Analyzing Muslim's Representation in Bollywood Films through the Lens of Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of Semiotics

Dr.Moneeba Iftikhar[1], *Dr. Anjum Zia[2], Naveed Iqbal[3] and Samia Javed[4]
[1,3,4]Department of Mass Communication, Lahore College for Women University,Lahore. Pakistan
[2]School of Media and Communication Studies.University of Management and Technology
*Corresponding author, e-mail:anjumzia@umt.edu.pk

Abstract
Film media is considered a powerful tool to influence the thought process. This study examines the portrayal of Muslims in South Asia's most significant film industry. Semiotic Analysis has been adopted to analyze five Bollywood films from 2017 to 2018 based on the Muslim protagonist. This study uses Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of Semiotics based on signs, visuals, and pictures to reconnoiter how Muslims are connoted in Bollywood movies. The ideologically constructed messages used in films assert Muslims' specific identity and portray this identity naturally to the viewers. This research serves as a catalyst for change by building a knowledge base and raising awareness regarding the role of Indian cinema in portraying Muslims by advocating the roles of Muslims and contributing to Muslims' positive identity in and through the media. This study also aims to help filmmakers recognize the need on the production side to produce films regarding Indian Muslims' representation and offer a solution to resolve the Muslims' waning image.

Keywords: Portrayal, Bollywood, Muslims, Semiotic Analysis, Characters

Introduction

Bollywood is one of the world's largest film industries. It makes over half times more films than the Hollywood film industry does. When describing Bollywood, Khan, Ashraf & Bukhari (2011) explain, "film, generally, has a significant impact on societies. Films not only build opinions but also reshape opinions. If one idea prevails strongly in a society, it can be transmitted from one society to another. Among the film industries worldwide, Bollywood is one of the most famous and vigorous film industries (Gaikar, Marakarkandy, & Dasgupta, 2015). Bollywood's influence and substantial impact have increased and almost reached the hegemonic level (Tripathi, 2017).

This study examines how Muslim characters' ideology as "terrorists" and "anti-social" is constructed and represented in and through Bollywood films. Their work attempts to analyze how the medium of film is used to build specific identities of Muslims (specifically the Muslims of the subcontinent) and how Muslims are represented in the Hindi-based Indian cinema of Bollywood. For this purpose, five Bollywood films, through purposive sampling, are selected to analyze different characters and their roles in the movies. The films selected to analyze are works of different directors, such as Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Apoorva Lakhia, Anubhav Sinha, and Hansal Mehta. Bollywood has a massive viewership (IBID, 2017), around the globe, especially in Pakistan. In their films, the messages constructed about Muslims of the subcontinent reach the masses, proving their dominance. Bollywood cinema is altering and reshaping the Muslim culture and identity through films. These films are creating detailed images of Muslims in front of the world not only in terms of hidden meaning but also in terms of physical appearance, using the stereotypical imagery of beards, scarves, antimony, prayer cap, abaya (cloaks) and showing it as the ultimate identity of Muslims of the subcontinent. This cultural misrepresentation threatens an unbiased perception of a typical Muslim. It can be said that the subjects of Bollywood films revolve around a few subjects, and Muslims are among them (Ali, Chaudhry & Faridi, 2012). The consistent existence of a Muslim character in the film and its depiction shows the Indian cinema's priority. This study aims to understand the messages about Muslims through the sugar-coated message in Indian films. According to Gupta (2019), Muslim characters in Bollywood have four phases. One phase spans the early 60s when Muslims have shown in more powerful characters like the Kings of the Mughal Dynasty. The other phase was the 70s and 80s, when Muslims were shown as romantic beings who wore a sherwani (traditional male dress) and recited ghazals (a form of Urdu poetry). The third phase is the phase of the '90s, the phase of the angry young man like Amitabh Bachan films, and then came the phase of 9/11, the terrorism phase where the image of Muslims in Bollywood films changed drastically, and Muslims were painted as terrorists, bad-guys, Pakistani's (Zafar, & Amjad, 2015). The incident of 9/11 changed the course of history and circumstances for Muslims as the films after 9/11 depict a different and diverted image of Muslims. Major film industries like Bollywood and Hollywood set specific representations of Muslims and started showing Muslim characters with a specific ideology.

This contemporary study helps the reader understand Bollywood's current situation and how they portray Muslims in their films over the past two years under the shadow of entertainment. Also, this study will reveal the changing trends of Bollywood regarding the portrayal of Muslims. They typically symbolize extremists, evil, terrorists, and harmful to society. The researcher desires to explore the nature and range of this representation of Muslims in Bollywood, focusing on 2017 to 2018. It aims to examine the canvas of positivity and negativity in Muslim characters in

Bollywood to see whether Muslims are portrayed negatively or in a supplementary manner or just a perception. This study also aims to help Muslims identify their current representation in Bollywood films and their intensity.

