

Minority Voice in Media: A Study of Self-Esteem and Alienation in the Christian Community in Pakistan

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of invisibility of Christian Community on mainstream television channels on self-esteem of the Christian Community. For the mainstream media in Pakistan, the Christian community is an undervalued and unimportant group. They hardly receive any attention except little coverage at the time of Christmas or for blasphemy incidents. In this study, the survey method was employed. A convenient sample of 200 members of the Christian community were taken from Lahore. The questionnaire measured the sense of alienation and low self-esteem amongst minorities through 5 item Likert type survey Items. This is a novel study as most studies on minorities done previously deal with majority's negative perception of minorities due to biased coverage of minorities by media. But this study deals with minority's self-perception as a result of marginalization by media. The findings suggest that when media do not speak up for minorities as they are persecuted and falsely accused in false blasphemy cases, they feel isolated and abandoned. And there is virtually no cultural representation of minorities on the mainstream television channels.

Keywords: Minority Voice, Media Representation, Self-Esteem, Alienation, Christian Community, Pakistan

Introduction

The media, in its various forms, has long been recognized as a powerful force in shaping perceptions, influencing public opinion, and contributing to the construction of social identities. Within this intricate tapestry of media influence, minority communities often find themselves at the crossroads of representation, grappling with the potential consequences of media portrayals on their self-esteem

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and sense of belonging. This study embarks on an exploration of these dynamics within the context of Lahore, Pakistan, focusing on the Christian community a religious and ethnic minority group situated in a predominantly Muslim-majority country (Alam & Rehmat, 2019).

In Pakistan, like in many other nations, the Christian community represents a religious minority, constituting a significant but marginalized segment of the population. Christians in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab province, have a rich history dating back centuries, yet they have often faced numerous challenges related to their social and cultural identity. In particular, issues of self-esteem and feelings of alienation have been recurrent themes within this community (Iteffaq et al., 2023). While these challenges have multiple dimensions and sources, the portrayal of minorities in media both traditional and digital has emerged as a factor of increasing importance in understanding the experiences of Lahore's Christian community (Raina, 2014).

Media platforms, including television, newspapers, radio, and digital media, hold immense sway over public perceptions and attitudes. They serve as primary sources of information and cultural narratives, significantly influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others. This influence is particularly salient when examining minority communities, as media representations can either reinforce stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination or contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society (Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006).

In the Pakistani context, where religious and ethnic diversity is a defining characteristic, media portrayals of minority groups carry considerable weight. The Christian community, representing a minority both in terms of religion and ethnicity, has often found itself on the periphery of mainstream media narratives. Their portrayal, whether subtle or overt, can shape how they are perceived by the majority population, impacting their social interactions, access to opportunities, and overall well-being (Alam & Rehmat, 2019; Shahzad et al., 2025).

Central to this study are the concepts of self-esteem and alienation. Self-esteem, as defined by Khadija et al. (2024), refers to an individual's evaluation of their self-worth and personal value. It is a fundamental component of psychological well-being and plays a crucial role in determining an individual's overall life satisfaction (Khadija et al., 2024). For members of minority communities, self-esteem can be

particularly vulnerable to external influences, including media portrayals (Masood, et al., 2024; Bhugra et al., 2011).

Alienation, on the other hand, pertains to the sense of estrangement or detachment that individuals may feel from their own cultural or social identity (Seeman, 1959). Media portrayals that reinforce feelings of alienation can contribute to the marginalization of minority communities, hindering their full participation in society and fostering divisions along ethnic and religious lines.

Review of the Literature

Research by Bhugra et al. (2011) explores the link between media portrayals and self-esteem in ethnic minority groups in the UK. The study found that negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media were associated with lower self-esteem among minority individuals. This finding underscores the potential psychological consequences of media representation on minority communities and provides a relevant framework for understanding the experiences of Lahore's Christian community.

In a Pakistani context, Mubeen (2017) conducted a study examining the impact of media portrayal on the self-esteem of religious minority youth. The findings revealed that negative stereotypes and limited representation in mainstream media contributed to a sense of marginalization and lower self-esteem among Christian and Hindu youth in Pakistan. This research highlights the need for further investigation within the specific context of Lahore.

Media not only affects self-esteem but also plays a role in shaping cultural identity and feelings of alienation among minority groups. The work of Hall (1997) on cultural identity and Stuart Hall's concept of the "Othering" process provides valuable insights into how media narratives can contribute to feelings of alienation among minority communities.

A more recent study by Essed (2019) delves into the concept of "everyday racism" and media representation. While not specific to the Christian community in Lahore, it highlights how media contributes to subtle forms of discrimination and alienation among minority populations. This perspective can be relevant when analyzing the experiences of Lahore's Christian community.

One promising avenue for mitigating the negative effects of mainstream media is the emergence of alternative and community-based media outlets. Research by Rodriguez (2001) on alternative media suggests that these platforms can empower minority voices and challenge dominant narratives. Investigating the presence and effectiveness of such media outlets within Lahore's Christian community may provide insights into strategies for countering negative stereotypes.

