

Islamophobia in visual media: Analyzing anti-Islam propaganda techniques in *The Kashmir Files*

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ABSTRACT

Background: This research is motivated by the propaganda utilization on movies or films which is growing day by day from overt through documentary to covert through fiction. Movies or films were eventually used by propagandists to launch propaganda using certain techniques to influence attitudes and behaviour towards a certain person or group. **Purpose:** this study aims to determine how much the percentage of anti-Islam Propaganda elements applied in *The Kashmir Files* film. **Methods:** this study uses a descriptive content analysis, with a sample of *The Kashmir Files* film that has been determined by researchers from what scenes and dialogues contain elements of anti-Islamic propaganda that are presented in this film. **Results:** With the unit of analysis through the sample film *The Kashmir Files*, the application of anti-Islamic propaganda uses propaganda techniques of Name Calling, Transfer, Card Stacking, Appeal to Fear, Demonizing the Enemy, Repetition, and Scapegoating. These propaganda techniques show anti-Islam in the storyline clearly. The results of data analysis Card Stacking and Transfer are the most frequently used and rarely used techniques, namely 18.0% and 7.4%. Other techniques found from the results of data analysis are Name Calling (15.9%), Appeal to Fear (14.8%), Demonizing the Enemy (13.8%), Repetition (15.9%), and Scapegoating (13.8%). All the techniques used by propagandists can be categorised as propaganda that displays anti-Islamic propaganda through Islamophobia. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that film clearly employs multiple anti-Islam propaganda techniques, with Card Stacking and Transfer being the most dominant. The film can be categorized as promoting Islamophobia through a systematic use of persuasive and emotive propaganda strategies. **Implications:** The way of delivering propaganda techniques in this film uses propaganda in verbal communication and visual communication. With the presentation of conversations or dialogues, direct reports, speeches, symbols, so that propaganda looks natural in its anti-Islamic delivery.

Keywords: Anti-Islam; film; islamophobia; propaganda technique; *The Kashmir Files*

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INTRODUCTION

Film, as a powerful medium, not only serves as entertainment, but can also be a platform for the construction and dissemination of ideological messages (Zhu & Fu, 2024), as well as many studies showing that films construct representations of issues (Maulany & Abdullah, 2019; Rachmaria, 2020; Rohmah et al., 2020; Umarela et al., 2020; Verma et al., 2025). Propaganda for certain messages is no exception (Zhou, 2025) Films are even used for propaganda with such as Islamophobic sentiments (Peters et al., 2018). In addition, some films contribute to the dissemination of Islamophobic narratives by reproducing stereotypical representations of Muslims and Middle Eastern characters. Such portrayals may shape audience perceptions and, under certain conditions, strengthen support for exclusionary or prejudicial attitudes (Hawkins et al., 2024; Masroor & Arora, 2024). Film is widely used as a propaganda medium by propagandists or filmmakers to convey various ideas, concepts, and ideas directly to the audience (Samit, 2016). This is due to film's capacity to reach broad audiences and to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours at both individual and collective levels. In contemporary media environments, audio-visual propaganda can exert substantial influence because multimodal and affective elements facilitate the large-scale circulation of persuasive messages (Rahmani et al., 2025; Bösch & Divon, 2024)

The history of the use of film as a

propaganda medium began overtly through the use of documentary films (Karnajaya & Annas, 2023). Many propagandists utilise documentary films to convey their propaganda goals (Kunandar, 2017). Story films are an effective form of propaganda media by (K. Wijaya, 2021) conveying propaganda messages through stories and narratives that are structured in such a way as to influence the audience's views on a particular issue or group (Bachtiar et al., 2016; Brown, 1963; M. Wijaya, 2021). Characters, plots, and conflicts in narrative texts can evoke emotional engagement and shape audience perceptions, attitudes, and responses. Recent research shows that richer narrative construction can intensify emotional processing and influence how audiences interpret messages and form evaluative judgments (Zhou et al., 2025; Rahmani et al., 2025). Compared with fictional films, which are commonly designed for narrative entertainment and leisure consumption, documentaries are more frequently associated with factual, public-interest, or advocacy-oriented representation. In contemporary screen culture, documentaries circulate widely across both television and streaming services (Rahmani et al., 2025; Hardiman, 2025). This is then utilised by propagandists because when the audience is "relaxed", propaganda messages can be easily inserted, even without realising it (Soules, 2015; Zhu & Fu, 2024).

Film is a powerful medium that can captivate, inspire, and transform communities

and individuals. Films have effects that go far beyond entertainment; they can serve as important tools for social movements, raising public awareness, and driving change. Films have proven to be a useful tool for teaching as they can “help dramatise and frame issues, generate discussion, and provide links to personal experience” (Nightingale, 2011). Films can also aid social movements and spread important issues.

