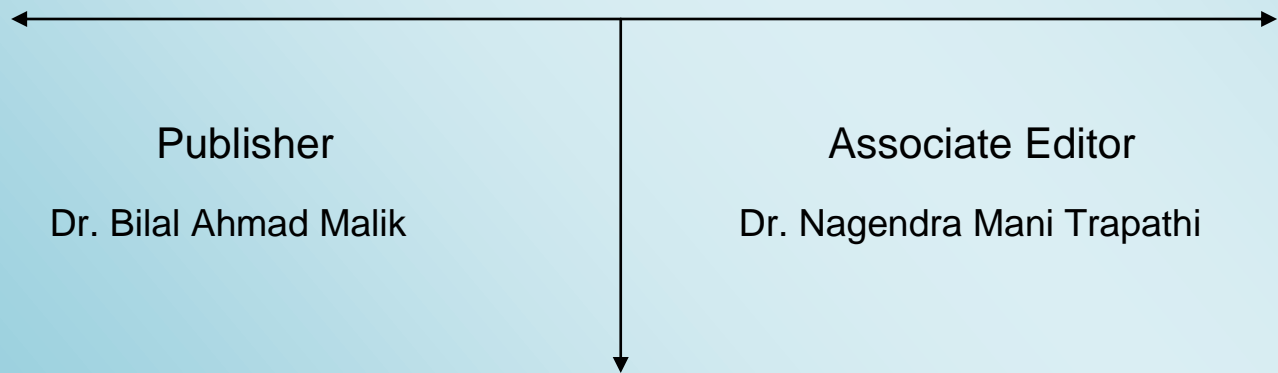


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## Social Exclusion of Muslims and Role of International Media

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### Abstract

*Muslims are having strong numerical strength than other religious minorities we find that this religious community is being tagged and labelled as either second class citizens or otherwise terrorists by manipulated media which is creating a severe problem for their survival we cannot attribute this state of affairs only to non Muslims but Muslims do are responsible for their status and role crises by virtue of their progressive resistant culture at collective level and progressive resistant nature at individual level which is reducing their status and role day by day. The focus of this research work is to highlight the role of international media in relation to Muslim society. It is only the custody of media to give publicity to any person, group or organization, the central idea of this paper is how media is acting as a strong force for reducing the status of Muslims all across the globe which in turn leads to serves as a breeding ground for their moral degradation and the output of which is identity crises and hence decreases their life chances and social exclusion. The ultimate focus of this paper is to highlight those problems which are faced by Muslim community by virtue of media because media is exaggerating any news or event in a very hyper sense if it is related to Muslims in a direct or an indirect manner. To have a holistic understanding of the whole situation secondary as well as primary sources will be used to collect the relevant data by virtue of books, journals, news papers and interviews will be conducted to have a multidimensional understanding of the issue which is under study. Finally few suggestions will be put forward which will facilitate Muslims on one hand and media on the other.*

**Key Words:** culture, Exclusion, Islam Media, Muslims,

### INTRODUCTION

Marshall McLuhan, often called the media prophet, in his book, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (1964) coined a phrase medium is the message- to explain the influence of mass media on the readers and audiences. The modern era is the age of the media. It is an age of communication technology and information revolution. At this stage of development, Mass Media is more pervasive than ever before. The Media has virtually turned the world into a global village of communication. The traditional role of mass media as defined by the media gurus' are- to inform, educate, entertain, and to persuade the people. The media can bring change in behaviour and attitude of the people by emphasizing certain issues. Meanwhile, with the revolutionary progress of mass communication, an unprecedented opportunity has been created to share and exchange information for knowledge and social change. But, the media has turned the affairs into a war of words. Actually, today's wars in the battle fields are the cumulative actions of what was designed, discussed, and persuaded through the media in moulding a favourable public opinion. The power of media has intimidated men for centuries. Now the power of live-actions video images on television has become even more intimidating. The books, newspapers, magazines, video cartoons, movie, radio, television and internet based websites are now widely used to manipulate