Literature Review

The films and the images of scenes have a stronger effect on the mind of viewers. Films, which are works of fiction, create fantasy and fantastical worlds and take the viewer to the world of imagination. The impact of films on the mind of the viewer is unavoidable. Movies not only build the image but also deform and distort it according to per agenda. This media medium is used to implement specific propaganda to distort the watcher from reality (Ali, Chaudhary & Faridi, 2012).

According to Negi (1998), "The conflict and riots between Hindus and Muslims dated back many centuries, and such matters are always the subject of most Indian movies and revolve around the topic of negative images of Muslims."

Similarly, Khan, Ashraf & Bukhari (2011) argued that Bollywood is following the footsteps of western Hollywood and collapsing the character of Muslims vastly by depicting them as terrorists. Generally, many movies were made to portray Muslims as a villain and presented as extremists, terrorists, and dangerous people not only for India but also for the whole world. In Bollywood, Muslims are shown as conspirators, terrorists, traitors, and disloyal, uncivilized, and cruel people."

On the other hand, Hirji (2008) stated, "Islam is an obligatory organ of Bollywood and is always portrayed scandalously and horribly. Terrorism, violence, and intercultural misunderstanding are associated with Islam. Islam has the longest history of presence in India until now, which is enough reason to give Islam global meaning through films. Islam plays a significant role in popular Indian cinema in altered form."

Brown, Brown & Richard (2015) discuss "The way British Media is representing Muslim countries and the Muslim student take it as the Muslims being old-fashioned, conserved, and economically backward. This media representation is making the viewers of different countries who are hosting Muslims believe that the Muslims are distrustful and find Muslims as suspicious beings."

Balraj (2011) stated, "Until today, Media associate every second any act of violence and terrorism with Muslims and connected its root with the foundation of Islam and such links with Muslims and Islam are based on typical rigid stereotypes set by media against Islam. Islam and Muslims historically do not have good and positive relations with the West and Middle Asia. Stereotypes about Islam are not new to Western culture."

Media plays a vital role in constructing images and using media as a weapon to build people's perception of social reality. Media immensely generate certain images which change the complete thinking of individuals about the world. Most of the time, media use the power of information and representation to complete social and political goals, and such media images greatly change the viewers' mindset about political and social scenarios (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992).

Ahmed (2014) designates that "Indian most important media, i.e., film, show the bombardment of cultural misrepresentation by portraying Muslims with the stereotypical image. The basic symbols include the "beard" and "cap" besides portraying them as negative or antagonists. The image of Muslims constructed by Bollywood films is not only displayed within the country or restricted to the Indian population, but it is reaching the masses and consumed by different communities worldwide."

On the other hand, Aguayo (2009) stated, "The critical overview of Hollywood cinema shows that there is massive use of representational codes and politics in film after 9/11. Hollywood has a complex planned script depicting Muslims as uncivilized, violent, and dangerous people who are backward. This deconstruction of Muslim images shows the racial mindset of Hollywood."

Islam (2007) said, "Very few films in Indian cinema show religious or communal harmony. The filmmakers made fewer stories based on Muslims' actual condition in India and what type of economic and social crisis they are facing in India. They present Muslims as more loyal to foreign countries, specifically Islamic countries, and are loyal to their religion rather than their territory."

Master (2010) put forward the notion that "Rather, we examine Bollywood fiction film or the film based on the partition; both are far from reality. The film's narrative is far from the partition of true stories written in literature. The state-based history of India is widely influenced by the specific ideology set by specific stakeholders. The films based on partition show only one side of the story and neglect other parties' perceptive. Many registered films are directed to change the whole course of well-documented history. It shows a hegemonic mindset of Indian cinema."

Dwyer (2006) believed that "Indian cinema has a sub-genre for Islamic movies widely known as Islamicate film, in which the Muslims and their social and cultural lives are represented. They are concerned with Islam as part of Muslims' everyday lives rather than the religion itself. These films mixed up the religion with the cultural framework,

which often creates a complex depiction of Muslims, which is hard to understand Islam as a religion and to understand Muslims."

Malhotra and Alagh (2004) said, "The Domestic Hindi films post-1990 consistently divide various religious communities. Hindus are consistently shown as wealthy, related to the ruling class, and masculine, who follow their traditions and are pure. While the other communities were shown as minorities such as Muslims and Christians and seemed to be off from the scenario."