The term propaganda has its historical roots in early modern Catholic usage, especially in the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. This institution was created to coordinate and direct Catholic missionary activity within a Counter-Reformation framework, including missions among Protestant and Orthodox communities as well as in territories beyond Europe; in this original context, propaganda referred to the propagation of the faith rather than to its later pejorative political meaning (Robin, 2024; Zhang, 2023, 2024). Originally, propaganda denoted the propagation of the faith; later, the term shifted into a pejorative political label associated with organized persuasion and manipulation (Zhang, 2024; McCluskey et al., 2023). These include *lies, deceit, manipulation, mind control, psychological warfare, brainwashing, palaver, and fake news* (Bago et al., 2020; Shu et al., 2020). Over time, the term propaganda has come to refer to a form of communication strategy. Propaganda is a communication that seeks to obtain a response

in accordance with the expectations of the propagandist (Lock & Ludolph, 2020).

The Kashmir conflict is one of the most complex and protracted geopolitical disputes in South Asia, involving India, Pakistan and local groups in the region, and the conflict was made into a propagandized movie called *The Kashmir Files*. Since the partition of India in 1947, Kashmir has been a disputed territory, resulting in prolonged tensions and several wars between India and Pakistan. The Indian government claims Kashmir as part of its national integrity, while Pakistan supports separatist movements and considers the region part of its wider Muslim identity. Discussing anti-Muslim propaganda in India, quoted from bbc.com, it turns out that hatred of Islam through campaigns and propaganda is an industry that is often intensified in India. According to criticism from various parties, hate speech, discrimination and attacks against Muslims have increased sharply since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014 (Yunariono, 2023).

The 2022 film *The Kashmir Files* has stirred intense debate and drawn widespread criticism for presenting the Kashmir conflict from a highly one-sided perspective. Directed by Vivek Agnihotri, the film focuses on the forced displacement of the Kashmiri Hindu community, known as the Pandits, which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s during a period of political and social unrest. The film depicts the suffering of the Pandit community in a deeply dramatic and shocking

way, highlighting stories of violence, fear, and loss that forced many families to flee their ancestral homes (Fortuin, 2022). While this portrayal sheds light on the genuine pain experienced by this community, critics argue that the film deliberately ignores the broader historical and political context that shaped the conflict. It oversimplifies complex factors and reduces the narrative to a clear division between victims and perpetrators, which risks deepening religious and social divides. The film has also been accused of fueling anti-Muslim sentiments by presenting the Muslim community solely as aggressors, without acknowledging their own experiences of violence and marginalisation.

From a discourse analysis perspective, *The Kashmir Files* illustrates how visual media can be used to construct powerful ideological messages that shape public perception, influence intergroup relations, and reinforce stereotypes that may already exist within society. However, the film has also been widely criticised for spreading anti-Muslim sentiments and pushing Hindu nationalist ideas (Mattingly & Yao, 2022). Many point out that it mainly highlights the violence committed by Muslims while ignoring the complex political, social, and economic factors behind the conflict.

The film uses emotional scenes and graphic violence to frame Muslims as the main perpetrators of terror. This portrayal creates the impression that Muslims are always the aggressors. As a result, critics argue the film acts as propaganda that fuels Islamophobia.

The Kashmir conflict is a multifaceted issue that extends far beyond the simplistic portrayals often seen in media representations, such as in *The Kashmir Files*. Its history is deeply intertwined with the legacy of colonialism, particularly the partition of British India in 1947, which created a geopolitical quagmire for the Kashmir region. This partition not only divided provinces but also sowed the seeds of enduring territorial disputes, leading to wars and a persistent state of tension between India and Pakistan over the region (Aryal & Muneer, 2025; Dar & Deb, 2022; Idrees et al., 2021).

Central to understanding the Kashmir conflict is the varied identity and culture of the Kashmiri people themselves, which has often been overshadowed by national narratives propagated by both India and Pakistan. The Kashmiri identity is shaped by a unique blend of secular and communal elements known as “Kashmiriyat,” which has historically transcended religious lines but has faced significant strains since the escalation of the conflict in the late 20th century (Hussain, 2023). Various armed groups with differing agendas now operate within Kashmir, complicating the landscape further. Each group’s motives are often colored by external influences and local grievances, contributing to cycles of violence that affect all communities in the region (Gabel et al., 2022).

Moreover, from a discourse analysis perspective, the reductionist portrayal of the conflict into binaries of ‘good versus evil’

serves to erase the nuances of Kashmiri lived experiences, thereby perpetuating misunderstanding and division (Din, 2022; Ghosh & Duschinski, 2020). Such oversimplification ignores the historical narratives that explain the socio-political fabric of the region and can fuel mistrust among different community factions. Scholars argue that successful resolution requires a deeper engagement with the overlapping historical, political, and social dimensions of Kashmir, emphasizing dialogue and reconciliation over divisive propaganda (Yousaf et al., 2020).