the information, facts and believes. The instrument of mass communication in the modern world have an enormous potential for inducing newer images in shaping global politics, culture and the public believes. Mass media is both a force for integration and for dispersion and individuation in society. Certainly the question of what most wide-ranging consequences follow from the media must also raise the question of motivation and use. With the emergence of modern communication technology, the society as a whole is now a simple hostage at the hands of the media. The time has come to ask whether the people are being managed, manipulated, massaged and brainwashed by the Media. Media men with a biased mind often become propagandists of their personal opinion, using the media as their vehicle. The media is also controlled by their sponsors.

The image of Islam and Muslims has often been portrayed in a negative fashion by politicians, the mass media and Orientalist literature. The relationship between Islam and the 'West' has also been depicted as one of confrontation and indifference. Such depictions are not a recent phenomenon, but have been handed down by Orientalist discourse as early as the seventeenth century. Certainly, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and other international events as the Bali bombing, helped exacerbate this image.

### **Misrepresentation of Muslims by international media:**

The media has the unique and often gruelling responsibility of reporting fair and unbiased news stories. However, the global media are now blamed for overlooking the ethical issues especially when it comes to the question of Islam. It is now clear to the world citizens that the western Media has launched a concerted campaign against Islam in the name of a campaign against terror. Various western media experts like Denis McQuail, the more channels carrying the same campaign message, the greater the probability of acceptance by the audience (McQuail, 1994). After the end of the Cold War, much media attention has focused on Islam as a disruption in the global order. Although Islam is the fastest growing religion in the West, the West has many stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam that are due to the media, prejudice, and ignorance. Islam is often looked upon as "extremist", "terrorist", or "fundamental" religion. In contrast to what many Westerners think of Islam, Islam is a peaceful religion, which does not promote any forms of uncalled violence or "terrorist" actions. Stereotypes about Islam are not new to Western culture and can be traced back 1400 years. At the time, Islam and Christianity were involved in the Crusades during the Ottoman and Moorish control in Europe. Islam spread quickly to the West, and threatened the position of the Christian Church and the ruling classes. The Western elites, mainly the governments and the churches, then became highly involved in seeing that negative images were presented about Islam. As a result, not only were battles fought against Islam, but also a war of words was initiated to make sure that Islam would not have any converts or sympathizers in the West. Today, the West, with limited understanding of Islamic history, has identified a new enemy, "radical Islam", a stereotype common to Western thought, portraying Muslims as fundamentalists or potential terrorists. Some of these ideas that the Western people have developed about Islam are due to the mass media of the West. Reporters who cover the Muslim world have very little details about it and therefore, develop a distorted image of Islam that Western culture adopts

For the media to isolate Islam as a religion that fosters terrorism is biased and just plain irresponsible. In 1995 when Timothy McVeigh committed "the worst terrorist act in American history" by bombing the Oklahoma City federal building and killing 167 people, many of them children, reporters did not sensationalize the story by referring to McVeigh as a "Christian terrorist." Instead after the Oklahoma City bombing, the TWA 800 disaster, and the Olympic bombing, Muslims and Arabs were initially blamed, which resulted in harassment of Arab-