Mubaraki (2014), stated that the "Film Jodha Akbar is based on historical characters and promotes the idea that in relationships, Muslim males have to absorb the religion of Hinduism, while the Hindu female shows no acceptance of the Muslim male and its religion. She only accepts him if Muslim males accept her religious needs and perform cultural rituals to access her. The cultural hegemony is highlighted through cinema."

Drucker (1972), while studying the theory of ideology, stated, "The concept of ideology plays an important role in modern-day social and political thinking. The relationship between the idea of a person and what society made him think about a certain issue are two different things."

According to Molaei & Babaeithe (2020), anti-Muslim activities due to the political unrest between Hindus and Muslims cause various media and cultural products to increasingly portraying Hindu-Muslim relations in bad light. Importantly, Indian films demonstrating Muslims as 'others', 'terrorists' and 'violent' are increasing. Particularly since 2016, Bollywood has turned to producing historical epics such as Bajirao Mastani, Padmaavat, Manikarnika, Panipat and Tanhaji.

Khatun (2020), said that criticizers in India believe that what Bollywood depicts' is not India's history, but rather the history of Hindus. The recent wave of historical stories in Bollywood focuses on highlighting stories that "have never been seen before". We cannot ignore the importance of media and its role in representing the concerns and issues of the public and certain communities. The most influential institution, which is also the pillar of the state, uses the platform to put the matters into debate, shape, and reshape public opinions and set the path to thinking about various things.

Kumar (2011), "Indian cinema is widely influenced by Hindutva ideology. The Hindutva ideology is promoted in the name of entertainment, influencing the viewer in many ways. This influence is exhibited mainly in popular Bollywood culture and shows biases toward Muslims.

Solik (2014), in the article, "Semiotic approach to the analysis of advertising. European Journal of Science and Theology," says that "Semiotics refers to the explanation of apparatuses and functions of the text as well as visual communicators and gives us a chance of better understanding of the nature of the social processes."

Baudrillard (2016), in "The consumer society: Myths and structures," has been critical of mass media due to its impact on society. He argued that signs, images, and representations dominate the contemporary world, and this domination is of such a degree that the line of distinction between the sign and its referent, the natural world, has blurred."

RQ1: Do Bollywood movies with Muslim characters portray Muslims positively or negatively?
R2Q: What are the dominant symbols in the films?

Method

To answer research questions, method of semiotic analysis was used to determine how the effective medium of films portrays Muslims of the subcontinent and how it differs from Muslims' actual identity. Ferdinand De Saussure's theory of Semiotics (Ma'arif, Jatmika, & Marlinda, 2022; Velmezova & Fadda, 2022) was used for analysis as a qualitative method to examine the frames from the main scenes of films with Muslim characters. Film semiotics are considered a hybrid version of media and language. As a study of signs, semiotics are related with contextual symbols, different forms of words, images, sounds, and art objects etc. All are relating to films, because films grab hold of all signs or symbols for audience to reach connotations that are usually communicated through semiotic systems (Alawi, 2021). Therefore, as qualitative analysis, semiotics is plumped for digging out the ideologies hidden in the representation of Muslims in Indian cinema. The main focus was the screen and background elements, such as dressing, lights, makeup, expressions, and colors. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, "Semiotics is the study of the life of signs within society." A sign is an action or presence which stand for something other than itself or the situation" (Krampen, 1987). The main scenes of films with Muslim characters in action were extracted to be analysed through semiotics. The research population resides in prominent Indian stream feature films selected through purposive sampling. These films were released from 2017 to 2018. All these films consist of Muslim characters in prominent roles. The primary purpose is to analyze the ideology behind the production of these (Persada, 2019). The unit of analysis for semiotics was screen elements and background elements such as expressions, gestures, make-up, dressing, set design, and colors. Goffman's scales of semiotic analysis, sign, signifier, and signified, have been adopted for this study. The images in the films have been based on (Goffman's Scale) of visual components scales (Goffman, 1976), introns it focused on colors,

screen elements, background, dressing, and expressions. Specific frames are shot within the scenes of films selected systematically for analysis. Another purpose behind selected films is that these films present the different levels of Muslims' appearance in different roles, characters, and perspectives.

