



## **Mediated Construction of Islamophobia: A Review of Global Media Narratives and Pakistan's Role in Combating Islamophobia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Islamophobia has become a thoroughly mediated construct, therefore assessing the media's involvement and indulgence in construction of Islamophobia is pertinent. Considering this, the current paper examines what kind of discourse is being developed and how mediated construction of Islamophobia is affecting at institutional and structural level. The paper also seeks to determine how various forms of media, such as news outlets, social media platforms, films, television shows, and other forms of communication, represent and contribute to the formation of Islamophobic attitudes and narratives on a global scale. By reviewing the existing literature, the paper also discusses the role of Islamophobia in instigating anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim sentiments as well as the strategies adopted by Pakistan to combat and curb Islamophobia and hate speech effectively. To combat Islamophobia in media representations, the study also provides certain recommendations and effective strategies for media professionals, policymakers, stakeholders and civil society organizations and by executing the suggestions and counter-narratives of the study, we as a global society can lead towards making our society more unbiased, equitable and inclusive for everyone, without discrimination towards any sect of the society specifically the Muslims and Islam. Moreover, the paper also provides valuable insights to minimize the negative mediated construction of Islamophobia as well as ways to combat mediated representations of Islamophobia, promoting media literacy and promoting tolerant and inclusive societies.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the terrorist attacks of 2001, the perception of Muslims and Islamic terrorism has become an imperative issue in Western civilizations. The threat perception from fundamentalist extremism and resentment towards the Muslim immigrants have both increased in preceding years, the outcome of which can be lack of security and well-being (Tartaglia, Rollero, & Bergagna, 2019; Poulin, Gil-Rivas, Silver, Holman, & McIntosh, 2002). Such anti-Muslim and anti-Islam practices in Western societies have instigated the notion of Islamophobia worldwide. According to Imhoff and Recker (2012), Islamophobia is the illogical hate, hostility, prejudice, or fear towards Muslims, Islam, and anything affiliated with Islam, including Islamic centers, Mosques, Hijab, the Holy Qur'an, hijab, and so on, particularly when perceived or viewed as a terrorism source. It includes Islamoprejudice, which is a prejudiced and discriminatory view of Islam and Muslims, and secular criticism of religion Islam motivated by universalistic and democratic opinions and beliefs.

In many societies, Islamophobia is becoming a growing concern, resulting in discrimination, exclusion, and even violence against Muslims. The irrational fear, prejudice, or hatred of Islam or Muslims is referred as Islamophobia, and it frequently results in marginalization, discernment, discrimination, and even violence. The marginalization and exclusion of Muslims is contributed by ingroup-outgroup dynamics and othering. Muslims being stereotyped as terrorists or relating Islam with extremism and violence, associating the extremist beliefs with all the Muslim community, or engaging in discernment, violence, discrimination and harassment toward Muslims are all illustrations of Islamophobia (Khan, Iqbal, Gazza, & Ahrari, 2012). Additionally, Institutional practices or policies that excessively target Muslim community and Islam also serve as manifestations of Islamophobia

Moreover, socialization processes like family and peer group interactions, educational organizations, and media exposure and consumption can reinforce the stereotypical and prejudicial biases against Muslims. Disinformation by media and media portrayals or framing of Muslim community and Islam in a negative light are the frequent root causes of Islamophobia in contemporary world. Stereotypes are perpetuated and biases against Muslims are reinforced by these media representations (McQueeney, 2014). Thus, media's role in construction of Islamophobia is obvious and apparent.

As Western media is consistently constructing and shaping Islamophobia, thus Islamophobia is becoming a mediated construct globally. Mediated construction of Islamophobia alludes to the manner by which media outlets and news sources, including TV, online platforms, newspapers, and virtual entertainment platforms contribute to the molding, perpetuation and propagation of Islamophobic perspectives and narratives within the society (Zulqarnain, Shafi, & Masood, 2022). The mediated representations have an imperative role in manipulating perception, viewpoints and opinions of public as well as influencing the public perceptions of Muslims and Islam.

Media is articulating and conveying particular discourses that aid in representation or misrepresentation of a particular minority group (Tariq, Iqbal & Khan, 2021). Media critics envisage that misrepresentations disseminated by media have been playing an influential role in propagating Islamophobia in the West (Kaya, 2015). Media systematically develops stereotypes against Islam and Muslim community by shaping the attributes of Muslims. Muslims are portrayed and represented as "foreign" and "alien" by Australian media. Additionally, Australian media also demonstrated Muslims as "ignorant, recessive, backward, uneducated, extremists, violent and vulgar", which strained the associations between Australians and Muslims. Therefore,

media's role and representations are vital when it comes to explicating the concept of Islamophobia (Poynting & Mason, 2007).

