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Unraveling Islamophobia: A Content Analysis of Propaganda in 'The Kashmir Files' 2022 in India

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Abstract

This research analyzes the narrative of Islamophobic propaganda in the film "The Kashmir Files 2022" using a qualitative approach, employing the concepts of propaganda and content analysis theory. The study identifies parts of the film falling into the category of Islamophobic propaganda into three aspects: name-calling, transfer, and bandwagon techniques. The findings reveal a narrative of Islamophobic propaganda, including depictions of intolerance towards women, other religions, and violence against children. Additionally, the research indicates political support through tax exemptions and special leave to watch the film in theaters, contributing significantly to the widespread dissemination of negative narratives about Islam. This study is crucial for uncovering and analyzing Islamophobic propaganda narratives in the film, fostering a deeper understanding of their potential societal impact, and promoting awareness of the need to avoid the reproduction of media narratives to strengthen social harmony.

Keywords: Content Analysis; Islamophobia; Propaganda.

A. Introduction

India has a significant level of fear and heightened threats directed towards Islam (Udin, 2012; Werleman, 2021). The phenomenon of Islamophobia in India is inseparable from its historical background as one of the countries in post-World War II Asia, having been a former British colony gaining independence. The division of India and Pakistan led to the growth of socio-political conflicts based on their respective identities. This conflictual relationship is reflected in the emergence of Islamophobia within Indian society.

The 2022 Indian film, "The Kashmir Files," serves as a reflection depicting these Islamophobic sentiments. The movie narrates the large-scale oppression and expulsion of Hindu Pandits in Kashmir by the Muslim community, which rejected the presence of non-Muslims. With a duration of 2 hours and 45 minutes, the film is a production of Abhishek Aggarwal Arts, Zee Studios, I Am Buddha, and Vivek Agnihotri Creates. The release of the propaganda film "The Kashmir Files" coincided with a controversial issue in India regarding the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, which had granted special privileges to the people of Jammu and Kashmir for approximately 70 years. The repeal of this article triggered massive demonstrations, particularly among the predominantly Muslim population of Kashmir.

Besides, the 2022 film "The Kashmir Files" tells the story of a character named Pushkar Nath Pandit, who advocates for the abrogation of Article 370, a constitutional provision granting special autonomy to the Kashmir region. This leads to the forced displacement of Pushkar, his children and grandchildren, and the Hindu Pandit community in the region, stripping them of their rights to the territory. The film portrays the Hindu Pandits in this area facing discrimination and destruction by Islamic followers, being ordered to renounce their religious identity and convert to Islam. Hindus who refuse to comply face persecution. Pushkar Nath Pandit eventually moves to Delhi with one of his grandchildren, Krishna, who is still a baby, after losing his family due to persecution by Islamic insurgents. The portrayal of Muslims in the film has an impact on Indian society. Quoting Rana Ayyub in *The Washington Post* (2022), the film encourages Hindu followers to harbor hatred against Muslims depicted as terrorists and promotes violence. During

the film screenings, Hindu viewers were reported to express hate speech directed at the entire Muslim community. Ayyub herself only watched the film for the first 30 minutes before leaving, feeling threatened due to the hate speech directed at her.

To strengthen the analysis, this research reviews several scholarly works related to Islamophobic propaganda in India. Thus far, literature pertaining to the film "The Kashmir Files" (2022) has been found in two journals. First, the journal titled "Between Knowing and not knowing: A Study of Trauma, History and 'Memory,' and the 'Crying Wound' in The Kashmir Files," written by Savita V Deogirkar, published in the Journal Creative Saplings in June 2023. Deogirkar emphasizes the psychological aspects of Vivek Agnihotri's film as a piece that recalls traumatic experiences and memories for the Kashmiri Hindu community. Deogirkar presents two narratives in the film: the narrative of Islamic extremist jihad attributed to Kashmiri Muslims and the traumatic narrative experienced by Kashmiri Hindus. For Deogirkar, the film has implications for peace and reconciliation post-genocide (Savita V. Deogirkar, 2023).