Americans and Muslims. After the Oklahoma bombing, this resulted in approximately 220 attacks against Arab-Americans and Muslims. Mohammed A. Siddiqui, a professor at Western Illinois University, said the coverage of Islam in major US newspapers contains most upsetting mistakes occur with the indiscriminate use of "fundamentalist" for any dedicated Muslim and the failure to distinguish between cultural practices that are national or regional in origin and not observed by Muslims in other countries. The New York Times was guilty of the latter mistake in a story from France dated January 11, 1993, about a Gambian woman jailed for mutilating the genitals of two baby daughters. The news article said female circumcision was an "age-old Muslim ritual" that "was originally applied in Muslim countries to control women." Two anthropologists at Princeton University, in a published letter to the editor, wrote: "Nothing in the sacred scriptures of Islam justifies this brutal operation, nor do most Muslims practice it. It is found in parts of sub-Saharan Africa where Islam has combined with local custom, as well as in non-Muslim societies elsewhere." Abdullah Hammoudi and Lawrence Rosen, who wrote the letter, complimented a Times column by A. M. Rosenthal which had condemned the practice as mutilation. The arrest of suspects in the New York World Trade Centre bombing in 1993 led to exploration in the news media of their possible links to a radical Islamic group. Most national news media made it clear that the New Jersey mosque in question was an atypical Islamic centre. Nevertheless, Yvonne Haddad, a history professor at the University of Massachusetts asked to comment on early press treatment of the story, said in an interview with *USA TODAY*, The press needs to sell stories, and Islamic terrorism sells. There are some newspapers that do it more carefully than others, but it keeps being used.

A major factor which contributes to Islamic stereotyping in the West is due to the media's selection of their words that describe Muslims. Some common names heard or seen in the news about Muslims are "extremist" or "terrorist". These words are misleading and are mainly anti-Islamic. The media rarely uses more neutral terms such as "revivalist" or "progressives".

A majority of the media's reports that talk about Islamic fundamentalism usually describes most Muslims as extremists. For example, Time magazine published a photograph where Muslims soldiers were shown performing prayers with guns. The caption on the bottom of the picture said, "Guns and prayer go together in the fundamentalist battle". The part that the Magazine omitted or failed to state was that the Muslim soldiers were praying on a battlefield in Afghanistan. Common sense of the situation meant that the soldiers had to remain armed at all times in case of an ambush at any time. With regard to the soldiers, another great misconception that exists is the truth about Jihad or "holy war" in Islam. Jihad literally means "The struggle in the path of God". However, the Western media often abuses the meaning of jihad by referring to it as a holy war where Muslims unreasonably kill non-believers. But the fact is that, jihad can mean a numbers of things that a Muslim does for the sake of God. Rarely has the Western media used this kind of a definition in their reports. The media often takes the word "jihad" out of context to propagate negative views on Islam. The association of Islam and violence is a common misconception that the general Western public has developed about Islam. An example of this kind of misconception is that the Western media and some historians often say that Islam was a religion spread by the sword. The spread of Islam was not through coercion but through acceptance of the religion. Since the majority of the Western public only gets their information about Islam through the media, they develop a misconception. The media's reports about Arab or "Islamic" events, such as the Gulf War, are often misunderstood. The media infrequently distinguishes between the religion Islam and the political affairs that occur in most Islamic countries. The notion of associating of Islam and Muslims with the terms Arabs and Middle East are in fact misleading.



Arabs only account for 18% of the Muslim population across the world. In their initial coverage, by emphasizing a build up to military action rather than exploring alternative solutions the western media provided support for, even helped create a context in which, armed intervention in Iraq was both expected and accepted. The globe witnessed a “pre-emptive attack” on Iraq and the emergence of “embedded journalism”. By defining the solution to the initial attack as a war on terrorism, policymakers provided the moral mandate for legitimated the course of action taken to have conceived of it as a crime would have required a different and that for the USA politically less satisfying approach. The western media, especially the big ones, also promoted the causes of dehumanization representing the tribes of Afghanistan as warring factions of primitive barbarians. Aside from the fact that the media misrepresents Islam, the media is also a profit-seeking organization. Islam has often been presented as a menace or a threat to the West and although negative images do not correspond to Islam, but are the belief of certain sectors of a particular society it influences people’s views on Islam. The Western media’s poor representations of Islam are due to poor language translations, the absence of developed news agencies with international networks and native reporters, and biased reporting by reporters.