### **Historical Background:**

Islamophobia is a novel term for the notion and phenomenon of anti-Islam discourse that dates back centuries. Islamophobia is now referred as a global construct and phenomenon; however, "Islamophobia" was initially used in 1925 as a term in a French article. Nevertheless, the term acquired institutional significance, first articulated and popularized as a notion in a report published by a British organizational think tank named Runnymede Trust in 1997 that focused on issues of cultural, racial and ethnic diversity. Islamophobia was defined in that report as "an unfolded and baseless resentment toward Muslims" or "a valuable way of referring to hatred, fear or dread of Islam and consequently fear of almost majority of Muslims." The consequences of such kind of hostility towards Muslim community and Islam leads to exclusion and prohibition of Muslim community from and societal concerns and mainstream politics (Jaber, 2022).

The evolution of Islamophobia is dynamic and steep. Islamophobia began as "us versus them" and lasted for a long time, but more recently, it has become "them among us" phenomenon (Allen, 2010). The proclamation of Muslims as equal protagonists on the cultural, global and civilizational phase resulted in threatening global order, which consequently planted the seeds of Islamophobia worldwide. Moreover, the development of anti-Islam discourse has been influenced by numerous historical factors. Initially, conflicts between the European Medieval and Islamic world fueled hostile discourse towards Muslims community and Islam. Later, Muslims and Islam were frequently portrayed as inferior, exotic and substandard to Western civilizations by Orientalists which reinforced negative interpretations and stereotypes. Subsequently, the colonialism prevailed and negative perceptions regarding Islam were further intensified by this imperialist discourse. The Nationalism ascent took place which led to the emergence of Nationalist movements throughout the world during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including Islamic world. These movements, along with the international contentions, prompted an expansion in anti-Islam rhetoric. Afterwards, during the Cold war era, the Soviet Union and USA competed for influence and power in the Muslim majority countries with Islamic ideologies. This cold war era joined with the Iranian Upheaval in 1979, created a viewpoint that Islam is a political threat for world, prompting the disparagement of Islam in certain circles (Iqbal, 2019).

The major incident which instigated the development of anti-Islamic rhetoric was the 9/11 incident. These assaults of 9/11, combined with subsequent fear monger occurrences around the globe prompted the suspicion and scrutiny of Muslims. Muslims and Islam were frequently depicted in a monolithic way, with the religion being linked to terrorism and extremism. The global media then started to perpetuate anti-Islamic narratives and Islamophobic attitudes within the global society (Al-Rawi, 2014). Later on, the emergence of social media platforms and Internet progressions facilitated the dissemination of anti-Islam rhetoric. Stereotypes have been now perpetuated and anti-Islam sentiments have been amplified as a result of mainstream media portrayals of Islam and Muslims in a negative manner as well as the proliferation of radical and extremist opinions online (Gray, 2017).

### **Rationale of Paper:**

Although advancement of digital technologies and globalization has facilitated transnational flow of communication and aids in advancing media technologies, however critics and researchers are of the view that this revolution has enabled global media to threaten the identity of Muslims and Islam worldwide resulting in marginalization and discernment against

Muslims (GADA, 2017). Considering this, the current paper is designed to investigate how mediated channels construct, disseminate and reinforce Islamophobia and global media's role in framing, shaping and perpetuating negative attitudes, biases, perceptions and stereotypes towards Muslims and Islam. Besides, the rationale of examining the mediated construction of Islamophobia is to shed light on the ways in which global media shapes public perceptions and contribute to the political, cultural and social dynamics surrounding Muslim communities and Islam.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current paper adopts literature review as the methodology and thus it reviews the existing literature available on episodic and systemic levels of Islamophobia and construction of Islamophobia on diverse media platforms.

### **Episodic VS Systemic Islamophobia and their Mediated Construction:**

According to the Chambers Study Dictionary's definition, Islamophobia is referred as "a persistent and obstinate and dread of Islam." In a similar vein, the term phobia is defined as "strong irrational hatred or dread of something". Thus, by this definition of phobia, it is apparent that "Islamophobia" will seem to be the "powerful and persistent irrational dread or hatred towards Islam." Consequently, Islamophobia indicated the fear or dread of Islam and its adherents. Experiencing feelings of hatred as a result of this fear gives rise to offensive behavior. As a result, Islamophobia demonstrates itself in numerous negative behavioral patterns directed against Muslims and Islam (Imhoff & Recker, 2012).

Islamophobia is categorized into two levels; Episodic and Systemic and Islamophobia is examined on both episodic and systemic level. Episodic Islamophobia implies to the individual occurrences, actions and incidents that aim to target or oppress Muslims. Such incidents can take many forms, including hate crimes, physical assaults, aggravation, harassment, verbal assaults and discrimination in numerous aspects like housing, education and employment. In short, it is characterized by individual demonstrations of bias or predisposition against Muslims, frequently determined by obliviousness, stereotypes, ignorance or personal hostility. Contrarily, Systemic Islamophobia is the term used to describe broader policies, social structures or ideologies that propagate discrimination and discernment against Muslims and Islam. It comprises societal norms, systemic prejudices and institutional biases that marginalize and exclude Muslims as a group. Systemic Islamophobia is manifested in laws, strategies or policies that excessively and disproportionately target Islam and Muslims or media portrayals that propagate pessimistic generalizations regarding Islam and Muslims (Kwon, Chadha, & Wang, 2019).