The primary categories for semiotics were signifiers and signified. As theory suggests, the signifier indicates the finger, the word, and the sound image. A word is simply a junk of literacies. It is in the explanation of the signifier that association is generated. Similarly, the signified is the idea and interpretation symbolized by the signifier. It requires not to be a 'real object' but is some referent that the signifier denotes. The thing signified is created in the perceiver and is internal to them. Whereas we share impressions, we formulate through signifiers. Even as the signifier is more constant, the signified fluctuates between people and circumstances. The signifier becomes constant with custom as the signifier prompts beliefs and images (Key & Pheiffer Noble, 2017).The researcher select the issue of construction of Muslims identity in Bollywood films and its portrayal in Bollywood movies. The Bollywood films are not only the major source of entertainment, but also shaping and reshaping the images and identity of Muslims not only living in Indian community but the Muslims living all over the world.

Figure 1.
Haseena Parkar

Semiotic Analysis
The film is based on the biopic of Haseena Parkar (sister of one of India's most wanted Underworld dons). The film revolves around the darker side of India's Muslims, who are involved in anti-social and criminal activities. Their link with the underworld is the subject matter, including the dress, makeup, color scheme, environment, set design, and actions communicate much more than just a cinematic element. The Muslim involvement in violent activities is an apparent reference to Muslims controlling the whole Indian underworld. The analysis shows various color schemes that portray a darker side of Muslims. The use of black, green, and darker color schemes shows that it is all planned to set the film's feel and tone. From wearing antimony to wearing gold necklaces and bracelets, prayer caps, and amulets, these elements distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims. It is here to mention that gold jewelry and amulets for men are restricted in Islam, while the prayer cap is used to offer prayers. Islam is only portrayed as part of the daily social life of Muslims rather than a religion itself. According to the theory of ideology, "Ideas control the people; people are not controlling the ideas." That is how Indian cinema is reshaping people's perspectives on Muslim identity. (Felluga, 2019).

Figure 2.
Mulk

Semiotic Analysis

The film shows a happy Muslim family living in peace and harmony in one of India's small towns. They are living everyday life. Everything is going well until the Muslim boy is portrayed as being involved in terrorist activity. The whole family faces a trial as their family member is labeled a terrorist. Aarti is a Hindu girl married to a Muslim boy in her family. She decides to defend the case of her family member. The father of Shahid is kept in jail, and the police continuously ask him about the terrorist group they are involved. Things turned against him in court. Bilal, already tired, ashamed, confused, saddened, tortured, and humiliated, suffers a massive heart attack and passes away on his way to the hospital.

The movie reflects the story of most Muslims in India. It shows that even if they have no association with terrorism, they are still blamed for their faith. The consequences they face worldwide after being accused of terrorism are difficult to narrate. The so-called independent media sets the ideology of Muslims as terrorists, so they are looked down upon by other religious communities. However, the film ends by proving the Muslims were innocent; its terrorism-oriented theme makes it look against Muslims' positive image from the start instigating more hatred towards Muslims. However, as the end is positive, it tries subtly to show how it is tolerant.

The film communicates that Muslims must prove themselves innocent, patriotic, and loyal to the state. The dress code and appearance seem to be okay, but the same-eyes, Shalwar kameez, wearing an amulet and prayer cap comes under the category of Muslims' generic representation. The scenario shows that the film again associates terrorism and extremism with Islam and Muslims. This film shows that Muslims are not loyal even to each other. They are disloyal and always involved in activities against India and humanity. This film set a theme of showing Muslims as disloyal, distrusted, and conservative. They are seen as a danger to society and involved in anti-social activities, and they are always the ones to blame.

Figure 3.
Omerta

Semiotic analysis

In this film analysis, the story is open-ended and does not have a promising and clear beginning or end. Omerta, the word itself, stands for silent terror. The films revolve around three real-life events related to the life of terrorist Omar Saeed Sheikh. Viewers easily associate fights and bloodshed with him. There is a clear association of terrorism with states like Pakistan and Afghanistan, representing all Muslims as terrorists. The film is not just the biopic of an extremist. However, it also lacks narrating the whole ideology behind the person who was a normal lively human being and became radicalistic. The circumstances under which he decided to join a terrorist organization are not noted. The film is an apparent attack on Islam and Muslims worldwide. It labels Islam as the religion that promotes terrorism and shows its followers are spreading their ideology through terror.

Nevertheless, the reality is the complete opposite. Islam condemns any act of violence and condemns the killing of innocent people. The people who promote this negative agenda and ideology in Islam are not Muslims. It is the defamation of Islam as a religion and Muslims.

