

Hegemonic Media and Polarized Discourses: An Analysis of Disinformation Narratives in Indian Media

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Abstract

There is a growing concern that disinformation, particularly transmitted through mobile phones, television, and social media, is fuelling social tension and even violence at times. Ample evidence, along with anecdotal interpretations, is available to illustrate how digital and mainstream media platforms in India have turned into pernicious channels for spreading hatred and violence. The proposed study investigates how propaganda, disinformation and fake news are used as polarization tools to elevate a particular political ideology or practice in a democracy like India. The study highlights a series of events and hashtags used on X (earlier Twitter) and other social platforms using derogatory language or agendas against communities and people of dissent. The media is wielded as a tool to spread polarized discourses that serve the interest of the ruling dispensation. Using some examples of fake news and propaganda, this paper draws attention to media propaganda and its effects on minorities, Muslims in particular, and human intellect in general. The research looks at how political goals shape propaganda definitions and signs, symbols, or languages used against minorities, who are largely portrayed as ‘others’ in the country. Additionally, it delves into the strategies and techniques employed by prejudiced media to shape reality, as well as how they undermine cultural norms and promote divisive policies of the ruling regime. The investigation of specific texts, videos, and audios will support the study. The findings reveal that such propagandised media or sources of information can have both positive and negative effects on the democratic process. The study uses some cases as examples to show how disinformation or media manipulation restricts the freedom of expression, food habits, mobility, and affiliation of the country's minorities. This is troubling because stigma can lead to more hostile attitudes toward integration or weaken one's sense of belonging in democracies.

Keywords: disinformation narratives, fake news, hegemonic media, language use, polarized discourse, propaganda

1. Introduction

Media is essential for the growth and development of a democratic culture in any nation. They provide the audience with information that influences their attitudes, views, and decision-making processes about society and politics. Consequently, the media need to be socially conscious and devoid of all forms of prejudice. Analyzing the effects of media propaganda in numerous democratic countries (suffering from capitalism, poverty, unemployment, and corruption), it has been revealed that people's minds and actions have been subpar due to ignorance of the true issues (which has caused a remarkable shift in public opinion).

This study focuses on a number of topics related to citizen expectations, media propaganda, and popular criticism of the media in democracies. Citizens of India and around the world have witnessed abysmal effects of fake news and propaganda through media recently: during and after COVID-19 pandemic. Alam et al., (2021), Ahmad and Alam (2022), Alam et al., (2022), and Alam and Ahmad (2020) highlight the idea about manipulation of language and propaganda of the state against minorities and the marginalized. The article highlights how the social media influencers sell their accounts for the sponsored contents that serve the interest of the ruling authority.

One of the aspects discusses that educated class in India, widely considered as educated liberals have expressed concerns over media content. The way media is functioning in India today raises ethical questions regarding fair and impartial journalism. It plays a destructive role, be it through the promotion of religious views, poor reporting on sensitive issues or investigative cowboy journalism that has damaged the media's reputation. This crisis is further deepened through the way social media is used to spread false information and stir hatred: false connections between videos, images, and messages; erroneous context; misrepresentation through the alteration or manipulation of already-filmed material; impersonation or distortion of actual speeches; production of fake content intended to incite and magnify hate speech by well-known people through numerous retweets, forwards, and shares.

2. Objectives of the Study

This research attempts to focus on reviewing various types of propaganda and fake news reports by drawing attention to critical issues that serve as conduits and mechanisms for the continuous flow of disinformation. Additionally, the study tries to understand the agenda and intentions of the media through use of languages and controversy and assesses the impact of such propaganda on human freedom, behaviour, and intellect.

3. Research Questions

- ❖ What are some examples and types of fake news and propaganda and how does media propaganda influence public opinion and polarize society using derogatory language against minorities?
- ❖ What tactics and methods do media use to influence reality using language, text, video, and audio content?