In the study of Islamophobia, Iyengar's explanation of how the media deals with and frames particular issues seems relevant. Iyanger explained how media constructs both episodic and systemic Islamophobia in diverse ways. He categorized framing into thematic and episodic framing. Thematic framing offers "collective evidence" whereas episodic framing portrays "concrete incidents that demonstrate issues" (Iqbal, 2010). Media outlets promote episodic Islamophobia via episodic framing by selectively reporting and amplifying the pessimistic events whereas downplaying the positive incidents regarding Muslims. Apart from this, media also amplifies hate speech on diverse social media platforms to individually target the Muslims.

Besides episodic level, the systemic level of Islamophobia is framed by media using thematic framing. Thematic framing of Muslims is done in a way that make people believe that religion of Islam has turned Muslims into terrorists, anti-democratic and irrational. Media

construct systemic Islamophobia via biased frames, misrepresentations of Islam, language manipulation and normalizing discriminatory policies (Kwon, Chadha, & Wang, 2019).

### **Mediated Construction of Islamophobia:**

Hostility and resentment toward Muslims is not a novel concept. Since 1980s, a large number of Muslims from various nations migrated to Europe, primarily seeking asylum: the notion of "Islamophobia" was coined during that period, which indicated developing interest in bias and aggression designated explicitly toward Muslims and Islam (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Particularly during the discourse of anti-Muslim prejudice, numerous undesirable stereotypes have surfaced in public deliberations and media. According to Lau, Seedat and McRitchie (2011), Western media have significant influence over the dominant value positions by encouraging western worldviews and epitomes. The stereotypes of extremism, violence and terrorism are associated with Muslims, and Islamic culture is typically portrayed in substandard and negative manner.

Muslims are always associated with violence and depicted as “fundamentalists and Islamic militants” (Samaie & Malmir, 2017). Nickerson (2019) also confirmed in his study that news media of US frames the Muslims in a biased and detrimental manner that reinforces hatred and prejudice against Muslim community. Different examinations have additionally featured that media impeccably utilize terms like “Islamic fanaticism”, “Islamic fundamentalism”, and “Islamic radicalism” while reporting regarding terrorist demonstrations committed by Muslims (Corbin, 2017). Contrarily, media while reporting regarding terrorist demonstrations committed by non-Muslims, they will generally pick more vigilant depictions, like “hate crime”, instead of discussing “domestic extremism” (Marusek, 2018). However, according to Allen (2010), media portrayals of Islam as “overwhelmingly different” appear to reinforce otherness. Baker et al. (2013) conducted a study in 2013 on British newspapers and found that Muslims are portrayed by stressing their similarity to one another and “their difference from West”.

Apart from this, Westerners visualized Arabs and Muslims as uncivilized, remote and violent since their first encounter with them and therefore, the oppressive visualizations of Muslim “Other” and Arabs have become even more ingrained American’s thoughts after 9/11. The media strengthens hostilities between the civilized and uncivilized and nurtures terror of the Arab “Other” by portraying the Middle East as land of brutality, tyranny and oppression depicting Arabs and Muslims as radicals and extremists (Caruso, 2008).

Younes, Hassan, and Azmi (2020) exhibited that mass media is the essential cause for proliferation of Islamophobic attitudes, narratives and negative image in Western nations. Muslim narratives are being manipulated via mediation. Islam-related negative connotations are created by the media and consequently, the narrative is altered. This study analyzed 368 news stories from Al-Jazeera, BBC, The Jordan Times and The Watchmen and results suggested that specific terminologies such as “Jihadis” and “terrorists” were employed by media and Islam was associated with extremism to construct a negative description about Islam that might have a substantial impact.

Iqbal, Khan and Rehman (2020) examined the controversial and provocative anti-Islam video titled “The Innocence of Muslims” and focused on representation of Muslims and Islam by US media with particular reference to this video. The discourse revealed that media coverage and treatment was diversified across various platforms. While a few media outlets condemned and criticized the offensive material and stressed the importance of religious tolerance and unrestricted speech, however majority of media outlets focused on the aggressive and hostile responses to video, which fueled Islamophobia and perpetuated stereotypes. In addition, the

significance of social media in circulating and augmenting the video's message was also emphasized by the researchers. Its widespread distribution was made possible by platforms like YouTube, which led to its international spread and more controversy.

Iqbal (2010) also examined how media frames and shapes the Islamophobic narrative. In his study, Iqbal tend to assess unfavorable and hostile perspectives among non-Muslim and Muslim groups, essentially addressing the religious variances and cultural norms. It continued to be a significant factor in conflicts between western and eastern communities.

Khanum and Iqbal (2022) analyzed the Hollywood films and their role in construction of Islamophobia. The findings specified that Hollywood is consistently representing Muslims and Islam negatively in the majority of its films. It was evident from the analysis of few films such as “American Sniper”, “Zero Dark Thirty” and “London has Fallen” that all Muslims are portrayed as violent and extremists in almost all the Hollywood films.