Ironically, the Muslim community in Kashmir is also depicted as experiencing severe suffering, including violence and the loss of dignity, as shown in the film *Kumari* (produced in 2018). *The Kashmir Files* shows how visual media can push a one-sided narrative, hide the bigger picture, and shape public opinion against a particular group.

The presence of hate speech may be observed in the translation of political and media remarks in India that pertain to Islam and the perceived threat posed by Muslims. The primary criteria for categorising the transmission of hate speech were solely determined by the targeted organization's foundation of hatred, such as race or creed (Dadabhoy, 2021). The political philosophy of India under colonisation is primarily rooted on an egalitarian spirit. Nevertheless, the actuality in everyday existence is unquestionably distinct. In order to develop a democratic system inside the country, specific

constitutional regulations were implemented to eliminate the disadvantages faced by marginalised groups living in the country. Underprivileged Muslim groups make up around one third of the whole Indian population (Ahad & Akgül, 2022). In addition, the animosity that arose among Hindus during the partition of the nation and subsequent control resulted in Islamophobic attacks targeting the Muslim population, including physical, psychological, religious, and sexual assaults (Singh & Dagar, 2022).

One form of representation of the phenomenon of anti-Islam or Islamophobia is by depicting it through film media (Arora, 2023). This is because the films produced produce certain symbols that can be used to represent certain ideologies or values (representation of anti-Islamic phenomena) (Sumra, 2020) and produce emotional associations that tend towards destructiveness (Masood, 2023; Shan, 2023). Here, researchers found an Indian film that has elements of anti-Islamic propaganda, namely *The Kashmir Files*. This film tells the story of a Hindu student named Krishna in uncovering the death of his family which turns out to be related to the exodus and genocide of Kashmiri Hindus in the 1990s (Wikipedia, 2022).

The emergence of the film *The Kashmir Files*, of course, reaped various pros and cons. In some ways, the film was praised for its historical storyline of the exodus of the Kashmiri Hindu minority, good cinematography

and visual editing, evocative music, and good acting by Anupam Kher and Pallavi Joshi. Especially with the direct support of the current prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, and other politicians from the BJP by removing the tax imposed on this film. Modi praised the film for showing the truth of Kashmir's violent past (Haider, 2021; Zhu & Fu, 2024). On the other hand, *The Kashmir Files* was criticised by some. The film is considered historically inaccurate and carries elements of anti-Islamic propaganda with Kashmiri Muslims portrayed as evil, dangerous and savage (Chowdhury et al., 2024). K.S. Alagiri argues that *The Kashmir Files* is aimed at fueling hatred against Muslims with half-truths and manipulated facts. Quoted from cnn.com, *The Kashmir Files* was criticised for showing graphic violence and killings that demonise Muslims and reinforce negative stereotypes of Islam. Such depictions, as well as alleged historical changes in the storyline, may exacerbate conflict and tension between Hindus and Muslims in India (Das, 2023).

The Kashmir Files had a big impression on both the general public and viewers. Among the effects are the radicalization and violence of the Muslim community in Kashmir towards the Hindu minority. The flight of Kashmiri Pandits is attributed to militant groups such as the Hizbul Mujahideen, who are known for their savage attacks, threats, and murders. The conflicts between the Muslim and Hindu groups are brought to light in *The Kashmir Files*. A notion of how intercommunal tensions can

escalate into destructive violence is provided by scenes depicting vicious attacks on Kashmiri Pandits, forced evictions, and sexual violence. and violent scenes that depict the pain Kashmiri Pandits endure (Showkat, 2025; Warikoo, 2023). The gruesome depictions of murder, rape, and forced displacement highlight how serious the violence is. A portion of the movie's story also includes criticism of the Indian government at the time. Another layer of complication to the conflict was the perception that the government was not doing enough to protect the Pandit community and was disregarding their misery. Many spectators were affected by the film's vivid and poignant portrayal of violence (Husandani et al., 2024; Masroor & Arora, 2024; Pradsmadji & Irwansyah, 2020). This research seeks to answer the main questions regarding the percentage of anti-Islamic propaganda elements in *The Kashmir Files* film based on the analysis of their occurrence distribution and how visual strategies in this film are used to convey manipulative propaganda messages. In addition, this research will also dig elements systematically and objectively, the forms of visualisation used in building propaganda narratives, and the relationship between the frequency distribution of propaganda elements and the effectiveness of delivering manipulative messages in the film.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach using descriptive content analysis.

Descriptive content analysis is a systematic method for examining communication content by identifying, categorizing, and describing the characteristics of messages or textual materials in accordance with predefined analytical categories (Mayring, 2023; Nicmanis, 2024; Sheydayi, 2023). With the descriptive content analysis method, this research will rely on the collective data collected. The data collected will be analysed systematically to identify certain patterns or themes that appear in the message or text under study. The results of this analysis will provide an in-depth understanding of the characteristics and aspects of the data that has been collected.