4. Literature Review

Media and propaganda have widely been discussed by media scholars, sociologists and so on. Edward. L. Barneys in his work titled *Propaganda* (2005) critically discusses universal literacy, public opinion and issues of propaganda in a democratic society and explains, 'The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society (Sharma et al., 2024a). Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country... We are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed, and our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of (1928, pp. 9-12). In another classical work, 'Media of Propaganda,' Brown F (1937) discusses interconnections between numerous issues such as nationalism, internationalism, media, culture, ethnicity, and global order. According to his research, the three main mechanisms for disseminating knowledge have been the press, radio, and film industries since their inception. He demonstrates through examples how media organisations have shaped attitudes toward nationalism at all levels and in all forms of governance. On the other hand, Al-Zaman (2021) emphasises five issues and threats to the Indian public in his paper 'COVID-19-Related Social Media Fake News in India.' During the pandemic, he examines almost 125 advertisements, news headlines, and other pieces of information that seemed farcical and deceptive to the public health communication system. He observes that text and video account for 47.2 percent of bogus news. Social media networks such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and others are responsible for 94.4 percent of fake news. Also, several themes and typologies relating to false news, its content, and its varieties (such as satire, parody, and so on) are discussed. Benkler, Faris & Roberts (2018) explored similar experiences of power, conflicts, and media's effect in their study. Right-wing branding, developing political websites, and social media networking were all fully realised through media representation during the Donald Trump period (Zeb et al., 2024a).

Nakov and Martino (2021) elucidated their concern about how people consume news and material. They underlined the audience's potential threat from many sites and applications available to them, referred to as technological propaganda. Danielson & Rolandsson (2020) discusses a fascinating element of political and media personalities appearing on television for entertainment purposes. The researchers aimed to put an intriguing side of politicians through their dancing, singing, and comedy abilities to connect with potential voters by engaging the audience and having their persona as well. Also, Kadiwal (2021) in her work elaborates on the connections between media, democracy, and feminism. She emphasises the importance of discussion in allowing women from marginalised tribal, Dalit, and minority groups to use their right to freedom of expression and speech.

Goswami (2018) highlighted how right-wing parties throughout the world utilise false news to influence election results and create a populist democracy. According to him, the century is a cyber-attack on the rational human mind, altering perceptions and ideas. The employment of false news in the 2016 presidential election in the United States, the application of technologies to promote fake news, and so on, are some significant examples. Countermeasures were proposed to stop the spread of false information.

Raj and Goswami (2020) advanced W. James Potter's notion that individuals are persuaded by the flow of erroneous information. He called for media leadership, media literacy, and self-awareness to be revised, among other things. In their study 'Misinformation, Disinformation, and Online Propaganda'. Andrew M. Guess and Benjamin A. Lyon (2022) construct a scholarly statement of the above three terminologies and their mobilisation. Rumours, conspiracy theories, and other themes in this paper have been found connected to the factors and cases studied. They deduce the pattern of hate speech, fake news, and their transmission and consumption. Sikander (2021) identifies trends and patterns of 'othering' minorities from mainstream majoritarian media. She cites examples from the mainstream media, including headlines from 'Aaj Tak' that asks, 'Will Modi construct a Mughal-free India?' The demand to change the names of places granted by the Mughals (recent trends) is a result of intolerance shown against Muslim monarchs in India's history. She concludes that Islamophobia is no longer caused by terrorist incidents, but rather by a political tactic aimed at proving Hindutva's supremacy by portraying Muslims as villains and second-class people.

4.1 Rethinking the Relationship between Language, Conspiracy Theory and Propaganda

Propaganda studies often focus on the strategies used by authoritarian regimes to coax sceptical populations. O' Shaughnessy (2004) suggests that the term propaganda is 'open-ended'. The true effort in identifying propaganda should be through the victim's interpretation. The main characteristics of propaganda in this regard are based on spreading false information against a particular group or individual. And when portrayed with collective consent by mainstream institutions, it does more damage. In India, propaganda has a deep social character that it refuses to lose its efficacy. O'Shaughnessy N. J. (2008) correctly points out that "marketing is about 'selling,' that schools