Tariq and Hanan (2018) scrutinized how the global press depicted terrorism, radicalism, racial profiling, and Islamophobia and found that Muslims' racial profiling is inherently terrible when viewed in the context of terrorism and extremism. In addition, only a small number of editorials present Muslims, Islam, and terrorist activities in a neutral light.

Regional media, like many aspects of the national and global media, have a narrow perspective and portray Muslims as repugnant and offensive. Phrases such as “They hate “US” and “call thugs a thug” are frequently found in American newspapers (Kaplan, 2006). Extreme Islamophobia may result from the media's naivety in representing Muslims and Islam. Thus, it is obvious that media are not merely the conveyers of news and comments to individuals; rather they have evolved into massively dispersed weapons capable of wreaking havoc.

Cervi, Tejedor, and Gracia (2021) illustrated that Islamophobia is overwhelming in media depictions of Muslims and Islam in Spain and Italy. In migration context, media reporting in Italy frequently stressed upon the security issues and linkage of Islam and extremism. Islamophobic sentiments may be bolstered by this, which may contribute to the perception that Muslims pose a threat to national security. Additionally, analysis of Serbian print media also exhibited that Islamophobic incidents are also prevalent in Serbia and are highlighted by Serbian media (PeRovIc, 2016).

Besides traditional media, internet and digital platforms can also contribute in construction of Islamophobic attitudes. Muslim men are depicted as culprits of sexual violence in Islamophobic tweets (Gray, 2017). This concept instigated via perpetuation of “Love Jihad Theory” which is a conspirative conception that Muslim men deliberately appeal and entangle the non-Muslim women with the determination to wed and convert them to religion Islam. Due to prominence of this theory, “Lovejihad” was positioned as the most recurrent hashtag utilized in Islamophobic tweets (Gray, 2017). Additionally, the unfiltered content of the internet could be destructive for Muslims and disparage their reputation. The goal of campaigns on Twitter, such as #banislam, is to perpetuate Islamic extremism. Moreover, Muslims also came up with Twitter campaign #Muslimrage to counter the hatred being generated by the global media on digital media. This hashtag emphasized the outrage and bias Muslims encounter on regular basis, in a comical, witty and sarcastic manner rather than in an outrageous manner (Butler, 2022).

Argyle, Gray, Nelimarkka and Terman (2016) explored islamophobia with new media perspective and examined the American public's hatred towards Islam and Muslims and its connection to terrorism. Moreover, findings revealed that media was fostering an anti-Muslim stereotype and generating the Muslim cultural hazard. Islam and Muslims were depicted as a cult by media.

The public's perceptions of new ideas can be shaped by media. Practitioners of media in today's technological era are also mindful regarding social media use and they often use social media platforms to construct an agenda and frame false news (Gray, 2017). The news about Muslims and Islam has received substantial attention in the Western media since the 9/11 attacks, and the quality of the reporting has been consistently deteriorated. The western media depicted a variety of negative and harmful messages about Muslims and Islam (Ahmad, 2006). Furthermore, the international media have linked radicalism, terrorism and extremism to Islam and practices of Islam in an effort to spread negative information about Muslims community and Islam. All of the world's largest media conglomerates and mainstream media portrayed Muslims as “terrorists” and related them to a diverse terrorist events and activities. For this reason, majority of Western population express dis-likeness and hatred towards the Muslim community and their emblematic identity. The perception that Muslims are particularly “sexist” is disseminated by the new media in the United States, influencing public attitudes towards Muslims and their practices (Terman, 2017).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

### Framing Theory:

Framing theory advocates that media outlets frame and attach certain attributes to the issue in order to emphasize a few aspects of an issue or event while downplaying or omitting others. The framed news story can have an impact on how the audience views and interprets the subject or issue. Consequently, public opinion and the construction of a particular narrative can be influenced by various frames.

Framing theory provides a framework for understanding the mediated representations and illustrations of Islamophobia. Framing theory is still applicable and functional as it attempts to explicate how the media frames stories about Islam and Muslims in the context of Islamophobia. The global media frames the Muslims and Islamic convictions in context of their association with radicalism, extremism and terrorism (Terman, 2017). According to Powell (2018), Muslims are portrayed and framed differently by the media in the United States than non-Muslims when deliberating the framing of terrorism, radicalism and extremism events and incidents. The negative and destructive framing of Islamic beliefs and Muslims by global media is acting as an emerging threat for Islam and Muslim community concerning their identity and global position.