According to Waseem Sajjad, former Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan the Islamic world is poorly represented in the West in terms of press and media coverage. Not only are there just handfuls of news agencies in Muslim countries; there is the concern over the number of inexperienced reporters. Many reporters don’t understand the local cultures nor speak the language, leaving them with access to only those English or French speaking Westernized elites. Thus their representation is often a biased account of the political and social events from the point of view of the ruling minority in Muslim countries ([http://www.islamfortoday .com](http://www.islamfortoday.com)) A negative image of Islam is becoming more inherent in the Western culture from inaccurate media coverage. The Western public often is misinformed about Muslims through the images on television, motion picture screens, magazines, radios, and comic strips in newspapers, which promote strong messages among their audiences. Western reporters often say that Muslims are terrorists. This becomes a common image to the general person that all Muslims are terrorists. Edward Said’s book, *Covering Islam* (1997), talks about how the media and experts determine how we see the rest of the world. He says that: Today, Islam is peculiarly traumatic news in the West. During the past few years, especially since events in Iran caught European and American attention so strongly, the media have therefore covered Islam: they have portrayed it, characterized it, analyzed it, given instant courses on it, and consequently they have made it known. But this coverage is misleadingly full, and a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material. In many instances Islam has licensed not only patent inaccuracy, but also expressions of unrestrained ethnocentrism, cultural, and even racial hatred, deep yet paradoxically free floating hostility. As well as creating inaccurate images about Islam, the Western media usually identifies Islam in Muslim conflicts. The media hardly points other religions out in their conflicts. For example, the news would say, "Five Israelis may have been shot, but they were shot by five Muslims", instead of saying "Five Israelis were shot by five Palestinians". The media often reverses this action when a conflict is against Muslims, for example the news would usually say "Bosnians are being killed by Serbians", but instead rarely says, "Muslims are being killed by Christians”.

In addition to the media’s inaccurate representations about conflicts, human rights of women in Islam, such as women veiling and women’s rights. The media often represents Islam as a male dominant religion where Muslim men have complete authority over all groups of people. However, it is ironic of what the media represents, that the Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) was one the greatest reformers for women. In fact, Islam probably

is the only religion that formally teaches women's rights and finds ways to protect them and if practiced correctly, it provides an equal gender society. As Islam came around, traditional pre-Islamic roles of women were replaced by new Islamic roles that women followed. Islam allowed women to have the right to be educated and the right to participate in political, economical, and social activities in their communities. This created upward mobility in their communities. Women were also given the right to vote, something the U.S. denied women until 1919. Women were given the right to inherit property and take charge of their possessions. While most of these rights are denied to Muslim women today as a result of cultural tradition, one should not associate this with Islam, because they do not correlate with it. Islamic women wearing veils is another commonly misunderstood concept. In the West. It is thought of as a harsh custom that Islam requires of women. Although it is claimed that's veils infringe the rights of women, in fact, it is meant to serve just the opposite and protect them.

The media is a significant social agent, with the potential to influence community perceptions. Its influence can seriously impact on minority groups by subjecting them to exclusionary pressures by implying that they hold 'alien' characteristics which do not correspond with the values and ethos of mainstream society. Various evidences from many countries especially from western world have been taken which have helped to prove how the media of international repute represents Muslims and Islam in news stories since September 11, 2001 until December 31, 2004. This paper is an analytical work of secondary sources which have proved the extent to which negative images of Islam are reproduced in the pages of *The Age* and *Herald Sun* newspapers. International media and hyper sensitization of Muslim related issues are concerned with the type of language these newspapers employ to describe Muslims and Islam; whether or not this language changes in response to major events; the frequency of coverage in relation to major events; if journalists explore the diversity of Islam and Muslim cultures by highlighting nationality, ethnicity, cultural practice, and theological differences; and the typology used to categorise certain groups, practices or modes of Islam. The aim is to gain an understanding of the ways in which the media plays a role in shaping perceptions on Muslims and Islam in the broader community and how they do so in response to particular events either at home or abroad.