The Muslims portrayed in the film are conservative extremists, jihadists, terrorists, psychopaths, and mysterious evil beings. Bernard Lewis has tried to prove that the Islamic teachings on jihad against all non-Muslims are a tool of Muslim domination worldwide. Although the movie is based on actual events, the storyline is somehow weak, and the researcher has found that it has been done intentionally to make the story in such a manner. The story is one-sided and is not an accurate representation of Muslims around the world. Muslims are also victims of terrorism around the world. Such films hurt Muslims' sentiments when they watch themselves portrayed as terrorists, jihadists, and extremists. The use of Taqbeer "Allah ho Akbar" is a direct attack on the religious sentiments of Muslims.

Figure 4.
Padmavati

Semiotic Analysis

"Padmavat" is a story based not only on the war epic but also on the evident distortion of the historical Muslim personality. Allauddin Khilji is a well-documented Muslim personality from the 12th century and the ruler of the sultanate of Delhi. However, the film's character is far away from the actual representation of the Muslim leader. Sultan Alauddin Khilji retreats into a ridiculous figure who is mistreating his queen, lusting after someone else's wife, and engaging in every possible chance of being promiscuous to fulfill his ambitions. 'Bhansali's Padmavat is all about glamourizing Padmavati (Deepika Padukone) and Rawal Ratan Singh's (Shahid Kapoor) innocence and sacrifice. The film shows scenes of eating meat weirdly, oddly violent behavior, and sexually exploiting multiple women. These are all Islamophobiac ideas of Muslims. The screen elements, colors, and background; each component has specific symbolism.

The element of false consciousness is visible here by using an excess of Black to represent the presence of evil and negativity. The use of the Kesari color signifies the absorption in Indian traditions. The dull and dark theme also creates the idea of fear, mystery, and some hidden terror. The reddish blur effects are consistently observed in the film. Muslim architecture is shown in dim light to minimize the effect of majesticness. However, we have evidence that Muslim architecture is expansive, airy, and full of light in our cultural heritage. The framework of history is used to create the idea that Muslims are bloodthirsty, violent, feudal, and uncivilized from the beginning. Even the Sultan ordered his army to fight to achieve a woman whom the Sultan was lustful over. It signifies that Muslims have no clear ambition in their life. They fight for women and go beyond limits to achieve that goal, but they do not have a worthy goal in life.

According to the Media representation theory by David Buckingham and Stuart Hall (Gandin, 2015), "The media do not just offer us a transparent window on the world, but a mediated version of the world." Media does not merely present reality; it represents it. This theory defines how media create a false reality. They show another version of reality and portray the media as false and accurate (Buckingham, 1998).

Figure 5.
Raees

Semiotic Analysis

The Film's analysis shows the typical Indian action-crime film based on the life of a gangster involved in corruption, misconduct, crime, fraud, and illegal activities. Considering there is also a direct association with Muslims as the lead protagonist is a Muslim. Raees consists of a stereotypical portrayal of Muslim characters. The film portrays Muslims as unfavorable and Hindus as lawmakers, civilized people who remove evil (Muslims) from society.

The film is a biased view of an Indian Filmmaker. One of the most important things to discuss here is depicting the shrine culture in the film. Although it is not new for Muslim-oriented films of Bollywood to associate shrine culture with Muslims of the subcontinent, the objectionable point is the association of subcontinent Muslim culture with Islam. Religion and culture are two different things, and this association builds a complex identity of Muslims. Wearing amulets and going to a shrine for prayers is not Islam. This film portrays Islam as the everyday social life of Muslims.

Another thing that is depicted in this film is that Muslims are not a minority in India; they are in the majority. The film reflects the notion that they have separate communities, rights, and points of view. So, Muslims' portrayal is equivalent to representing the vast majority within India in a negative light. The portrayal of the typical Muslim male and female relationship in the film is also objectionable. Getting intimate with the opposite sex before marriage is

neither customary in Muslim culture nor permissible in Islam. The association of crime and violence with sectarianism is also part of the debate. The film also depicts the modified version of Arabian Night Fantasies by adding item numbers performed by Sunny Leone and Muslims' involvement in the culturally and religiously abstained activity. Cultural hegemony is widely observed in Bollywood films. As Gramsci said, cultural hegemony shapes the ideology of people. It terminates the true spirit of authentic culture and ideas. It deforms the original cultural contexts. It serves the interests of the ruling class (Cole, 2019).

Discussion

This research work examines the portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood movies. Visual metaphors and pictorial depictions can say thousands of words and create numerous impacts (Batool, Iftikhar, & Mashal, 2020). The research is comprised of semiotic analysis. Semiotics communicate their specific messages (Iftikhar, Aziz, & Latif, 2011; Iftikhar & Islam, 2017; Velmezova & Fadda, 2022). The study revolves around two main research questions that are being countered by semiotic analysis through the lens of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory (Yakin & Totu, 2014).