The second journal, titled "Movies that Actually Get History: The Case and a Half of Kashmir Files: A Study in Social Blogging," written by Venkat Rao Pulla and published in the Journal Space and Culture in 2022. Pulla employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to gain a better understanding of user sentiments on social media platforms regarding "The Kashmir Files." Pulla observes that the film combines accurate historical aspects with captivating drama. The analysis focuses on two aspects: first, the audience and critic responses to the educational content and the film's narrative; second, an exploration of the audience and critic perceptions of how discussions about the film unfold in the media and the subsequent thermodynamics resulting from these discussions (Pulla, 2022). Both pieces of literature analyze "The Kashmir Files" from the same perspective, namely, the accuracy of historical representation in the film, and they position Kashmiri Muslims as the perpetrators against Kashmiri Hindus.

Meanwhile, before these two pieces of literature, there have been quite a few scholarly publications on the socio-political conflict between Muslims and Hindus in India, including those involving the Kashmir issue. This study found 12 journal publications, spanning the period from 2010 to 2022, covering various themes. These themes include the portrayal of Indian society in its films concerning Muslims with stereotypes of terrorism, negative minorities, and (Priya

& Ravi, 2013; Rajasekhar & Venkataraghavan, 2013), Fluctuating Muslim-Hindu relations in Bollywood films, which often depict romance, simultaneously exhibit a bias towards India by portraying Muslims as terrorists. (Ali et al., 2012; Falarti et al., 2019; Molaei & Hussain Babaei, 2020; Tiwary, 2011; Zafar, 2018), India's media employs a double standard in shaping the image of Muslims (Anwar et al., 2022; Rafi et al., 2017), and Indian media that creates digital warfare and produces false ideologies framing Muslims as terrorists (Anwar et al., 2022; Hussain Bhat & Hussain Bhat Scholar, 2019).

Based on the literature above, this study highlights that the analysis of *The Kashmir Files* (2022) represents a new contribution to similar studies conducted earlier. The uniqueness of this research lies in the phenomenon of anti-Islam conveyed through *The Kashmir Files* as a form of propaganda. The objective of this study is to identify the forms of dialogical propaganda and Islamophobic narratives within the film.

Due to criticism that the film presents inaccurate facts, it has sparked anti-Muslim sentiments in Indian society (Christiyaningsih, 2022). Thus, the writer is intrigued to explore how the movie creates an adverse reality impacting Indian society's views on Muslim communities. The author utilizes the propaganda concept to elucidate the occurrence of Islamophobia in India, emphasizing that this narrative and perception aren't solely derived from the public but also receive backing from those in political power. Additionally, the author employs content analysis theory, involving an in-depth examination of written or printed information within mass media (Ginanti, 2020). In this study, content analysis theory is employed to dissect the Islamophobic propagandas embedded in the film scenes, that aims to raise awareness and spark discussions to counter such narratives within India's media and political landscape.

B. Research Methods

The researcher did a qualitative approach using content analysis and framing methods. The research process involves comprehensive examination of the film 'The Kashmir Files 2022', lasting 2 hours and 45 minutes. Subsequently, the researcher identifies scenes with negative tones, particularly those involving Islamophobia. The study also entails categorizing framing based on propaganda techniques consist of name-calling, transfer, and bandwagon. This categorization is applied to the collected data, and the researcher samples from each category, including 3 samples from the name-calling category, 1 sample from the transfer category, and 2 samples from the bandwagon category. Sample selection is based on the representativeness of strong dialogues and symbolic propaganda with sufficient duration, with a focus on latent message components following the production flow in content analysis.

C. Results and Discussion

C. 1 Content Analysis of the Film The Kashmir Files 2022

Following the initial phase of data collection, which involved observing and examining the entire 2 hours and 45 minutes of the film, this research identified 16 scenes that carried an Islamophobic tone. In the subsequent stage, the research categorized these 16 scenes into framing categories, namely name calling, transfer, and bandwagon. Consequently, the researcher identified 9 scenes with name calling, 4 scenes with transfer, and 3 scenes with bandwagon.