### The Islamophobic Process Model:

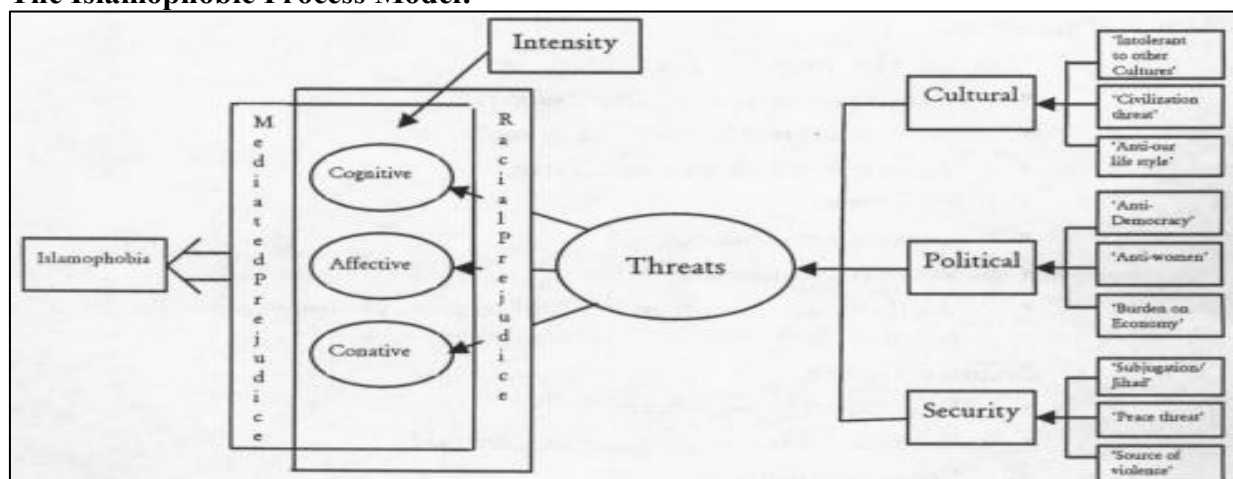


Fig.1. The Islamophobic Process Model

This model has been discussed by Dr. Zafar Iqbal in his study conducted on Islamophobia in 2010. This model is applicable and elucidates how as media depict and construct the phenomenon of Islamophobia. The Islamophobic process model focuses on the stages and components comprising Islamophobia's emergence. According to the process model, Islamophobia is not an inherited construct, rather it is instigated with the formulation of stereotypes and preconceived notions regarding Islam and Muslims. The various stages and factors involved in the development and persistence of Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors are outlined in the process model of Islamophobia. It acknowledges that Islamophobia is a complex process influenced by individual, social, and contextual factors rather than a single construct. Stereotypes, prejudices, socialization, concept of othering, institutional factors, political discourse, individual experiences and mediated prejudice are all highlighted by the process model. Racial prejudice and mediated prejudice both are responsible for propagation of Islamophobia (Iqbal, 2010)

The Islamophobic process model delineates the mediated construction of Islamophobia in a way that it tends to enlighten the substantial role of mediated prejudice at various stages of process model such as the development of prejudices, stereotypes, othering, in-group and outgroup dynamics, socialization, and individual experiences. The process model acknowledges that a variety of factors, including mediated prejudice, play a crucial role in shaping Islamophobic attitudes and the multifaceted nature of Islamophobia. Reporting that is biased or sensationalized by media has the potential to bolster existing prejudices, amplify negative narratives, and contribute to the social acceptance of Islamophobia (Iqbal, 2010).

## **DISCUSSION AND CRITIQUE**

It is evident from the literature that a vast majority of global media have misrepresented the Muslim community and Islam worldwide via either attributing diverse labels with them or framing them in an inappropriate and undesirable manner (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Although the global media did not diverge from their traditional representation of Islam and Muslims, however sometimes it seems that media is crossing the decency lines while giving coverage to incidents related to Muslims or Islam. The Muslim community and Islam are being demonized and being depicted as Jihadis, extremists, violent and irrational by the US media and in this way their media is justifying US assaults on Muslims (Abdelkader, 2016). Additionally, almost all the Islamic nations excluding Turkey are illustrated in more or less similar manner in the Hollywood Films. The representation of life in Islamic countries is shown miserable in Hollywood movies and Islamic people are depicted as extremists with long Beards. These kinds of global messages generated by Hollywood are global and intense, therefore these messages need to be re-examined and altered.

Audiences from all over the world may feel a sense of dread and dangerous threats resulting from the negative, undesirable and stereotypical portrayal of Muslims in Hollywood films. These kinds of misrepresentations are inculcating feelings of dis-likeliness towards Islam and its devotees. Also, anti-Muslim and outrageous incidents like attacking worshipers and burning of mosques have escalated around the globe due to such misrepresentations by global media (Khanum & Iqbal, 2022). Furthermore, anti-Islam demonstrations are on the rise in various parts of the world. For instance, Germany started a demonstration called PEGIDA that stands for "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of West," which is a striking display of wide-ranging hostility towards Islam and its devotees.



Although majority of research studies concurred that Muslims and Islam are framed and represented in a negative and undesirable manner, yet a few scholars pointed out and criticized the inappropriate terminologies employed by journalists and reporters to describe Muslims and Islam (Cervi, Tejedor & Gracia, 2021). Most of Western newspapers with huge circulation in the US still utilize neutral frames and attributes to label and define Islam and Muslims, whereas 4% utilize positive and 24% percent employ negative attributes to define Muslim community and Islam (Rezaei, Kobari & Salami, 2019). Thus, the common ideology that all media outlets construct the Muslims and Islam in a negative manner and misrepresent the Islamic community is being challenged. In this perspective, Munnik (2017) delineates the Glasgow's media case, whereby the reporters and journalists came forward with the diverse portrayals of Muslims which deviated the traditional negative construction of Islamophobia. It is also worth mentioning that media do not always attributes Muslims in a negative light, however the media sometimes demonstrate a balanced representation of Muslims and Islam when reporting regarding devotion and commitment in Islam (Bleich & Murits, 2022). The extent to which diverse media outlets portray Muslims and Islam is correlated with their political ideologies, for instance, the conservative media outlets in Australia frame and shape Islam via "othering" and "secularization", while the socialist media outlets tend to represent Muslims and Islam in a positive manner (Iner & McManus, 2022).