The core research question is R1: Do Bollywood movies with Muslim characters portray Muslims positively or negatively? What are the dominant symbols in the films? Moreover, R2: The core research question was "Does Bollywood Films with Muslim characters portray Muslims negatively or positively?" It is that Muslims has been negatively portrayed in Bollywood film under study.

Most Muslim characters selected from the films are shown in controversial roles in contrast with Islamic teachings during 2017-2018, as mentioned earlier (Zafar & Amjad, 2015). The Indian films distort the image of Muslims and their culture and create an identity crisis for Muslims. Not only this, but they are also deforming the realities of well-documented history. They labeled Muslims as terrorists, evil, uncivilized, economically backward, brutal, fundamentalists, extremists, gangsters, conservative, and violent. Each film selected for research revolves around these themes; this aligns with a study regarding Hollywood movies, as stated by Aguayo (2009). Where deteriorated Muslim image racial mindset of Hollywood."

The current study goes contrary to the findings of Islam (2007), the conclusion that fewer stories are based on Muslims' actual condition in India and what type of economic and social crisis they are facing in India.

Master (2010) put forward the notion that "Rather, we examine Bollywood fiction film or the film based on the partition; both are far from reality. The film's narrative is far from the partition of true stories written in literature. The state-based history of India is widely influenced by the specific ideology set by specific stakeholders. The films based on partition show only one side of the story and neglect other parties' perceptive. Many registered films are directed to change the whole course of well-documented history. It shows a hegemonic mindset of Indian cinema."

The dominant symbols used in the films were dress codes used in the films typical, such as males with beards, prayer caps, shalwar kameez, amulets, and antimony in eyes, and Muslim women as an oppressed being. All these characteristics are stereotypically used to portray Muslim identity, which is aligned with the findings of Ali, Chaudhary & Faridi in 2012. One thing that needs to be addressed is that some of these films are based on biopics, while others claim to be based on true stories, as mentioned by Mubaraki in 2014 in the study based on "Jodha Akbar." The label of a film based on true stories or events proves the authenticity of the film's information. Now the series of biopics and true stories have been consistently released through Bollywood cinema for a decade, and these films also cover the stories from the life of Muslims. These films are inaccurate depictions of Muslims, ideologically disputed, and distort reality, contrary to Khatun's findings in 2020. These findings also prove the analysis of Dwyer (2006) that Indian cinema has a sub-genre for Islamic movies widely known as Islamicate film, in which the Muslims and their social and cultural lives create a complex depiction of Muslims while Hindus are consistently shown grander.

There are not nearly enough Muslim roles, and few Muslim characters mainly strangely deal with them. The way these characters are dressed, how they speak, and the understated religious references associate the Muslim characters more with their religious identity than the individual. Finding a recurring character who happens to be a Muslim is sporadic. Most of the time, it is a stereotypical, distorted, and extravagant version of them. Semiotics of the sample films highlight a few things which can be categorized throughout, like the use of the same dress code, language, method of portraying Muslims as evil and harmful, violence, ill-manner, distortion of reality, and lust all these are just different names, different directors, different characters, locations and periods. The use of dull dark themes and connotations of black with the portrayal of Muslims remains the same throughout the sample films. These essential findings align with Malhotra and Alagh (2004).

Conclusion

Many studies have been conducted to answer similar research questions; by adopting various research methods. Nevertheless, it is indeed eye-opening through the lens of semiotics that within one year, five Bollywood movies'

treatment of Muslim characters in the manner researched is discrimination and censuring. The underlying reason behind this portrayal is the political unrest between two states, Indo-Pak, and between Hindus and Muslims within India. The political ideology depicts through movies (Jha, 2020). It puts a question after introspecting why not they depict more realistic roles for Muslim characters instead of attacking them at any chance to get by accusing them of being what they are not. Semiotics of sample films highlight a few things, which are categorized throughout that is similar dress code, comparable language, the same method of portraying Muslims as evil and harmful, identical violence, alike ill-mannered, same distortion of reality, same lust, just different names, different directors, different characters, locations and time (Goffman, 1976). The dull dark theme and the connotation of black with the portrayal of Muslims remain the same throughout the sample films. The Bollywood industry is worldwide one of the most popular industries, and millions of Muslims live in India. Also, films are a creative and influential medium used for more innovative purposes, rather than a propaganda medium or a medium for the distortion of history and reality. It is a moral responsibility for Indian filmmakers who belong to an acclaimed secular state to act responsibly and promote a positive view of any religion or sector of the population, especially in today's times when extremist sentiments are creating tensions in society.