C.1.1 Framing of Name Calling



Figure 1 Minute (03.35)

Muslim Man : Son of a bitch. You Indian dog. Say Long live Pakistan, Death to Hindustan! Come on, say it! Say it! Say Long live Pakistan.
Shiva : "Abdul! Abdul, please help!"
Muslim Man : Say Long Live Pakistan! Come on, say it, damn it!
Shiva : Abdul! Abdul, help!

a) Message Visible in the Picture:

In figure1, three angry-looking men are surrounding a small child in a field. The three men are using inappropriate language towards the child. One of the men is attempting to grab the child's shirt to potentially harm him. The child is displaying a stiff body posture due to fear.

b) Unseen Message in the Picture:

The situation in image 1 depicts three Muslim residents in Kashmir. They are displeased with the presence of Hindus in India. When a Hindu child named Shiva shouts the name Sachin, a professional cricket player from India, the three Muslim men become angry, assault, and threaten Shiva to utter derogatory words against the Hindu community. Shiva's stiff gesture reflects the response of a frightened child unable to resist and protect himself from adults twice his size. Thus, all Shiva can do is scream for help from his friend named Abdul. Since Abdul is also a child, he can only assist Shiva by throwing snowballs at the three Muslim men and helping Shiva stand up and run.

c) Non-verbal message in the Picture:

In the dialogue snippet, a propaganda message is conveyed to dislike Muslims because of their intolerant attitude towards other religions, regardless of who their opponent is, even if it's an underage child. The dialogue snippet conveys a message that despite the three Muslims being adults who should have the intellect to think and great empathy, they do not hesitate to resort to violence, use foul language, and threaten a small child to resolve an issue. This scene portrays a propaganda message to the public that Islam is intolerant of differences in religion and ethnicity, lacks compassion for a small child, and employs violence to solve problems.



Figure 2 Minute (1:04:09)

- Kashmir Muslim Rebels : Doctor! He needs O Negative blood.
Doctor : We haven't received a blood supply for several days.
Kashmir Muslim Rebels : So, get it from elsewhere.
Doctor : O Negative is a rare blood type. *With the curfew in place...*
Kashmir Muslim Rebels : Then use the patient's blood!
Nurse : "How can he use the patient's blood?"
Kashmir Muslim Rebels : *"Pointing his weapon at the nurse, he then fired a shot at the nurse's head."*
Doctor : Shock, the atmosphere in the hospital room became tense with the patients' screams of shock.

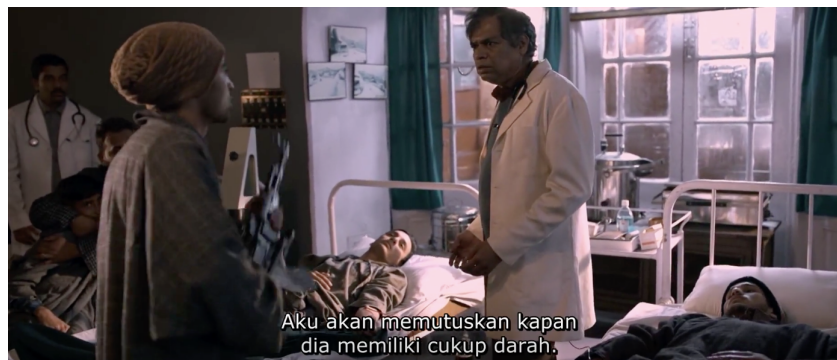


Figure 3 Minute (01:05:14)

- Kashmir Muslim Rebels : What's going on?
Doctor : I have already given him enough blood.
Kashmir Muslim Rebels : I will decide when he has had enough blood (forcibly)

removing the blood transfusion tube from the donor)
Doctor : What are you doing? He could die!
Kashmir Muslim Rebels : Your troops shot my brother. They must know; we'll
kill two for every bullet they shoot at us.

a) Message Visible in the Picture:

In Image 2, three individuals enter one of the hospital rooms in a threatening and panicked manner, one of them demanding medical assistance for their dying friend who needs O Negative blood. They brandish firearms and force the doctor to provide this rare blood type. In Image 3, the donation process has been carried out by a Hindu volunteer with O Negative blood. The doctor stops the process as the required amount of blood has been donated. However, the rebel forbids the doctor from doing so, sabotaging the doctor's actions by removing the blood transfusion tube without any procedure, allowing the donor to die from blood loss.

b) Unseen message in the Picture:

The situation in Image 2 shows that the rebel is using firearms to force the doctor to comply with their demands without considering the situation and conditions of other patients. The rebel aiming their weapon while seeking help is a form of intimidation to prevent anyone from opposing or confronting them. Thus, the situation inside the room becomes tense, as the doctor is threatened. Image 3 depicts the cruelty committed by a Muslim against someone with a different religious identity, even though that person helped them.