are about 'teaching', that churches are about 'proselytising', and that politics is about propaganda" (p. 14). However, this casts a harsh and unfavourable light on it. The ideological distancing involving the separation of the decoder or observer from the activity or communication could be viewed a neutral perspective of propaganda (Guess et al., 2020). Propaganda is far away from persuasion but closer to manipulation. Consider India, where fundamental rights provide the freedom to choose a spouse and marriage between two genders who practise any faith. Love speaks exclusively in terms of persuasion. Here is an example of how persuasive language manipulation is depicted in the nation: Right-wing Hindutva activists support the Islamophobic conspiracy theory known as "*Love Jihad*," sometimes known as "*Romeo Jihad*," also. According to the conspiracy theory, Muslim men use tactics like deception, seduction, and marriage to coerce Hindu women into becoming Muslims. This is all part of a larger Muslim demographic 'war' against India and a planned global conspiracy aimed at gaining dominance through population replacement and growth. The conspiracy theory is known for its resemblances to previous historical hate campaigns, modern white nationalist conspiracies, and Euro-American Islamophobia. It uses deception to carry out its hate campaign. It propagates the patriarchal and sexist views that Hindu women are helpless and victims, and that any prospect of women expressing their legitimate right to love and their right to choice is ignored. It also incorporates Orientalist depictions of Muslims as hypersexual and barbarous. It is certainly not based on rational decision-making or action by a group of citizens, but mostly on rhetorical emotion (O' Shaughnessy, 2004). One thing they all have in common is false or misleading information. Rumour is often believed to be a tenant of propaganda because of both, its social character and medium of transmission. Conspiracy theory is defined as an attempt by a powerful group of people trying to dominate the public mind by perpetrating some kind of farce or manipulative notion against a group. It contains unique effort aspects as well as deceptive loops intended to create a conspiracy. If you look at the perception and manipulation of how Muslims are described as a community committed to double its population and unlawfully taking territory in right-wing political jargon. However, Muslims only make up 14% of the population of India, while Hindus make up 80%, according to the country's 2011 census. Perception or mindset generates suspicion or manipulates language, rhetoric, emotions, and behaviours based on it. All of these concepts are distinct yet can be used interchangeably. But any act of communication that persuades citizens to follow one political party or ideology over the other through misleading or false promises or argument is called propaganda (Benkler et al., 2018).

Often defined as an insidious dissemination of information, propaganda is spread through various outlets, the media being one of them. In keeping with a non-ideological or impartial socio-political democratic approach, the media should act as a catalyst in promoting unbiased communication free from manipulation. The study explains the difference between traditional or true journalism and propaganda journalism. Since several aspects of propaganda can be elaborated on, the discussion for performance and performance evaluation of media essential to fulfil political propaganda must not be excluded. Jerard (2019) asserts that the threat of online extremism poses a threat to the social cohesion of several societies. Internet extremists employ a variety of online forums, from terrorist organisations to cyber bullies during COVID-19 in India, to radicalise and incite violence using a combination of Arabic and Hindi words like '*Thook Jihad*' (Jafri, 2021). India has roughly 376.1 million active social media users with Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube being the country's four most popular social media sites. With the increase in the number of social media users, online fake news is becoming more common. Studies show that WhatsApp is the primary source of information (Keelery, 2020). Mass media, including social media, have had a lot of positive impact and are now being used as a viable method to provide accurate and timely information on topics like economy, politics, human development and so on. But we cannot ignore the fact that these social media platforms often flicker with manipulation, promote fake news, and serve the interests of the authority. Previous research suggests that in India, false news on digital platforms has been mostly used for political and religious objectives.

Brown (1937) makes an unusual connection between the three components of the media, namely the press, radio, and film industries, and human tendencies towards 'nationalism' and 'internationalism'. He rightly claims that the above three constitute indirect learning for the human mind, in which one-way communication takes place, and the message conveyed is widely accepted without critical examination. Bollywood films like '*Main Hoon Na*', '*Fanaa*', and '*Chak De India*' have contributed to the spread of negative stereotypes about Muslims. Indian film employs stereotypical portrayals of its characters to convey powerful political themes. Hollywood's attempts to portray Muslims more sensitively by emphasising global terrorism and Islamic extremism have caused more harm than good to Muslims worldwide. This study reveals that a number of Bollywood productions have shown Hindus as brave, intelligent, devoted, and patriotic, while portraying Mughal Muslims as violent, harsh, and nonsensical (Khan et al., 2011). There is another side as well. There are films that discuss issues pertaining to Islam that are significant in India. 'OMG' discussed faiths in general, while 'Dharam Sankat Mein' discussed the Imam's attempts to coerce followers into Islam. '*Nikah*' dealt with the problems with the Islamic rule that a divorcee can only remarry his wife once she had been married and divorced by another man (the Malayalam film Ghoshayaathra was about the same subject). '*Fiza*' and '*Shahid*' were about Muslim youth joining terror groups. '*Bazaar*' was about foreigners purchasing wives from underprivileged Muslims.