The discourse being developed by the global media appears to be detached with 'totality of Muslims' life and Islam and consequently, Islam is being viewed as a "political construct" rather than an "ideology" (Suryandari & Arifin, 2021). As Islamic ideology contradicts with the Western ideology and their way of life, therefore Islam and Muslims are viewed by the Western media from only political aspect. The Muslims' ordinary lifestyle and their cultural/religious festivities are rarely covered by global media which results in public perception of Islam and Muslims as creators of unrest, turmoil and violence, rather than dictators of harmony, peace and tranquility. It is also apparent from the discourse that Muslim transients are more frequently blamed by global media outlets for causing economic, social and political issues comprising joblessness, disparity, extremism, and crime and overpopulation.

Besides, the US media reporters are unable to distinguish between the non-Arab and Arab Muslims. Despite the fact that Arabs make up only 24% of Muslims residing in US, all Muslims are visualized as Arabs and vice versa by the US media (Caruso, 2008). Most likely, this misrepresentation of the issue renders the reporters and journalist of US media accountable for their inefficiency to dig further into the realities other than communicating callous attitude towards the incredibly sensitive issues related to Muslims and Islam. Apart from this, journalists are also unable to comprehend the scriptural distinctions between various Islamic sects and thus, they treat every sect under the similar umbrella. Contrarily, when it comes to reporting about Christianity, then the journalists dig into the diverse sects of Christianity such as Baptist, Catholic, Coptic and so on. This misinterpretation of the US reporters and media specialist results in treating both the extremists and tranquility-lovers in the same manner.

Moreover, association of Islam with terrorism is also pervasive throughout the diverse social media platforms. Sometimes, Muslim men are depicted as culprits of sexual violence in Islamophobic tweets, while sometimes, outrageous and anti-Islamic campaigns are initiated on diverse digital spaces by the Western communities to exhibit hatred toward the Muslim community as well as to disparage their reputation (Karipek, 2020). Besides, the hate and disgust toward Muslim community and Islam has been intensified due to these digital spaces and

unfortunately, Twitter and other social media platforms are failing to guard and protect the renowned Muslim public figures from online intimidation.

Another major concern related to mediated construction of Islamophobia is that the practice of Mediated Islamophobia has been escalated due to the inappropriate use of digital spaces. Mediated Islamophobia basically implies that majority of people articulating their Islamophobic opinions and sentiments are unaware regarding practices of Islam and Muslims; their Islamophobic sentiments and insight about Muslims and Islam might be the result of exposure to social or traditional media. Islamophobia is less likely among people who recognize Muslims personally, encounter with them regularly and have sufficient knowledge about them (Colic-Peisker & Mikola, 2022). Thus, rather than criticizing and demonizing Muslims and Islam baselessly merely by relying on media, one should personally interact with Muslim community people to ascertain the reality behind mediated stereotypes.

### **Islamophobia and Anti-Pakistan/Anti-Muslim Sentiments:**

Islamophobia is a worldwide issue ranging from the US, Europe to India that manifests itself in a multitude of ways. Pakistan, being an Islamic Republic, faces a moral challenge in terms of protecting its diasporas and the widespread Muslim Ummah, as well as an ideological threat, considering that Pakistan was founded in the name of Islam. Though Islamophobic activities in India are frequently deliberated in Pakistan, however there have been several concerns voiced regarding Islamophobia in France and Europe particularly (Jamil, 2020). Following the conflict between blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and free speech, media sources extensively reported the outbreak of protests and remonstrations across Pakistan during 2021. Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), the far-right Islamic political party of Pakistan orchestrated violent rallies in April 2021, whereby the French flag as well as the images and dummies of Emmanuel Macron (French President) were burned during rallies and protests demanding the boycott of French commodities and the expulsion of French envoy. Due to these protests, the perception that Muslims are fundamentally hostile, was reinforced in the mind of Islamophobes across Europe when the protest videos and pictures played into their hands (Saleem, Ullah & Hassan, 2023). Sheikh Rashid Ahmed, former Interior Minister of Pakistan, also said that the TLP's demands “could have represented Pakistan as a fundamental and radical state globally”.