The research sample comes from all scenes in *The Kashmir Files* film that contain elements of anti-Islamic propaganda techniques. In this study, seven propaganda techniques were selected as the main analytical categories, namely name-calling, transfer, card stacking, appeal to fear, demonizing the enemy, repetition, and scapegoating. These categories were adapted from the classical propaganda-analysis tradition and from more recent scholarship that treats propaganda as a set of identifiable manipulative techniques in mediated texts (Horák et al., 2024). The selection of propaganda techniques uses non-random/non-probability sampling techniques. The selection of propaganda techniques is based on the assumption that the scenes fulfil the characteristics of the messages in the anti-Islamic propaganda techniques contained in the

film *The Kashmir Files*. The recording unit that researchers use is the syntactic unit. The unit of analysis that researchers determine is that there are two units of analysis, the first is the image language analysis unit and the second is the textual language analysis unit (Anjani et al., 2021). The image language unit of analysis is used to analyse the visuals of the anti-Islamic propaganda scenes, while the textual language unit of analysis is used to analyse the verbal messages conveyed in *The Kashmir Files*. This method allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the propaganda techniques used in the film. Thus, the analysis can provide a more complete picture of how anti-Islamic messages are conveyed through various visual and verbal elements in the film. This method also allows the researcher to identify certain patterns used to indirectly influence viewers. By using a textual approach, the researcher can identify the narrative that is implicitly constructed in the film. In addition, this analysis can also help in understanding how certain messages are conveyed through the dialogue and visuals used. In this research, the data used are primary data and secondary data (Anam & Nurhayati, 2020; Kusuma & Munasah, 2023). Data was obtained by two events: observation and documentation (Ghony & Almanshur, 2016). Observation in this study, which is used as the unit of analysis, is the research interaction with the elements of anti-Islamic propaganda contained in the visualisation of words, sentences, dialogue, and scenes in

the film *The Kashmir Files*. Documentation was also used as a supporting data-collection procedure to systematically archive and manage the research materials examined in this study, including scenes from *The Kashmir Files* and relevant textual sources such as books, journal articles, and other academic documents (Fazeli et al., 2023; Moilanen et al., 2022).

The data obtained from observation and documentation were then analysed to identify the elements of anti-Islam propaganda in *The Kashmir Files* film. This analysis is important to understand how negative messages against Islam are conveyed through visualisation in the film. The data obtained from observation and documentation were then analysed to identify the elements of anti-Islam propaganda in *The Kashmir Files*. This analysis aims to understand how anti-Islamic messages are conveyed through the visualisation of words, sentences, dialogues, and scenes in the film. The results of the analysis can provide a deeper understanding of how anti-Islamic narratives are constructed in the film. Thus, the audience can be more critical in receiving information presented through visual media such as films.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of *The Kashmir Files* reveals that the film employs various anti-Islam propaganda techniques, categorized into seven types: Name Calling, Transfer, Card Stacking, Appeal to Fear, Demonizing the Enemy, Repetition, and Scapegoating. These techniques are strategically used to construct a negative

image of Muslims through narrative elements, dialogues, and visual portrayals that implicitly and explicitly instill specific perceptions in the audience. Based on a quantitative analysis of the film's scenes, Card Stacking was found to be the most frequently used propaganda technique, appearing 17 times (18.0%). This technique involves selectively presenting information that supports a particular viewpoint while omitting or downplaying opposing information, thereby creating a biased narrative. In the context of this film, Card Stacking is used to highlight the alleged atrocities committed by Muslims against Hindus while omitting a balanced historical perspective that could provide a more nuanced understanding of the conflict. Additionally, Name Calling and Repetition were also frequently observed, each appearing 15 times (15.9%). Name Calling is employed to associate Muslims with negative labels, reinforcing stereotypes that influence public opinion. This technique is further amplified by Repetition, in which anti-Islam propaganda messages are reiterated throughout various scenes and dialogues, making them more ingrained in the audience's perception. The Appeal to Fear technique appeared in 14 scenes (14.8%) and serves to instill fear toward a specific group—in this case, Muslims—by portraying them as a direct threat to others. This technique is commonly used in scenes depicting acts of violence or terror committed by Muslim characters, without offering a counter-narrative that presents alternative perspectives.

Demonizing the Enemy and Scapegoating were each identified in 13 scenes (13.8%). Demonizing the Enemy is employed to portray Muslims as cruel and inhumane, reinforcing negative perceptions. Meanwhile, Scapegoating is used to attribute the blame for various tragic events in the film solely to Muslims, despite the existence of other contributing factors that are left unaddressed. The least frequently used technique was Transfer, which appeared in only 7 scenes (7.4%). This technique works by associating an individual, group, or ideology with particular symbols to strengthen the intended perception. In *The Kashmir Files*, Transfer is used to link Muslims with symbols of violence or extremist ideologies, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes in the minds of the audience. Overall, this analysis reveals that *The Kashmir Files* systematically employs propaganda techniques to construct a narrative that is overtly biased against Muslims. With a total of 94 instances of propaganda techniques across the film, it is evident that the film's anti-Islam messaging is not merely implicit but

also explicit, potentially shaping how viewers perceive the depicted conflict.