c) Unseen non-verbal message:

The dialogue snippets from Image 2 show a Muslim man forcing the doctor to obey his orders, prioritizing his own interests, and daring to eliminate or even kill anyone who stands in his way, especially individuals with a different religious identity. The dialogue snippets from Image 3 convey the message that Muslims are ungrateful towards fellow humans and vengeful if their family or close ones are harmed by individuals of a different religion. Both scenes portray the propaganda message that Muslims are selfish, ruthless, impose their will, are cruel, and lack gratitude towards

fellow humans.

Discussion:

In the three scenes described above, there are propaganda values conveyed by the producer to the audience through *The Kashmir Files*. It suggests that Muslims have an intolerant attitude towards differences, lack humanity, especially towards children, are associated with the use of violence to solve problems, act selfishly, impose their will, are ruthless, and lack gratitude towards fellow humans. The producer's portrayal is a propaganda technique called Name Calling. *The Kashmir Files'* film producer depicts Muslims as a negative label with the aim of damaging their reputation to influence the audience into having a negative view of Muslims considered as enemies.

Framing Category	Quantity	Duration Range
Name Calling	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 00:03:35 – 00:04:03 • 00:05:33 – 00:05:50 • 00:11:26 – 00:11:30 • 00:15:16 – 00:15:27 • 01:00:51 – 01:01:50 • 01:04:09 – 01:05:59 • 01:19:35 – 01:20:07 • 02:04:28 – 02:05:14 • 02:34:03 – 02:35:09

Table 1: *Categorization of Negative Framing Tone with 'Name Calling' in The Kashmir Files*

C.1.2 Framing of Transfer



Figure 4 Minute (01:53:58)

Hari Narain : Behold! (Commanding Brahma, Vishnu, Maresh Kumar, and Krishna to observe Pushkar's family worship temple)

a) Message visible in the Picture:

Brahma, Vishnu, Maresh Kumar, Krishna, and Hari Narain show expressions of sadness as they observe Pushkar's family worship temple scattered with derogatory scribbles against the Hindu community in India. The location indicates they are in Pushkar's backyard in Kashmir. They approach the small worship temple, placing one of the stones lying beneath it and paying respects to the temple and the stone.

b) Unseen message in the Picture:

Brahma, Vishnu, Maresh Kumar, and Hari Narain are companions of Pushkar who accompany Krishna to spread Pushkar's ashes in his backyard in Kashmir, following the will of his late grandfather. They express concern and sorrow over the condition of Pushkar's house in Kashmir due to the rebellion by Muslim Kashmir. The situation in image 4 shows the barbaric looting done by Muslim Kashmir in the past, destroying Pushkar's entire house, including the family's worship temple. Brahma rearranges the scattered sacred objects into the temple, paying respects as a form of apology and devotion to God for what has happened.

c) Unspoken verbal message:

Although the scene in image 4 only portrays the command from Hari Narain, this command can send a message to the audience that Muslim Kashmir caused the destruction of the house. Not only the house but Muslim Kashmir also damaged the temple, a symbol of religion, by insulting Hindus through scribbles on the temple walls and demolishing it like throwing stones, which is a sacred object for Hindus. The propaganda message conveyed in this scene indicates that Muslims do not respect religious differences, insult, and degrade sacred objects of other religions, and act in a vile manner.

Framing Category	Quantity	Duration Range
Transfer	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 00:50:55 – 00:51:07 • 01:53:58 – 01:54:25 • 02:17:32 – 02:19:50 • 02:26:21 – 02:26:45

Table 2 *Categorization of Negative Framing Tone with 'Transfer' in The Kashmir Files*

Discussion

The scene described in Table 2 have propaganda values conveyed by the producer to the audience through the film 'The Kashmir Files,' such as portraying Muslims as barbaric, disrespectful of religious differences, vile, and insulting and degrading sacred objects of other religions. The producer's depiction of this scene involves the propaganda technique of Transfer, using the worship temple and stone as sacred objects revered by Hindus, which are damaged, insulted, and degraded by Muslims in Kashmir. This portrayal sparks anger and negative perceptions from the Hindu community, the target of the propaganda, against Muslims for their actions of insulting God and religion.