The paper begins with background information on Muslims in western world to contextualise the study, and then moves to a review of previous studies on the representation of Muslims and Islam in the Western media. Following this, the paper discusses the particular methodology employed to gather and analyse the articles, before moving to the research findings. Western identity is enriched by the fusion of many cultures and traditions. Multiculturalism has contributed to the complex social mosaic that makes western world a tapestry of harmony. This process, however, has not been without its challenges. While European settlers have relied on similar religious and historical traditions to merge with the broader community, Muslims from the Middle East have found this process more challenging. This is in part due to religious and cultural differences and misperceptions that arise as a result. In the recent past, issues of international terrorism and security concerns appear to have made matters worse, as Muslims have at times been identified with extremism. The arrival of asylum seekers from the Middle East on Australian shores amid this heightened sense of insecurity has led some commentators to assume a connection between terrorism and Muslims. As a consequence, there appears to have arisen a disturbing sense that Muslims are non western and that Islam poses a threat to the western way of life.

## **Muslims: A socially excluded community and role of international media:**

Muslims justifiably worry that the terrorist activities of groups which call themselves Muslim have colored public opinion strongly against all followers of Islam. The term "Muslim terrorist" is a non sequitur, they say, because if one is truly a Muslim, he or she cannot be a terrorist. Muslims are now asking, if, as Mr Obama claims, the attacks on New York and Washington were an assault on civilization", why shouldn't Muslims regard an attack on Afghanistan as an assault on Islam? Salam al-Marayati, director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, noted that radicals calling themselves Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Christian commit violent acts in various parts of the world, too. "These movements are equally fanatic and threatening, but extremism in the Muslim world receives disproportionate alarm," (<http://www.jannah.org/articles/media.html>). Obviously, distinctions between mainstream and unconventional groups are important to Muslims no less than to believers in other faiths; for that reason, among others, reporters must educate themselves to know what differentiates one group from another. For instance, most responsible journalists who cover Islam's spread among African-Americans know that the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, an outspoken militant, leads a sectarian branch called the Nation of Islam. They also know that many black Muslims in the United States have moved away from sectarian Islam into orthodox practices and have been welcomed into Islamic gatherings by foreign-born Muslims. This argument, which represents a widely accepted view, fails to distinguish between promoting Islam by individual Muslims from different walks of life, as a result of the goodness of their character and attitude and the nobility of their actions, on the one hand, and promoting Islam through planned action undertaken by professionally trained Muslims, on the other. The latter requires the utilization of the most advanced skills and techniques available, most notably arts and technology. Arts include, among others, playwriting, acting, and singing. Technology includes the use of electronic media, whereby transmitted pictures and sounds can be employed to convey the message of Islam. The marriage of the two has produced powerful media, capable of transmitting values, beliefs, and views in the form of movies, theatre plays, documentaries, educational programs, talk shows, cartoon shows, and others. But, despite the importance of electronic media and the profound impact they have made in effecting cultural change, they have not yet become tools and instruments for the dissemination of the message of Islam. One important sign of the lack of appreciation of these powerful tools may be seen in the fact that Islamic higher learning institutions do not consider arts and technology to be useful means for reaching out with the message of Islam, but continue to focus on interpersonal communication, and to a lesser extent on public speaking. Recently, print media has received more emphasis by Islamists. However, newspapers and magazines published by Islamists are very often oriented towards Islamic movement audiences, rather than the public at large.

"The Muslim-West relations have become increasingly strained due to a string of events such as the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Afghanistan war in 2002, the Iraq war, the London bombings in 2005 and the Danish cartoon row. "In this current climate, it is essential to gauge Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes with a view to resolving differences. The research found that both sides agree that Muslims and non-Muslims "don't understand each other" but have different concerns about the cause of the culture clash.