The analysis identified 94 occurrences of propaganda techniques across 69 scenes in *The Kashmir Files*, distributed as follows (Table 1).

In content analysis research, *inter-coder reliability* is a crucial aspect to ensure that data interpretation is not subjective or biased but adheres to standardized analytical frameworks. Therefore, this study conducted a reliability test by comparing the coding results of multiple independent coders.

The reliability testing process involved cross-verifying the classifications made by Coder 1, Coder 2, and Coder 3. The results demonstrated a high level of agreement among coders, indicating clarity and consistency in the categorization framework used for the analysis. This reinforces the validity of the identified propaganda techniques, suggesting that the findings are not merely subjective interpretations but part of a systematically embedded communication strategy within the film.

Table 1 Percentage of Propaganda Techniques

No	Propaganda Techniques	Freq.	%
1	Name Calling	15	15,9%
2	Transfer	7	7,4%
3	Card Stacking	17	18,0%
4	Appeal to Fear	14	14,8%
5	Demonizing the Enemy	13	13,8%
6	Repetition	15	15,9%
7	Scapegoating	13	13,8%
Total		94 Item	100%

Source: Researcher, 2024

This methodological accuracy strengthens the quantitative findings, which identified 94 instances of propaganda across 69 analyzed scenes. Using a descriptive content analysis approach, this study allows for an in-depth examination of how propaganda techniques are integrated into the film's narrative to influence audience perceptions of Muslims.

The methodology also enables an analysis of how *The Kashmir Files* combines verbal and visual elements to convey its message. The use of symbols, facial expressions, lighting, background music, and dialogue all contribute to the propaganda strategy, enhancing its psychological impact on viewers. The interplay of these elements reinforces the film's messaging, making it more persuasive and emotionally compelling.

Given these findings, it can be concluded that *The Kashmir Files* serves as a clear example of how films can be utilised as propaganda tools to shape perceptions of particular groups. The film does not solely rely on verbal propaganda in its dialogues but also leverages visual and cinematic elements to strengthen its anti-Islam narrative.

The findings reveal a deliberate and calculated use of propaganda techniques, with Card Stacking (18%) being the most frequently employed, followed by Name Calling (15.9%) and Repetition (15.9%). Each technique plays a specific role in reinforcing the film's anti-Islamic message.

The details obtained as follows in the Name

Calling technique, Negative Name Calling is found in *The Kashmir Files* fifteen times with the portrayal of Muslims, namely Kashmiri Muslim militants, portrayed as evil, cruel and unmerciful towards non-Muslims, especially Kashmiri Hindu-Pandits. Name calling in the film is often used to label Muslims as "terrorists" or "enemies", which reinforces the stereotype that Muslims are inherently dangerous. This technique blurs the identity of individual Muslims by generalising them as part of a hostile group, fighting Kashmiri Hindu-Pandits.

In the Transfer, Propaganda technique in this film, two forms of anti-Islamic propaganda with the Transfer propaganda technique are seen, namely statements using Islamic religious terms, namely the term "*Jihad*" the term "*Syahadatain*", the term "*Sufi*", and the term "*Dervish*" as well as the use of Islamic religious symbols (mosque shots). All seven scenes aim to associate a bad activity with the use of terms and symbols from Islam, so that all things that have a relationship with Islam will be considered bad as well. The use of the term "*Jihad*" is associated by the protagonist as the "us" party with the movement (terrorism) and acts of violence carried out by Islamic militants. So that the term "*Jihad*" becomes misunderstood and used by propagandists to be interpreted as a physical struggle or resistance with weapons as a way to get to Allah's paradise which has a bad or negative connotation. Whereas the concept of "*Jihad*" itself is actually not only interpreted in this way. According to MUI (Indonesian

Ulema Council), Jihad has a broad meaning. Jihad literally means “*qital*” or “war” as in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 190. Symbols of Islam, such as mosques or traditional Muslim dress, are associated with acts of violence or threats. This creates a mental association between Islam and violence, which reinforces Islamophobic narratives. When viewers see these symbols, they may automatically associate them with violence, without questioning the validity of the association. The frame of mosques being associated as a gathering place for Islamic militants is a symbolic visualisation that emphasises that the (*holy*) place of worship of Muslims is a place for Islamic militants or “terrorists” to call for their jihad movement (Swami, 2017).