C.1.3 Framing of Bandwagon



Figure 5 Minute (01:34:03)

- Pushkar : I have sent more than 100 letters to your office requesting the removal of Article 370, but your office has not replied to a single letter from me.
- Ministry of Home Affairs : Listen, that's a different matter. I'm here to help you.
- Pushkar : This is the only help I seek from you. Repeal Article 370 and rehabilitate the Kashmiri Pandits. Repeal Article 370!
- Pushkar and all Hindu refugees : Repeal Article 370 and rehabilitate the Kashmiri Pandits! Repeal Article 370 and rehabilitate the Kashmiri Pandits!



Figure 6 Minute (01:43:04)

- Pushkar : It happened. You may not have seen it, but it happened. The Prime Minister will write to me when they repeal Article 370. He

will write, "Mr. Pushkar Nath Pandit, grandfather of Mr. Krishna Pandit. We have noted your 6000 letters. We declare that you are no longer a migrant. You can return to Kashmir."

Krishna : (Smiles with a sad expression upon hearing his grandfather's words)

Pushkar : Dreams don't just become reality. You have to chase them. We won't fly there. We'll drive there. I'll show you the Martand Temple, Kheer Bhavani, Talamula, Habba, Kadal, Rainawari, Shankaracharya, Karan Nagar. My mother's house is in Karan Nagar No. 84.

a) Message visible in the picture:

In image 5, Pushkar and other refugees are seen advocating for the repeal of Article 370 and the rehabilitation of Hindu Pandits in Kashmir in front of the Indian Minister of Home Affairs and Brahma, who serves as the Minister's advisor. The location indicates that they are in the Hindu Pandit refugee camp in Jammu. In image 6, Pushkar, lying in the hospital, conveys his final message and dream to Krishna before he dies.

b) Unseen message in the picture:

The situation in image 5 shows that Article 370, which grants special rights to the autonomous region of Kashmir, led to the forced displacement of Hindu Pandits from their land, forcing them to live in miserable conditions, facing hunger, water shortages, and marginalization. When the Indian Minister of Home Affairs visits to listen to the refugees' requests, Pushkar requests the repeal of Article 370, the primary cause of the suffering of Hindu Pandits. The Indian Minister of Home Affairs admits that he cannot fulfill this request, prompting Pushkar and other refugees to collectively rally and demand the repeal of the article. Then, the situation in image 6 depicts Krishna's sorrow for his grandfather, who, throughout his life, fought for the repeal of Article 370 for the well-being of Hindu Pandits, but none of his efforts were acknowledged by the Indian Government. This situation tells the story of Pushkar's aspirations, hoping that the Indian Government would respond to his plea and repeal the article so that he could return to his homeland. However, fate had other plans, and until Pushkar's death, the repeal of Article 370 never occurred.

c) Unseen verbal message:

In the dialogue excerpt from image 5, a propaganda message is conveyed to the Hindu community that the presence of Article 370 is the trigger for the expulsion and oppression faced by Hindu Pandits in Kashmir. This dialogue encourages the Hindu community to support the repeal of Article 370 for the well-being of Hindu Pandits, enabling them to return to their homeland. In the dialogue excerpt from image 6, the audience is emotionally drawn into the sadness of Pushkar's struggle throughout his life to repeal the article that caused him to lose his family. The propaganda message in this scene is intended to resonate with the audience, gaining their approval for the repeal of Article 370 for the welfare of Hindu Pandits in Kashmir.

Framing Category	Quantity	Duration Range
Bandwagon	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 00:49:02 – 00:49:05 • 01:33:32 – 01:34:40 • 01:42:55 – 01:44:09

Table 3 Categorization of Negative Framing Tone with 'Bandwagon' in The Kashmir Files

Discussion

In the two scenes described above, there are propaganda values conveyed by the producer to the audience through the film "The Kashmir Files," such as trumpeting the government's policy on the repeal of Article 370, which has sparked controversy both within the Kashmiri community and neighboring countries. Thus, this scene employs the propaganda technique of bandwagon, where the film's narrative encourages the audience to collectively support the idea or program of repealing Article 370 proposed by the Indian Government, allowing Hindu Pandits to live prosperously in their homeland.