The study published by Alam & Haque (2021) also presents the linguistic aspects of speech and its intentional use in different contexts. Supporting psychoanalytical themes, the study has constructed parallel thoughts to Adorno (2002) who believes that television, as a mechanism, usually enchains a mandatory atmosphere of mass culture, internalising stereotypes, and incendiary thought process lateral to right-wing radical norms. Similarly, another study by Haque & Alam (2024) suggests that media messages gain significant impact when audiences identify with a particular group or category that shares identical traits. Genocide expert Gregory Stanton recently spoke with an Indian journalist, Karan Thapar, about the need for India's prime minister to uphold his moral obligation to condemn the Dharma Sansad

(religious congregation)'s genocidal comments against Muslims in India in Haridwar (Thapar, 2022). Citizens in democracies pay attention to the content and delivery of media as well as the values it promotes in civic participation. However, the report does not address whether individuals are dissatisfied with media content or how citizens map their evaluations. As a result, the platform is open to multiple interpretations and discussions about how much citizens trust the media and what kinds of actions and activities come from or are associated with such specific content (Rai, 2015).

5. Methodology of the Study

The current study uses published and online available language, text, audio, and video to examine digital propaganda and its effects. The content analysis approach is used to explore this study. The goal of the research is to determine how people's use of various digital developments in the new digital era are influenced by socio-political shifts and how such landscapes are utilized for political communication. For the goals of the study, indictments against minority communities, media interviews, and internet news sources have all been carefully investigated. Given that social media is a primary dissemination method for such propaganda (which frequently involves sentiments disparaging of Islam and incorrect depictions of the majority Muslim community), this study focuses on descriptive and qualitative analyses of statements made by media professionals as well as symbols, headlines, and other content that propagate prejudice and lies. The selective nature of the cases and samples, together with independent interpretation tests, limits the findings' generalizability. The basis of this study is convenience sampling, which is the process of obtaining and selecting examples from recent socioeconomic changes.

6. Discussion

6.1 Media Propaganda and Its Presumed Effects

Fake news and propaganda have gained a lot of traction in the digital era and through social media networking. Many experts, like Allcott & Gentzkow (2017), agree that the phrase 'fake news' is primarily misleading. Fake news isn't always untrue rather the event could have happened in real life. However, the way such information is presented is false and it misleads the core of the current situation. The proliferation of fake news and misinformation not only threatens the credibility of the media but also raises serious questions about the ethics of journalism. The unrelenting circulation of misinformation through various social media platforms has created an atmosphere of hostility, anxiety, and uncertainty. One such example of the negative impact of propagandist media is the rise of anti-minority sentiments in India which often manifest in violence. The consumption of fakes news leads to erroneous human attitudes, mental health problems, and anxiety among people. Many analysts believe COVID-19 has exacerbated the problem of internet fake news propaganda (Al-Zaman, 2021). Tandoc et al., (2018) provides six categories of false news (satirical and parody news, fabrication, manipulation, propaganda, and advertising) which are discussed here in more detail here. Media has a huge influence on public opinion since it distributes news and information to nearly 1.38 billion people in the country on regular basis. The study focuses on all areas of news material, including the weight assigned to each piece of information, the headlines and wordings utilised, and the visual demonstration (Chenoweth, 2020).

6.2 Beneath the Daily Headlines

The study leaves room for interpretation as to what would be the institutional goal in spreading misleading information through television and online social media platforms. This has clear consequences today, where politics and the media are entwined, determining how, when, and which manipulation of content and information are delivered to the public. In fact, politicians and media resource persons often fall victim to such deception.