The Transfer propaganda technique in *The Kashmir Files* is perhaps the most symbolically charged, as it manipulates the *shahada* a fundamental Islamic declaration of faith and associates it with acts of violence and coercion. The *shahada*, central to Muslim identity, states, “*There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.*” It is a sacred affirmation of monotheism and devotion, but in the film, it is framed as a tool of oppression used by “Islamic Tyrants” or militants to force religious conversion upon Kashmiri Pandits. This manipulation distorts the meaning of the *shahada*, imbuing it with a sinister connotation that undermines its spiritual essence. By employing the Transfer technique, the film effectively projects the negative actions

of specific individuals onto an entire religion and its symbols. In this portrayal, the *shahada* is stripped of its universal significance and transformed into a representation of terror and subjugation. This distortion serves a dual purpose: first, to vilify Islam by equating its core tenets with violence; and second, to evoke emotional reactions of fear and anger among viewers, further entrenching Islamophobic sentiments. From a broader perspective, this deliberate framing reflects a recurring pattern in global cinema and media, where religious symbols are co-opted to serve propagandistic goals. The weaponization of cultural and religious markers often amplifies existing biases and simplifies complex sociopolitical conflicts into binary oppositions of good versus evil. In this case, the *shahada* becomes emblematic of the perceived threat of Islam, while Kashmiri Pandits are cast as unequivocal victims, erasing the nuanced realities of the Kashmir conflict. This narrative strategy has profound implications. On a societal level, it perpetuates stereotypes and fuels communal tensions by portraying an entire religious community as monolithic and inherently violent. On a psychological level, the repetitive association of sacred symbols with acts of terror creates a lasting cognitive bias, making it challenging for viewers to separate religious beliefs from the actions of a minority. This not only deepens divisions but also marginalizes Muslims by casting suspicion on their practices and symbols.

Moreover, the use of the *shahada* as a

propaganda tool aligns with broader trends in media representation, where religious or cultural symbols are frequently decontextualized to fit a specific narrative. Such portrayals contribute to a global discourse that normalizes prejudice against marginalized groups, reinforcing systemic inequalities. The framing of the *shahada* in *The Kashmir Files* exemplifies how visual storytelling can influence perceptions and perpetuate harmful ideologies under the guise of entertainment. To counteract these effects, it is crucial for filmmakers and audiences alike to engage with media critically. Filmmakers bear the ethical responsibility of portraying religious and cultural symbols with sensitivity and accuracy, especially in narratives addressing contentious issues. Audiences, on the other hand, must develop media literacy skills to recognize and question biased representations. The manipulation of the *shahada* in *The Kashmir Files* illustrates the potent impact of Transfer propaganda in shaping public opinion. By critically examining such portrayals, we can foster a more informed and empathetic understanding of complex socio-political realities, resisting the divisive narratives that propagate fear and mistrust.

In the film *The Kashmir Files*, the use of card stacking technique is aimed at the worst facts for the opposing party, the Kashmiri Muslims. The protagonists, as propagandists, present truths such as the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus but mix them with falsehoods such as mixing up the portrayal of the Kashmiri

Muslims as cruel and merciless Islamic militants who like to commit acts of violence against Kashmiri Pandits. Even the falsehoods that are mixed with the truth are presented in such a way by the propagandists that it results in a case or fact that there was a genocide against Kashmiri Pandits. The film *The Kashmir Files* depicts the cruelty of Kashmiri Muslims in committing acts of merciless violence against Kashmiri Hindus or Kashmiri Pandits. The film is set in 1989-1990, where terror attacks emerged and became rampant due to the jihad movement by Islamic militants (bad guys). Kashmiri Pandits (good guys) are portrayed as the ones who suffer from the cruelty of these attacks. Facts that support the anti-Islamic narrative are highlighted, while the wider context or alternative views are ignored.

This creates a highly biased and incomplete picture, potentially reinforcing Islamophobic views among viewers. There are fourteen Appeal to Fear propaganda techniques in *The Kashmir Files* film. First, all statements by the protagonist that display fear of acts of terror committed by Islamic militants or Kashmiri Muslims, which amounts to twelve times. And secondly, all statements that display a sense of anxiety due to the manipulation of the truth by Islamic militants, which amounts to two times. Appeal to Fear is used in this film, with scenes that portray Muslims as a constant threat, the film attempts to influence the audience's perception that Islam is a dangerous religion. All scenes and statements delivered by the protagonists as

the “us” side contain anti-Islamic propaganda to spread feelings of fear, anxiety and panic towards the audience by pointing to Kashmiri Muslims or the “them” side as the source.

Kashmiri Muslims in *The Kashmir Files* are identified as Islamic terrorists who are portrayed as ruthless, merciless and justifying all means (in the name of jihad). This portrayal is further reinforced through statements from the protagonists and explicit graphic visualisations of violence. The propaganda technique of Demonizing the Enemy found in *The Kashmir Files* is thirteen times. All scenes and statements delivered by the protagonists as propagandists contain anti-Islamic propaganda to disseminate immoral behaviour and actions committed by Islamic militants so as to form a bad image for Kashmiri Muslims.

