or the attack on Pearl Harbor (Tabbi, B. 2021).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Muslims and Islam became a major focus in Western and American media. Unfortunately, media coverage frequently portrays Muslims and Islam as associated with negative images such as underdevelopment, illiteracy, homelessness, and failed states, according to Richardson (2004). Additionally, Muslims are often viewed as a threat to democratic, secular, and liberal societies worldwide. CNN's coverage of 9/11 is an example of this trend, with flashing titles such as "Attack on America," "Strike against Terror," and "War on Terror" being

used to report on the event. In the first 12 hours of coverage, CNN used the term "war" 234 times to describe the attack, and the attackers were portrayed as insane and cowardly. Despite this negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam, CNN's coverage often focused on stories of sacrifice, bravery, camaraderie, patriotism, and love for America. The mainstream media in the United States and the United Kingdom, such as the BBC, played a significant role in persuading Western nations to support the United States in its fight against terrorism. After 9/11, the media began creating a constructed connection between Islam, Muslims, and terrorism by distinguishing between friends and foes. As a result, President Bush's open declaration that "You are either with us or against us" was extended to include all Muslims, regardless of where they lived, which further fueled the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media.

Werner et al. (2000) argue that the term "Islamic terrorism" was created by Western media conglomerates and American policymakers. This term has been heavily exaggerated by the mainstream media in the United States, leading to the perception of Muslims as a threat to global peace and progress. Dawisha (2009) also argues that the West views Islam as its most dangerous enemy after the demise of worldwide socialism. These perceptions have been reinforced by individuals such as Geert Wilders, who, in an interview with CNN, claimed that the Quran is a fascist book and that Muslims' ideology poses a threat to Western society and freedom. The negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in American media has led to the reshaping of non-Muslims' perceptions of Muslims as prejudiced and negative due to propaganda and misinformation. Given the turbulent ten years that have passed since the 9/11 attacks, it is important to investigate how talk shows like CNN and BBC present Islam and Muslims in a negative light. It is also crucial to identify the predominant themes discussed in these talk shows regarding how they frame Islam and Muslims.

Additionally, Political discourse is often utilized in Western media to influence people to adopt certain beliefs or take specific actions. On March 15, 2019, a terrorist attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The first attack occurred at 1:40 p.m. at the Al Noor Mosque, and the Linwood Islamic Center was attacked 15 minutes later. The attacker broadcasted the initial attack live on Facebook. As reported by Radio New Zealand, the attacks resulted in the deaths of 51 people and injuries to 49 others. Politicians and leaders across the world widely condemned the attack, with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern referring to it as "one of New Zealand's darkest days." The official response to the incident could have contributed to a new perspective on Muslims in New Zealand and the West, unlike the negative portrayal of Muslims that is widespread in Western political contexts. Scholars such as Shaheen (2003), Ibrahim (2010), and Patil (2014) have scrutinized the negative depiction of Muslims

in political contexts, whereas Poole (2002) argues that Muslims and Westerners may be perceived as being in a state of cultural conflict.

Said (2008) argued that the Western media's portrayal of Muslims negatively was influenced by the 1979 Iranian revolution. This view has been exacerbated by the events that followed, including the 1990s wars in Iraq and the 9/11 attacks (Ahmed 2012, Ibrahim 2010). Furthermore, the media and political discourse have fueled anti-Islamic sentiments worldwide. Stereotypical depictions of Muslims as heartless, brutal, uncivilized religious fanatics (Shaheen, 2003), or extremists and fundamentalists (Patil, 2014), have perpetuated this view. These stereotypes quickly spread throughout the Western world, portraying Muslims as the cultural "other," and providing a convenient target for nationalists and xenophobes. In contrast, the Christchurch mosque shooting marked the first time Muslims were portrayed as victims instead of perpetrators, a significant shift (Patil, 2010). The media's portrayal of the New Zealand mosque shooting in 2019 was analyzed in a study using framing theory. Specifically, 80 online articles from CNN and BBC were compared to identify the most prominent frames used and how they were used in a particular context. The study focused on the White attacker, themes of Islamophobia and White supremacy. The analysis, conducted eight days after the shooting, found a shift in the media's portrayal of White attackers' attacks, exemplified by adopting the terms "terrorist" and "terrorism" instead of "mentally ill perpetrator." Both organizations portrayed the shooting as an Islamophobic terrorist attack, but CNN emphasized the White supremacist motive more prominently than the BBC. Poole's idea that Muslims and Westerners can be described as opposites in a culture confrontation was also mentioned.

7. Conclusion:

It was observed that CNN and BBC were more interested in discussing the political changes and regional transformations in the Muslim world than other topics like religion, economics, or the war on terror. Most of the talk shows focused on geopolitical issues in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. During the climactic days of massive protests calling for regime change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, both CNN and BBC dedicated the majority of their news bulletin time to covering the events. This extensive coverage of the MENA region is unprecedented in Western news media. The importance of this political shift is highlighted by the fact that Stephen Sackur, host of hard talk, traveled to Cairo to interview Egyptian Prime Minister Hisham Qandil and others at Tahrir Square, while Emmy Award-winning CNN correspondent Ben Wedeman provided exclusive coverage from Cairo. The limited coverage of religion and the war on terror indicates a shift in the way Muslims and Islam are portrayed in Western and American media, in contrast to previous studies which focused on these issues. Previous studies have shown that the portrayal of Muslims in the media started to become more generalized and

negative after the Bay War and particularly after the 9/11 attacks. This led to the perception of Muslims as being associated with terrorism and violence in the Western and American societies.

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