An established pattern of presenting and commenting on the new transforms political debate into righteous passion against individuals and groups that disagree with the status quo. The targets of violence are marked with precision, taken as public hostages, and accused of being enemies of the state. Later they explain what has to be done to this enemy. Through constant repetition, they construct a political, moral, and historical alibi that eventually becomes the accepted truth (Vijayan, 2018).

Islamophobic hashtags, such as (#Coronajihad), started circulating on social media in late March soon after news of the Corona linked it to a Muslim missionary group known as the (Tablighi Jamaat). Corona has been used as a tool of polarization creating a precarious atmosphere for Muslims who were already seen as a threat. Corona crisis was one more opportunity to stigmatize Muslims. The situation has further been worsened by the Media. Many journalists intentionally posed and raised questions like 'Why is there a mob gathering near mosques disregarding COVID-19 protocols during the lockdown?'. Some of the harshest headlines on television news networks were 'Who is the villain of Nizamuddin?' 'Tablighi Jamaat ki ghatiya harkaton ki gawahi (testimony of Tablighi Jamaat's heinous acts).' ABP News reported that Tablighi Jamaat was responsible for 30% of all incidents. Muslims were blamed for the spread of COVID-19, which sparked a wave of anti-Muslim sentiment. Fake news and anti-Muslim propaganda have increased as a result of the rise in the number of coronavirus cases (Goswami, 2018). Tablighi Jamaat has been used as a scapegoat by pro-Hindutva journalists after a wave of fake material surfaced online suggesting they had breached COVID-19 guidelines. This resulted in violence, anger, and apathy directed at a single community. This kind of agenda setting by the mainstream media was primarily aimed at socially excluding Muslims and politically appeasing the Hindu majority. Agenda-setting occurs through a cognitive process known as accessibility which implies that the more frequently and prominently the news media covers an issue, the more that issue is to be remembered by the audience (Iyenger & Kinder, 1987).

In no time many social media posts went viral with outrageous allegations like, Muslims spitting on food and objects to spread COVID. One video, which received 80,000 views on Facebook, depicts a Muslim guy spitting on fast-food takeout foods. The man was initially thought to be an Indian Muslim, but it was later established that the video is from Malaysia, thanks to the use of a pink-coloured Food panda logo. So

powerful were the motives for defaming Muslims that old videos of Muslims gathering for Eid prayers were circulated accusing them of not maintaining social distance. Hashtags such as #Coronajihad #TablighiisInHiding #NizamuddinIdiots and others trended on Twitter. The relentless assault on Muslim identity as a tool to garner TRPs has suppressed the overall logic of the voice of human reason. The truth is that it is critical to improving the media's performance in covering incidences of lynchings (which have been occurring with Muslims since 2014), recent Dalit atrocities, vandalism of churches, and so on (Sikander, 2022). In the context of Islamophobia in India, the link between fake news on social media, polarization, and mob mentality must be examined through the lens of social influence processes. People's actual, imagined, or suggested presence can all influence social influence and online settings are no different. People frequently use online places to form opinions, obtain information, and learn about other people's perspectives on various problems (Rai, 2014).

This is another hashtag that trended on social media during Indian farmers' protest against the contentious Three Farms Act in 2020-2021. To demonise the farmers, these hashtags labelled their sit-in protest as 'Khalistani.' Godi Media (a term coined by Ravish Kumar, an Indian Journalist, to describe government-sponsored media) used a community element to portray the farmers as Khalistani, a pro-Sikh religious militant group. Sudhir Chaudhary, a studio staffer, hosted a segment using the hashtag #AndolanMeinKhalistan and replayed footage of pro-Khalistani slogans from an old clip. The head of the BJP's IT cell posted the same video, attempting to pin the blame on the Congress. This is how the mainstream media shaped a conspiracy idea. The farmer's protest, however, was not led or supported by any political or religious philosophy, but rather by common farmers (Suresh, 2021). Farm organisations developed their own newspaper to continue their civil disobedience movement, which provided them a profound sense of textual and visual freedom. The newspaper publication was titled 'Trolley Times', and it addressed a variety of sentiments surrounding the Delhi border protests (Ranjan, 2021).