References

Aguayo, M. (2009). Representations of Muslim bodies in the Kingdom: Deconstructing discourses in Hollywood. *Global Media Journal, 2*(2), 41.

Ahmad, S. (2014). Presentation of Islamic Symbols in Indian Cinemas a Critical Study. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 2*(2), 33-54.

Alawi, A. H. (2021). Media and intercultural communication shifts: A semiotic analysis of the cultural identity in two international films. Croatian International Relations Review, 27(88), 1-13.

Ali, S., Chaudhry, S., & Faridi, A. B. (2012). Portrayal of Muslims characters in the Indian movies. Pakistan Journal of History and Culture, 33(1), 137-159.

Ali, S., Chaudhry, S., & Faridi, A. B. (2012). Portrayal of Muslims characters in the Indian movies. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture, 33*(1), 137-159.

Alvarado, M., Gutch, R., & Wollen, T. (1987). *Histories. In Learning the Media* (pp. 9-38). Palgrave, London.

Balraj, B. M. (2011). My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist: Representation of Muslims in 'My Name is Khan'. *Journal of Language and Culture, 2*(6), 91-95.

Barthes, R. (1977). Barthes, R. (1977). Image, music, text. (S. Heath, Ed.) *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Vol. 37, p. 220).

Batool, S., Iftikhar, M., & Mashal, A. (2020). Visual Metaphors in Pakistani Television Commercials: Its Role in Shaping Female Consumer's Perceptions about Brand Image and its Consumption. *Liberal Arts and Social Sciences International Journal (LASSIJ), 4*(2), 145-158.

Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The consumer society*. SAGE Publications Ltd, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526401502

Bezuidenhout, I. (1998). *A Discursive-Semiotic Approach to Translating Cultural Aspects in Persuasive Advertisements.*

Bleich, E., Stonebraker, H., Nisar, H., & Abdelhamid, R. (2015). Media portrayals of minorities: Muslims in British newspaper headlines, 2001–2012. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 41*(6), 942-962.

Brown, L., Brown, J., & Richards, B. (2015). Media representations of Islam and international Muslim student well-being. *International Journal of Educational Research, 69*, 50-58.

Buckingham, D. (1998). Media education in the UK: Moving beyond protectionism. *Journal of communication, 48*(1), 33-43.

Cole, N.L. 2019. *"How The Ruling Class Maintains Power Using Ideas And Norms"*. Thoughtco.

Drucker, H. M. (1972). Marx's concept of ideology. Philosophy, 47(180), 152-161.

Dwyer, R. (2006). *Filming the gods: Religion and Indian cinema*. Routledge.

Dwyer, R. (2017). Calling God on the wrong number: Hindu-Muslim relations in PK (2014) and Bajrangi Bhaijaan (2015). *The Muslim World, 107*(2), 256-270.

Fedtke, J. (2014). 'My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist': disability and asexuality in My Name is Khan. *South Asian History and Culture, 5*(4), 521-533.

Felluga, D. F. (2002). Introduction to Louis Althusser; Module on Ideology. *Introduction to Louis Althusser; Module on Ideology.*

Gamson, W. A., Croteau, D., Hoynes, W., & Sasson, T. (1992). Media images and the social construction of reality. *Annual review of sociology*, 373-393.

Gandin, L. A. (2015). The contribution of Stuart Hall to analyzing educational policy and reform. Discourse: *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 36*(2), 287-299.

Goffman, E. (1976). Gender Display. In: Gender Advertisements. Communications and Culture. Palgrave, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16079-2_1

Gupta, S. (2018). *Mulk breaks Bollywood's Sunny Deol-ised Muslim-as-terrorist mould*.

Hirji, F. (2008). Change of pace? Islam and tradition in popular Indian cinema. *South Asian Popular Culture, 6*(1), 57-69.

Gaikar, D. D., Marakarkandy, B., & Dasgupta, C. (2015). Using Twitter data to predict the performance of Bollywood movies. Industrial Management & Data Systems.

Iftikhar, M., & Islam, M. (2017). Construction of female identity in Pakistani television commercials (November, 2015-April, 2016): a semiotic analysis. Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies, 14(1), 81-110.

Iftikhar, M., Aziz, F., & Latif, F. (2011). Femininity in Pakistani Advertising. *Portrayal of Gender Relationships & Islamic Values in Pakistani Television Commercials studies, 3*(4), 151-159.

Islam, M. (2007). Imagining Indian Muslims: Looking through the lens of Bollywood cinema. *Indian Journal of Human Development, 1*(2), 403-422.