The perception of Pakistan as hostile and violent nation has been instigated primarily after 9/11 incident and subsequent terror attacks, which reinforced and validated Islamophobes' claims that Islam and Muslims are violent. Also, in certain cases, such attacks lead to increase in hate crimes Pakistani Muslims and Muslim international students. Furthermore, COVID-19 also exacerbated the situation in Europe and offered a justification for Islamophobia in the form of scapegoating. The COVID-19 epidemic escalated Islamophobia in Europe via misleading media representation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. A few media outlets in Europe demonstrated implicit bias by publishing photographs of Muslims praying in mosques during Ramadan and on Fridays in the articles concerning COVID-19. Such media reports demonstrated that Muslims were violating lockdown conventions by keeping mosques open all the time and celebrating Eid festivals without taking precautionary measures and breaking lockdown restrictions (Hunter, 2022). Thus, non-Muslims easily scapegoated Islamic congregations for the proliferation of COVID-19 as well as the misconceptions about Muslims and their association with the virus was also reinforced.

Apart from this, certain Islamophobic discourses also encompassed anti-Pakistan sentiments. For instance, the Telegraph newspaper published a news article on June 26, 2020

with a deceptive headline titled “Pakistan identified as the source of half of Britain's imported viral infections of COVID-19.” In this article, they also claimed that almost 30 people who have travelled from Pakistan were reported to have coronavirus since June 4, and therefore they constructed a narrative that Pakistani’s were responsible for transmitting coronavirus among the Britains (Hunter, 2022).

Moreover, in May 2020, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) emphasized the issue of Islamophobic scapegoating. The UN Secretary-General condemned xenophobia and hate crimes against Muslims and affirmed that some mainstream media outlets have published fear-mongering news articles, leading readers to assume that the Ramadan fasting time might aggravate the viral outbreak. Such kind of false narratives lead to an upsurge in anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan sentiments and hate crimes against Muslims in the mind of Islamophobes (ENAR, 2020).

### **Pakistan’s Role in Combating Islamophobia:**

The proliferation of Islamophobia is an intricate and challenging phenomenon, that is fueled not only by the extremist groups' acts, but also by some organizations and individuals' political goals. Moreover, considering the association between anti-Pakistan opinions/sentiments and Islamophobia in Europe, it is critical for Pakistan to develop real-time and effective approaches for combat and curb Islamophobia. These tactics, including countering disinformation and use of soft power and persuasion via cultural influence, may be used to combat centuries-old preconceptions and detect disinformation used to spread Islamophobia, therefore limiting its influence (Khan, 2023).

Pakistan may capitalize on the strategy of soft power and persuasion by educating the Europeans about Islam and Pakistan in order to challenge the historical misleading and Islamophobic misconceptions and stereotypes about Pakistani Muslims. Pakistan could achieve this by having its cultural diasporas and foundations in Europe that will aid non-Muslims to acquire knowledge regarding Pakistan’ cultural celebrations, religion, traditions, music and norms. This would not merely prevent Islamophobia, but would also aid in cultural promotion. Secondly, Pakistan may also use the countering-disinformation strategy to curb the disinformation related to Islam and Pakistani Muslims. This could be done by banning and eliminating all the disinformation regarding Muslims on social media platforms particularly Twitter and Facebook. These sites also have the capacity of removing content that are claimed to spread disinformation (Abadi, 2018). Besides, disinformation could also be controlled by teaching and training people and helping them recognize disinformation, so that they do not embrace or transmit it blindly.

Apart from the proposed strategies, Pakistan has practically taken certain initiatives to combat Islamophobia. Imran Khan's letter to Mark Zuckerberg (Facebooks’ CEO) is one example, in which he calls on social media sites, notably Facebook, to prohibit and remove Islamophobic content. Pakistan has deemed it a principal responsibility to speak out against the injustices that Muslims are facing merely due to their religion. Pakistan has also taken part in various coalitions to generate awareness regarding Islamophobia.

Pakistan's attempts to curb Islamophobia were bolstered in 2019 when Imran Khan (the then-Prime Minister of Pakistan) addressed the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on Islamophobia. He delivered speech at UNGA, whereby he stressed upon the need of addressing marginalization issue, which frequently leads to radicalism and also suggested to eradicate Islamophobic discourses from all the social media platforms. He further stated that terrorism is not associated with any religion and that no religion will attempt to encourage extremism and radicalism. He

also clarified in his speech that fundamental and radical Muslims is a misconception instigated by Western media, and this unfair media coverage is giving hype to Islamophobia (Gulf News Report, 2019).

Besides, Pakistan achieved a milestone when the foreign ministers of the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) overwhelmingly supported and adopted a resolution put forward by Pakistan designating March 15 as the "International Day to Curb Islamophobia." Pakistan's relentless efforts resulted in the official declaration of 15 March as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia'. This idea was successfully executed on March 15, 2022, when the UN General Assembly unanimously endorsed and adopted it. The annual observance of this day will assist in influencing the global discourse and norms concerning Islamophobia (Unition Nations, 2022).

Ex-Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also delivered a speech at UNGA conference held on March 8, 2023 and the conference focusing on women rights and identity in Islamic World. In his speech, he stressed upon establishing a judicial mechanism and practical implementation of that mechanism to recompense Islamophobia victims and penalize those who are accountable for such vile crimes. (Guterres, 2022). Furthermore, Pakistan also highlighted the issue of vandalism of the Holy Quran in Sweden as the most recent manifestation of religious hate and xenophobia, emphasizing that the lack of preventive legal framework, procrastination, and a refusal to speak out encourages further incitement to such violent activities during the OIC Human Rights Council meeting held in April 2023.