In the context of focusing on equal rights for all to pray only in mosques, temples, and churches, and not in public places, media have been so busy showing news reports for almost two months on how a hundred of hyper-Hindu nationalists group named, *Sanyukt Hindu Sangharsh Samiti*, would not allow a single Muslim to offer 'Friday Namaz' in open ground anywhere in Gurugram (Hindu groups, 2021). At other instance, Muslim women also became subject of prejudice and hatred. Forget about the 34% increase in crime against women and the 82 percent increase in assaults since 2014 (Suchitra, 2019). There is overwhelming evidence that India's ruling party is staunchly anti-women in terms of gender equality and protection of women during communal violence. The systematic ignorance of all major women-led socio-political movements in the so-called inflexible patriarchal political situation has met with harsh headlines and rumours. A close analysis of how the Uttar Pradesh government failed to take the legally and morally required action in the Kathua Dalit child rape case reflects the irresponsible attitude of the government. The issue revolves around how, years ago, the government sought to protect Muslim women from Triple Talaq (quick divorce) by criminalising it through law. 'The BJP government loves Muslim women, but not Muslim males', were jokes all around. Ashraf (2018) makes an interesting comparison by mentioning the party's hypocrisy in not allowing Hindu women to marry Muslim males, with a mandate conspiracy theory of 'Love Jihad,' with or without traces of Hindu women's religious conversion to Islam.

Harassment of Muslims has increased in recent years and has been supported without proper audit and reprimand. One such manifestation of the growing anti-Muslim hatred was the virtual auctioning of Muslim women of on social media platforms under the names of 'Sully Deals', and 'Bulli Bai.' The term 'Sulli' comes from a disparaging epithet coined by right-wing hyper-nationalists for Muslim women, as opposed to 'Mulli/Mullah (ethnic slurs for Muslim men and women)'. The applications featured publicly available photos of Muslim women describing them as the deal of the day. The women were assessed according to their physical and sexual attractiveness and the bid amount was fixed at five to ten rupees. Although there was no real selling, it was meant to denigrate and humiliate Muslim women, many of whom have been outspoken about the rising tide of Hindu nationalism under the current political regime in India. Media as well as technology has once again shocked Muslim women by objectifying and commodifying them in the app 'Bulli Bae' (Mukherjee, 2022). The United Nations has condemned it as a type of hate speech against women from minority groups in the country. Also, misogyny and communal hatred, when combined, should not be ignored as they are a common strategy used by internet hate campaigns to persecute women. The purpose was to insult Muslim community and the whole thing smells like aggressive sexualisation portraying women from a religious minority as 'purchasable.' In a paper titled "*The Jewess Question: The Portrayal of Jewish Women in Nazi Propaganda*," by Kathryn Wehbe, offers an account of the Third Reich's dehumanization of Jews and the genocidal attack of Aryan identity as a means of consolidating its political power over another nation. "Minorities in every culture are a disadvantaged lot and media treats them differently and not favourably compared to the language, culture and social system of the majority that gets reflected in the media" (Narayana & Kapur, 2011, p. 155).

6.3 Anti-Humour or Anti-Satirical Politics

History shows that culture, art, and race are the first victims of authoritarian political systems. In any part of society, theatre, art, and performance are intended to raise the awareness and attention of the audience. According to McConachie (2008), performance or theatre art involves numerous features in general, such as gaze tracking, dialogue delivery, content/scripts, and so on. McConachie masterfully weaves interconnections on how ambiguity associated with any event or object in our subconscious mind becomes activated in the brain with any immediate sight or performance at hand. Therefore, the identity of the marginalised in Indian democracy has been constructed through the cognitive psyche. Today, there is a growing need to organize a variety of artistic expressions in public spaces, not just in auditoriums for the elite, but something that is accessible to the public. This can be an effective strategy to reclaim and protect diverse religious-cultural sites from the clutches of intolerant and authoritarian groups. The arrest of comedian Munawwar Faruqi on charges of injuring religious emotions sent shivers down people's spines. This widely popular comedian has had his bail revoked twice because he has made jokes about Hindu Gods and Goddesses. What's remarkable about this case is that while democracy provides for limited freedom of speech and

expression, authoritarian governments have crushed the rationale behind satire, parody, and comedy in folk performances, which have long been a tradition in Indian theatre and performance literature (Ahmad et al., 2022). The arrest is a flagrant violation of people's fundamental rights, according to the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR). Faruqui's biggest effects, even after his release, were the continuous cancellation of shows in states where the BJP is in power. Hindu Jagran Samiti and Jai Shri Ram Sena have approached police for about 12th time in a row, claiming that the comedian will be barred from performing for the same reasons in Karnataka, Gurugram, and Madhya Pradesh, where he was first detained.