Jha, A. K. (2020). The representation of gender in Bollywood film posters: A Semiotic Analysis. Global Media Journal: Indian Edition, 12(2).

Kabir, N. (2006). Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian media, 2001–2005. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 26*(3), 313-328.

Key, L., & Pheiffer Noble, B. (2017). An Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure's Course in General Linguistics (1st ed.). Macat Library. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781912281732

Khan, M. A., & Bokhari, S. Z. (2011). Portrayal of Muslims in Indian cinema: A content analysis of movies during (2002-8). *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research, 8*, 1-15.

Khatun, N. (2020). Retracted Article: Postcolonial Hindi Cinema and Neo-Nationalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity. *South Asian Popular Culture, 18*(2), 10-17. DOI: 10.1080/14746689.2019. 1673541.

Krampen, M. (1987). Ferdinand de Saussure and the Development of Semiology. In: Krampen, M., Oehler, K., Posner, R., Sebeok, T.A., von Uexküll, T. (eds) Classics of Semiotics. *Topics in Contemporary Semiotics*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4757-9700-8_3

Kumar, A. (2011). Mass media and Muslims in India: Representation or subversion. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 31*(1), 59-77.

Kumar, S. (2013). Constructing the Nation's Enemy: Hindutva, popular culture and the Muslim 'other'in Bollywood cinema. *Third World Quarterly, 34*(3), 458-469.

Ma'arif, H. M. A., Jatmika, S., & Marlinda, A. P. (2022). Music as Propaganda for Humanitarian Diplomacy: Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure in The Song We Are the World. *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding, 9*(9), 144-157.

Malhotra, S., & Alagh, T. (2004). Dreaming the nation: Domestic dramas in Hindi films post-1990. *South Asian Popular Culture, 2*(1), 19-37.

Master, N. (2010). *Representing the unrepresentable: the Bollywood Partition film* (Doctoral dissertation, Carleton University).

Menon, N., & Chowdhary, R. (2016). Muslim identity and representation in Deepa Mehta's earth and Abhishek Kapur's Kai po che. *Postcolonial Text, 11*(2).

Molaei, H., & Hussain Babaei, S. (2020). Portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood: case-study of the Tanhaji movie. *World Sociopolitical Studies*, *4*(2), 379-400.

Mubarki, M. A. (2014). Exploring the 'Other': inter-faith marriages in Jodhaa Akbar and beyond. *Contemporary South Asia, 22*(3), 255-267.

Negi, N. *The Cinematic Representation of Communal Holocaust in Mahesh Bhatt Zakhm (1998).*

Persada, S. I. P. (2020, January). Semiotic Analysis of Gundala Movie Poster. In International Conference on Business, Economic, Social Science, and *Humanities–Humanities and Social Sciences Track* (ICOBEST-HSS 2019) (pp. 133-135). Atlantis Press.

Raja, G. B., & Ganeshkumari, S. P. (2015). The Perception of Muslim Audience on the Portrayal of Islam in Tamil Cinema. *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science & Humanities, 2*(4), 204-221.

Shaikh, M., Bughio, F. A., & Kadri, S. A. (2015). The representation of men and women in advertisements: A critical discourse analysis. *The Women-Annual Research Journal of Gender Studies, 7.*

Solík, M. (2014). Semiotic approach to analysis of advertising. *European Journal of Science and Theology, 10*(1), 207-217.

Tabassum, S. (2019). Bernard Lewis on Islam and Violence. *Islamic Studies, 58*(1), 9-32.

Trevino, M., Kanso, A. M., & Nelson, R. A. (2010). Islam through editorial lenses: How American elite newspapers portrayed Muslims before and after September 11, 2001. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research, 3*(1-2), 3-17.

Tripathi, S. (2017). Role of Bollywood cinema in promoting tourism, business and intercultural communication in Arab world: A study with Oman. International Journal of Social Sciences, 3(1), 424-435.

Velmezova, E., & Fadda, E. (2022). Introduction: Reflecting on Ferdinand de Saussure's intellectual legacy in the modern context of the development of semiotics and history and epistemology of ideas. *Sign Systems Studies, 50*(1), 7-10.

Venkataraghavan, M. (2015). Portrayal of the Muslim Community and Islam by Indian cinema Post 9/11-An Analysis. *Journal of Media Studies, 28*(1).

Yakin, H. S. M., & Totu, A. (2014). The semiotic perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A brief comparative study. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155, 4-8.

Zafar, A., & Amjad, M. (2015). Portrayal of Muslims in the Bollywood Movies. *Ethnicities*, 15(5), 675-695.