C.2 Islamophobia Propaganda

The film "The Kashmir Files" exacerbates existing sentiments of hatred and Islamophobia in India. The Indian government sees the film as strategically aligned with its policies, particularly the revocation of Article 370 granting special autonomy to the region in 2019. While the film aims to publicize the suffering of the Hindu Pandit community during the exodus events in Kashmir, it contains provocative propaganda against the Muslim population, especially Muslims in Kashmir.

The movie successfully shapes public opinion, contributing to the resurgence of anti-Islamic sentiments in Indian society. A video shared by the Twitter account Alishan Jafri shows an Indian Hindu man delivering an anti-Muslim speech in a cinema after watching "The Kashmir Files." Jafri believes that cinemas should be safe spaces for people from all backgrounds. However, the screening of this film has made the Muslim community in India feel unsafe due to the risk of mass violence (Jafri, 2022).

The Indian government's decision to allow civil servants to take half-day or full day leave to watch the film is a way of endorsing the propaganda embedded in the movie, particularly regarding the oppression faced by Hindu Pandits at the hands of Muslim communities in Kashmir. (Bhattacharjee, 2022) Hence, this strengthens the propaganda message and ensures its effective delivery to the audience. Additionally, politicians from 8 Indian states under the leadership of the BJP made statements on Twitter regarding the privileged tax-free status granted to the film. The messages conveyed by politicians through social media serve as an easy, cost-effective, and straightforward way for them to channel their political propaganda. Twitter is a commonly used social media platform for politicians and political parties to articulate their political messages, reaching a wide audience. (Marzuuqi & Yuliyanto, 2019). In India, the accessibility of the Twitter platform allows user-generated content to be crafted to promote a discriminatory and

exclusive understanding of nationalism. Consequently, it is utilized to propagate their political propaganda.



Figure 9 Tweet from one of the Chief Ministers of an Indian State

The BJP politicians who utilized Twitter to promote this film include: Uttar Pradesh, led by Chief Minister Mahant Yogi Adityanath; Goa, led by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant; Tripura, led by Chief Minister Biplab Deb; Madhya Pradesh, led by Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan; Karnataka, led by Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai; Haryana, led by Chief Minister ML Khattar; Gujarat, led by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel; and Uttarakhand, led by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami (hindustimes.com, 2022). The government's support is a strategic step to garner public favor for the film. Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the film, stating that it accurately represents the truth about the massacres experienced by Hindu Pandits in Kashmir and reflects what happened in India.

The support from PM Narendra Modi was utilized by the film's producer to garner sympathy for the film's truthfulness among the public. This prestige was intended to convince people to agree with the statements made. The producer employed the technique of sharing photos of the film production team's meeting with PM Narendra Modi on Twitter. This approach successfully generated a lot of support from artists, politicians, and even civilians regarding The Kashmir Files. The positive responses described by officials in India indirectly fueled and strengthened the Hindu community's agreement with the film's narrative containing anti-Islamic propaganda. The government's narrative escalated the existing anti-Islamic sentiment in India, leading to increased discrimination and marginalization against Muslims.

D. Conclusion

Based on the conducted research, it is evident that films are not neutral media, free from values, and born in a vacuum. Films have the power to manipulate messages in such a way that unseen meanings are produced, capable of altering the reality perceived by the audience. In this study, the meaning embedded in the 2022 film 'The Kashmir Files' is shaped by the anti-Islamic actions that have occurred, especially in the social and political environment of India before. The film successfully becomes an instrument of Islamophobic propaganda in India, presenting its narrative through the lens of the suffering experienced by Hindu Kashmiris. Consequently, the pre-existing Islamophobic phenomenon in India is further fueled by the release of this film, creating propaganda in society, including marginalization and discrimination against Indian Muslim communities.

Furthermore, the vulnerability of Indian society to opinion manipulation has led to divisions in the harmony of communities with different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Post-release, "The Kashmir Files" has been marked by an upsurge in anti-Islamic sentiments, reinforced by negative actions from Hindu communities and positive responses from the Indian government. Muslims in India become increasingly marginalized, and incidents of discrimination escalate.

This research acknowledges limitations in capturing the complexity of societal reactions. Future studies are encouraged to explore broader impacts of propaganda films on Indian society. Additionally, upcoming research should emphasize the need for public awareness and critical interpretation of cinematic content.

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