In addition, Pakistan also has a firm belief in practicing of one's own religion without interfering with other people's beliefs, inter-faith peace, harmony and it also actively encourages tolerance, dialogue culture, and harmony among varied religions across the country and globally. Considering the content of inter-faith peace, Pakistan took the milestone initiative by opening the "Kartarpur Sahib Corridor" between India and Pakistan. Besides, Pakistan also served as co-sponsor of the UNGA resolution on the "Intercultural and Interreligious dialogue Promotion," approved on December 9, 2021. In this resolution, Pakistan emphasized its commitment to a culture of regional peace as well as its society's pluralistic, multicultural, and multi-ethnic nature. It further underlined that Pakistan aims to strengthen its ties with the neighbors and other international community members via intercultural and inter-religious tolerance, mutual respect and collaboration (Khan, 2023). Apart from these initiatives, some other crucial initiatives are underway to counteract Islamophobia and foster a better knowledge and acceptance of Muslim communities and Islam.

Despite all the efforts made by Pakistan to curb Islamophobia, it remains a stern concern and menace to the Muslim Ummah, which should be combated, addressed and restrained effectively. It is critical to underline that the responsibility for preventing and combating Islamophobia should not only be on the shoulders of Islamic nations such as Pakistan, but all European countries must also make a collaborative effort to denounce and curb Islamophobia and formulate tactics for its avoidance (Abadi, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION:**

The study explicated that the mediated construction of Islamophobia varies depending on the media's affiliations and motives as well as the geopolitical contexts. Overall, the marginalized group of Muslims have been always reduced to negative caricatures or misrepresentations by the global media, however a few media corporations portray Islam and Muslims positively as peace and tranquility lovers rather than violent and extremists.

The Western and overall, the global media have been making an attempt to manipulate and frame Islamic narratives and they are portraying Islam as a violent, aggressive and conservative religion, as well as portraying Muslims' ideology as intimidating and in contradiction with the non-Muslims ideology (Powell, 2018). Certain global media's frames and patterns are associating notion of terrorism with Islam, consequently inciting fear of Muslims among non-Muslims. Furthermore, global media specialists, journalists and giant media corporations are stimulating the Islamophobic rhetoric to fuel violence, unrest and conflict in the Muslim world, to destabilize and demonize the Muslim societies, as well as to alienate them from the rest of the world.

Apart from media, numerous factors encompassing the upsurge of Islamic extremism and radicals, personal prejudices regarding anyone's identity and nationality, and enhanced safety and security concerns over the previous decades, contribute to the high prevalence of Islamophobia within global culture. Moreover, it is essential to remember that Islamophobic discourse generated by diverse media does not accurately reflect the perspectives of all individuals. Instead, it is the consequence of social dynamics, geopolitical factors, and historical circumstances. Promoting accurate information, challenging preconceived notions, encouraging interfaith dialogue, and fostering respect and mutual understanding are all necessary for combating anti-Islamic discourse. It is also vital to address the Islamophobic discourse at both systemic and episodic level by highlighting the structural factors responsible for perpetuation of Islamophobia and Muslim discrimination.

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The study aims to provide following recommendations:

- Accountable journalism encompassing avoidance of sensationalism and negative framing, stimulation of stereotypes and encouraging empathy and compassion, should be prioritized by the global media organizations to counter Islamophobic narratives and attitudes.
- The policymakers and media regulatory authorities ought to develop a policy framework with some legal conventions and ethics which would guide the media outlets and media specialists how they have to report the sensitive issues regarding Islamophobia and avoid employing offensive and provocative terms such as "Islamic radicals," "Jihadis," and "Muslim extremists."
- Media outlets should be held accountable to encourage and inculcate a positive mindset of inclusion and acceptance among its viewers rather than promoting discriminatory practices against Muslims.
- International media channels having global reach such as CNN, Al-Jazeera and BBC, should accept responsibility for honest, unbiased and balanced reporting, abstaining themselves from sensationalism that reinforces prejudices.
- Social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook may also aid in this regard by enforcing firm anti-hate speech regulations and filters, so that the users should be abstained from making nasty comments and spreading hatred online.
- Media literacy should be enhanced and each individual of the society should be able to investigate and assess the mediated construction of Islamophobia appropriately.
- Legal mechanisms need to be strengthened and improved to prevent and address Islamophobia effectively. This may include enacting stricter legislations and policies against hate crimes and religious discrimination. Governments should enact strict legislations against fake Islamophobic discourses which result in discrimination and stereotypical attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, as well as it should develop adequate reporting

mechanisms whereby victims of Islamophobia can report their concerns and issues and seek justice (Rashid, Iqbal, & Tanveer, 2023). Also, lawmaking institutions and lawmakers should be taken onboard to counter Islamophobic narratives.

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