Repetition propaganda technique found in the film *The Kashmir Files*, which is fifteen times. All statements delivered by the protagonists as propagandists contain anti-Islamic propaganda to repeat all acts of violence and other crimes committed by Islamic militants so that the audience can easily remember them according to the propagandist’s will. There are many scenes in *The Kashmir Files* that contain arguments that are considered true but do not actually match the situation on the ground, for example, anti-Islamic arguments that blame Kashmiri Muslims and position them as the only perpetrators of crime and violence in the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri Pandits are also portrayed as the real victims of the incident.

The scenes in *The Kashmir Files* film that are the main characters in the use of scapegoating propaganda techniques are mostly delivered by Krishna Pandit, although there are several other scenes delivered by other characters but still contain scapegoating propaganda techniques. Speaking of the scapegoating propaganda technique, this technique is used to spread arguments in the form of statements that blame Kashmiri Muslims for the chaos and suffering experienced by Kashmiri Pandits.

From the beginning to the end of the film, *The Kashmir Files* continues to find fault with Muslims by making an argument and discussion in the conversation between the characters. This scene becomes a propaganda that shapes negative thoughts about Islam as a whole. Propaganda techniques are used to selectively present propaganda to associate the enemy with negative symbols, influencing the audience’s perception without providing a balanced view. So, the data found that the techniques of Name Calling, Appeal to Fear, and Demonizing the Enemy became quite dominant, with frequencies of 15.9%, 14.8%, and 13.8% respectively. These techniques are all used to create negative associations towards Islam and Muslims so as to portray Muslims as dangerous, cruel, or dishonest. Repetition and Scapegoating were also significant, each appearing in 13.8% of the analysed content. Repetition is used to reinforce negative stereotypes, while Scapegoating aims to blame Muslim groups for the problems Hindu communities suffer.

The Kashmir Files presents a narrative laden with propaganda techniques that systematically shape a biased perspective, reinforcing Islamophobic views among its audience. This analysis identifies the deliberate use of specific propaganda strategies such as Appeal to Fear, Demonizing the Enemy, Name Calling, Repetition, and Scapegoating, all of which play a significant role in constructing a highly prejudiced portrayal of Kashmiri Muslims and Islam as a whole.

The frequent use of the Appeal to Fear technique underscores the film's attempt to evoke fear and anxiety among viewers by portraying Kashmiri Muslims as perpetual threats. The data shows that twelve instances involve fear of terror acts, while two instances emphasize the anxiety caused by alleged manipulation of truth by Islamic militants. Such selective portrayal not only simplifies a complex socio-political conflict but also fosters a monolithic view of Islam as inherently violent and dangerous.

The Demonizing the Enemy technique, employed thirteen times, intensifies the portrayal of Kashmiri Muslims as ruthless terrorists. By associating them with merciless violence in the name of jihad, the film entrenches a stereotype of Muslims as morally reprehensible. This demonization is further magnified through explicit graphic visualizations and repetitive statements that highlight acts of violence committed by Islamic militants. And, Repetition, appearing fifteen times, reinforces the narrative's negative stereotypes by repeatedly

associating Muslims with violence and other crimes. This technique ensures that the audience internalizes the propagandist's framing of events, making it difficult to separate fact from constructed narrative. Similarly, Scapegoating blames Kashmiri Muslims exclusively for the suffering of Kashmiri Pandits, absolving other factors and stakeholders of accountability. This oversimplified causation denies the multifaceted nature of historical and political conflicts in Kashmir.

The use of propaganda techniques raises significant ethical concerns about the role of mass media in perpetuating biased narratives. By portraying Kashmiri Pandits as the sole victims and Kashmiri Muslims as the sole perpetrators, the film disregards the multifaceted nature of the conflict and silences alternative voices. This one-dimensional portrayal hinders reconciliation efforts and exacerbates communal tensions. From a broader perspective, such narratives can exacerbate communal tensions and hinder reconciliation efforts. The repetitive use of negative stereotypes and scapegoating techniques creates a one-dimensional narrative that obscures the historical context and silences alternative voices. This not only distorts public understanding but also risks perpetuating cycles of prejudice and division. Therefore, it is imperative for filmmakers, scholars, and media professionals to critically engage with the ethical responsibilities of storytelling. Films like *The Kashmir Files* serve as reminders of the power of visual media to shape perceptions

and influence societal attitudes. To counteract such biases, there is a need for balanced narratives that embrace nuance, promote empathy, and foster dialogue. In conclusion, the analysis underscores the role of *The Kashmir Files* in advancing a singular, Islamophobic narrative through the systematic application of propaganda techniques. This calls for a conscious effort to critically evaluate and challenge media representations that reinforce stereotypes and deepen societal divides. By doing so, we can move towards a more inclusive and equitable discourse that respects the complexity of historical events and the diversity of human experiences.