7. Findings of the Study

Decision-making process influenced by the flow of fake news and propaganda is determined by the content presented by journalists on television or uploaded on social media platforms such as X (earlier Twitter), WhatsApp, and Facebook. This in turn affects the general participation and voting behaviour of the people. The extent to which the minds of the public are nurtured into what they want to see and what is offered to brainwash them has become a matter of concern for the entire society (Sharma et al., 2024b).

The findings of the study suggest that media play a decisive role in shaping public opinion about various historical events. After a thorough and detailed analysis of the select cases, the researchers believe that the mainstream media (with some notable exceptions) in India has been biased, communal, casteist and corporatized. Instead of promoting openness, contradictions, and diversity of viewpoints, the Indian media has been busy promoting fault lines and animosity. Using examples of coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper demonstrates that the media horribly targeted Muslims and spread propaganda to exclude them on both social and economic levels. The study also highlights Muslim women as the subjects of harassment on digital platforms. The kind of language used by people against other communities and different opinion on social media is an area of study and it was found that it impacted badly on the young adults because they were exposed to the content available has repercussions largely and shape their thought process (Haque & Alam, 2024; Zeb et al., 2024b).

It is evident that the media is equally partial in the case of other minority communities like Sikhs. The unfair representation of Sikhs during farmers' movement strongly reflects the media's biased portrayal which helps researchers conclude that it is the media's influence that has ruptured the country's diversity. Based on the above findings it can be concluded that the media has played an important role in spreading propaganda and creating a highly polarizing discourse in India in the last few years (Henry, 2025).

8. Conclusion

In any democracy, the media plays a crucial function as a '*watchdog*'. This organization promotes fairness, the free interchange of ideas, and an objective assessment of what is good and wrong in addition to the instantaneous local and worldwide dissemination of information. The normative role that journalistic networks and the media play in day-to-day operations have a significant impact on audience perception. The ability of the media to shape public opinion raises the possibility that it will become a hegemonic instrument for the propagation of divisive rhetoric. The reason nation-states are so obsessed with controlling the media is because it is to be used as a hegemonic tool. They use the media to promote misleading content, turn misconceptions and prejudices into reality and thereby strengthen their position.

This strategic use of the media to construct the disinformation narrative is evident from the above discussion. Propaganda, which is widely distributed through media, can influence the way people think. Media can be blamed to some extent for fuelling hatred against Muslims in India and their precarious condition. The stereotyped and dangerous portrayal of Muslims, activists, and Dalits by the media has turned them enemies of the State. To make it worse, many of them now believe the media's portrayal of Muslims, activists, Dalits, and so on. Millions of individuals are given skewed facts and half-truths marketed as viewpoints.

Strangely, liberalization initiatives aimed at promoting growth through the low-cost availability of smartphones, the Internet, or Wi-Fi have led to a snowball effect in the dissemination of misinformation. This research paper provides ample evidences of the media's anti-feminist, anti-minority, and supporting 'Hindutva as Supreme' ideology. What we refer to as modern India has remained 'unmodern, underdeveloped, and dehumanised in recent years. The harm done in the last hundred years to the 'raw' human mind and condition will not be imagined or rebuilt. The new Indian worldview is one of demolition, devastation, and death. The absence of post-modern characteristics from India would result in a flawless, orderly society where uniformity rather than unity would be ingrained in the soil. There would be very little, if any, space for variety tolerance.

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Authors Contributions

Dr. FA and Dr. SA were responsible for study design and revising. Dr. SK, Dr. AS, WUW, Dr. KA and Dr. SAH was responsible for revising and drafting the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors equally contributed in the manuscript with their insights and regular discussions. All authors contributed equally to writing, editing, and proofreading the manuscript.

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No additional data are available.

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