### **Evidences of Muslim social exclusion by media:**

The ramifications of the attacks of September 11, 2001 are felt throughout the United States. However, no minority community is as deeply affected as the American-Muslim minority. Since the attacks on the World



Trade Centre, Muslims residing in the United States have experienced violations of economic and political liberties, as well as ongoing social discrimination. Media stereotypes and government legislation continually exacerbate these human rights abuses and entrench institutional, social, and economic discrimination deeper in American society. At the heart of this discrimination are clear misunderstandings about Islam and those who practice the faith. In an effort to combat these challenges, Islamic organizations are fighting to protect the community's civil liberties. Is America turning a corner in the treatment and understanding of Muslim Minorities? By hyper sensitizing the Muslim related issues in false image the Muslims of USA are facing now a day's institutional discrimination, social discrimination, economic discrimination and political discrimination at macro level. Likewise same situation is faced by UK Muslims. Western foreign policy and human rights abuses of Muslims are contributing substantially to the alienation of UK Muslims. "On the other hand, non-Muslims are concerned about extremism, the lack of integration, Muslims not being proud to be British and the lack of tolerance by Muslims. However, the biggest threat to good Muslim and non-Muslim community relations is the misinformation on Islam in the media." Following by UK and USA another largest democracy of the world is creating atmosphere of social exclusion for the respective Muslim community as has been discussed below. In Australia, it has become the norm for some media outlets and politicians to paint Australian Muslims and Islam in a pejorative and derogatory manner. According to some scholars this led to constructing Australian Muslims as the new 'other.' This social misconstruction had a detrimental impact on the lives of many Australian Muslims, and has certainly strained the relationship between them and the wider Australian community. In order to practically create better understanding about Islam and the Muslims, and to build sustainable bridges between Queensland Muslims and the wider society, Multicultural Affairs Queensland (MAQ) and the local Muslim community formed the Muslim Community Reference Group (MCRG) in 2006. Working with, and not on behalf of, the local Muslim community brought immediate positive and constructive results. Multicultural Affairs Queensland commissioned this research to establish an empirical basis that can inform policy concerning inter-community relations. As content analysis of the media representation of the Queensland Muslim community would be limited in its capacity to yield the necessary data, this research sought an audience analysis. The aim was to provide insight as to the impact of media representations of Islam and Muslims on the Queensland Muslim community by studying the effects that such representations have on Queenslanders. Likewise in Indian context Muslims are facing major problems by labelling as terrorists especially in relation to Kashmiri Muslims All Kashmiries are known and are called by Non Muslims of the subcontinent as terrorists. This behaviour of Non Muslims towards Kashmiri Muslim is posing a serious threat and are reducing the life chance of Kashmiris outside the valley which in turn leads to social exclusion and is hampering their socio economic development. The root cause of this marginalization and deprivation is only maintained and grounded only by misrepresentation of Kashmiris by domestic and international media. To reduce the possibilities of discrimination against Muslims the UNESCO in July 2005 organized a debate on "Islam, media and public opinion". Over 150 participants representing the academic world, the media and civil society participated in the debate from which it became clear that any difficulties that may be seen concerning the place of Islam in western society is clearly one of perception and, by no means a reality related to the religion itself or to its practice. A call was made by all participants for more tolerance and openness in dealing with different cultures, religions and socio-cultural backgrounds this problem cannot be eradicated till the moment media custodians don't follow the ethics of media by respecting all faiths and by providing special care to human rights while presenting any kind of news .

## CONCLUSION

In light of the above discussion it can be concluded that media is manipulating the attitude, perception and ideologies of different groups by presenting Muslims as serious threat to Non Muslim groups which in turn leads to identity crises of Muslims and the outcome of which is social exclusion from their own social settings or alienation, and in long run this alienation breeds conflict between Muslims and non Muslims or clash of civilization as predicted by Samuel P. Huntington. Finally the ramification of the media misrepresentation is loss of human lives and violent class struggle for the protection of group interests which is then termed by Muslims as Jihad and non Muslims as terrorism. This problem can be solved only by separating politics and media at both national and international level.

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