He findings of this study have significant implications for both media representation and societal attitudes. By employing these propaganda techniques, *The Kashmir Files* perpetuates a narrative that deepens communal divides and reinforces Islamophobic stereotypes. The film's selective portrayal of events simplifies a complex conflict, obscuring the nuanced realities of the Kashmir issue and silencing the voices of Kashmiri Muslims. From an ethical perspective, the use of such techniques raises questions about the responsibility of filmmakers in representing sensitive socio-political issues. While art and cinema have the power to shape public opinion, they also bear the burden of fostering understanding and empathy. Misrepresentation of religious or cultural groups not only perpetuates biases but also exacerbates existing tensions, hindering

efforts toward reconciliation and peace. These findings underscore the need for critical media literacy and responsible storytelling in addressing sensitive issues. Audiences must be equipped to recognize and question biased representations, while filmmakers should strive to create narratives that promote inclusivity and understanding. Addressing these challenges requires a collective effort to foster dialogue and bridge divides, paving the way for a more equitable and empathetic society.

The impact of *The Kashmir Files* extends beyond regional boundaries, contributing to a growing trend in global cinema where political and cultural narratives are shaped to align with specific ideological perspectives (Showkat, 2025). This phenomenon raises questions about the responsibility of filmmakers in presenting balanced portrayals of contentious issues. Films with a similar agenda have the potential to influence international audiences, perpetuating stereotypes and exacerbating cultural misunderstandings on a global scale. In global cinematic discourse, such narratives often serve as tools for soft power, influencing international perceptions and policies. The portrayal of Muslims as antagonists aligns with broader Islamophobic tropes in Western and Indian cinema, reinforcing negative biases that already exist in various societies. By amplifying divisive narratives, *The Kashmir Files* and similar films contribute to a cinematic landscape that prioritizes sensationalism over nuanced storytelling, risking the further marginalization

of minority communities. Moreover, the international success of ideologically charged films highlights the economic motivations intertwined with cultural representation. The profitability of such narratives encourages filmmakers globally to adopt similar strategies, potentially creating a cycle where divisive content overshadows balanced narratives in mainstream cinema. This trend underscores the urgent need for global audiences and critics to advocate for diverse and inclusive storytelling that challenges stereotypes rather than perpetuates them.

CONCLUSION

This study has comprehensively examined how *The Kashmir Files* employs systematic anti-Islam propaganda through seven distinct techniques: Name Calling, Transfer, Card Stacking, Appeal to Fear, Demonizing the Enemy, Repetition, and Scapegoating. The quantitative findings show that Card Stacking and Transfer are the most frequently used, which highlights how the film selectively presents information to favour one side of the Kashmir conflict while overshadowing the complex socio-political realities that underpin it. By consistently labelling Kashmiri Muslims as violent aggressors and tying Islamic symbols like the shahada or mosques to terrorism, the film constructs a binary narrative of good versus evil that fuels Islamophobic sentiments. This aligns with the study's objective to reveal how visual and verbal elements in popular media

can systematically shape negative stereotypes of Muslims and normalise these biases in the audience's perception. The repeated use of fear-based messages and demonising imagery magnifies the psychological impact, embedding prejudice at an emotional level that is difficult to dismantle once internalised. This research thus reinforces the need to see film not merely as entertainment but as a potent ideological tool capable of manipulating collective memory, influencing intergroup relations, and deepening social divides. The findings also confirm that *The Kashmir Files* contributes to a larger trend in both Bollywood and global cinema where Islamophobia is strategically constructed and normalised through manipulative storytelling. While the film gives voice to the real suffering of the Kashmiri Pandit community, it does so by silencing and vilifying another community, thereby failing to offer a balanced view that could support dialogue, reconciliation, and historical understanding. In line with this, the study contributes to the discourse that propaganda through film is an influential vehicle for soft power and that the ethical responsibility of filmmakers in representing marginalised communities should not be taken lightly.

Based on these findings, this research recommends that future studies continue to examine other films, TV series, or digital media content that may employ similar propaganda techniques, especially in regions with ongoing ethno-religious conflicts. A comparative approach across different cultural contexts could

deepen our understanding of how Islamophobic narratives are constructed globally and how they impact interfaith relations and public policy. Methodologically, further research could integrate audience reception analysis to see how such propaganda techniques influence viewers' attitudes and behaviours over time. In practice, this study calls for stronger media literacy initiatives that help viewers recognise and critically question biased representations, especially those that exploit historical traumas for ideological agendas. Educational institutions, community leaders, and media practitioners should work together to promote storytelling that upholds fairness, empathy, and historical accuracy while respecting the dignity of all communities involved. Filmmakers are encouraged to adopt more nuanced approaches that do not exploit fear and prejudice but instead foster mutual understanding and reconciliation. Lastly, policymakers and industry stakeholders should consider frameworks or guidelines to address the risks of harmful narratives in popular media, ensuring that artistic freedom does not become a vehicle for amplifying hate and division. By building these safeguards, we can move towards a media landscape that supports social cohesion, respectful pluralism, and peace-building, especially in societies marked by deep-rooted historical conflicts like Kashmir. In this way, the insights from this study can serve as a reminder that critical media awareness and responsible content creation are vital steps toward a more inclusive, informed,

and resilient society.

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