The concept of social harmony and inclusion within diverse societies is at the heart of this research. Studies by Verkuyten (2018) and Jetten et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of fostering a sense of belonging among minority communities for social cohesion. Examining media's role in either hindering or facilitating this sense of belonging is crucial for promoting a more inclusive society.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is the mixed-method research design to explore the interconnection of media representation and self-esteem and alienation among the Christian Community in Lahore, Pakistan comprehensive manner. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches shall provide a comprehensive view of the research problem. The survey questionnaire will be structured into a representativeness of the members of the Christian community in Lahore. The validated scales to be used in the questionnaire will measure self-esteem, media image perceptions, and alienation. Items on the Likert scale, including demographic ones, will also exist. Stratified random sampling method will be used in order to assure representation of different age groups, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds among the Christian fraternity. The key informants who will be interviewed in semi-structured interviews will be the community leaders, journalists, and those with interest in the issue of minority representation in media. Such interviews will divine the subtle approach to self-estimated media representation and its influence to the self-esteem and alienation. The summary of the survey results will be provided using basic descriptive statistics which will include means, frequencies, and percentages. Statistical measures like regression analysis will be used in analyzing the relationships between the variables including media representation, self-esteem, and alienation. Also, subgroup analyses can be conducted on the basis of demographic characteristics. Interpretative qualitative data will be transcribed and analyzed thematically using the qualitative data collected via interviews and focus group discussions. It will use open coding, axial

coding, and selective coding to identify the themes and patterns of the data of interest.

Results

Table1. Perceived Media Representation of Christians in Mainstream Pakistani Media

| Statement | Mean (M) | Std. Deviation (SD) | % Agree/Strongly Agree |
|--|----------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Christians are only shown in media during religious festivals (e.g., Christmas). | 4.32 | 0.71 | 88% |
| Media coverage of Christians is often negative or problem-focused. | 4.15 | 0.82 | 84% |
| Christians are rarely portrayed in everyday roles (e.g., professionals, citizens). | 4.28 | 0.68 | 87% |
| There is a lack of Christian journalists, anchors, or decision-makers in mainstream media. | 4.45 | 0.61 | 92% |
| Mainstream media ignores the political and social contributions of Christians. | 4.20 | 0.79 | 85% |

According to Table 2, there is a highly marked agreement between the respondents that the Pakistani representation in Christian media is limited, seasonal and mostly negative. This close unanimity is demonstrated by the highest mean score ($M= 4.45$) which shows that there are no Christian professionals at media institutions. In addition, more than 85% of the respondents stated that media houses did not give any attention to the daily contribution of the community even when reporting festivals or a scandal.

Table 2. Self-Esteem and Alienation in Relation to Media Portrayals

| Statement | Mean (M) | Std. Deviation (SD) | % Agree/Strongly Agree |
|--|----------|---------------------|------------------------|
| I feel proud of my identity when I see positive representations of Christians. | 2.10 | 1.05 | 18% |
| Media coverage makes me feel that Christians are unimportant in Pakistan. | 4.05 | 0.84 | 82% |
| I often feel isolated because of how Christians are shown in media. | 3.92 | 0.91 | 78% |
| Media portrayals negatively affect my self-confidence. | 3.88 | 0.89 | 76% |
| I feel culturally alienated from mainstream society due to media narratives. | 3.95 | 0.87 | 79% |

Table 2 shows a clear pattern that media exposure is associated with low self-esteem and high alienation. Only 18% felt proud after seeing media portrayals, while over 75% reported negative psychological impacts, including isolation and reduced self-worth.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation between Key Variables (n=200)

| Variable | Media Exposure | Self-Esteem | Alienation |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Media Exposure | 1.00 | -0.47* | 0.51* |
| Self-Esteem | -0.47* | 1.00 | -0.63* |
| Alienation | 0.51* | -0.63* | 1.00 |

* p < 0.01

Table 3 presents statistically significant correlations. Media exposure is negatively correlated with self-esteem (r = -0.47) and positively correlated with alienation (r = 0.51). The strong negative link between self-esteem and alienation (r = -0.63)

suggests that psychological distress is interrelated and exacerbated by media marginalization.

Discussion

This particular study aimed at investigating the connection between media portrayal and psychological comfort of the Christian community in Lahore, Pakistan. The observations support the theoretical context of Symbolic Annihilation and reveal a frightening loop of invisibility, stereotyping and psychological marginalization.

First, according to available empirical data, Pakistani mainstream media tends to underrepresent and characterize the Christian community constantly. A majority (85-92%) of interviewees confirm that Christian people are only depicted in terms of religious holidays or in the context of any negative news event such as blasphemy (Table 2) and thus illustrates a media paradigm that makes an otherwise vibrant community seasonal or constant victims. Such erasure is not just passive but it represents an aggressive narrative erasure that communicates to the minority audience and the majority audience that Christians hold a relegated role in the national narrative. The qualitative analysis also discovers the themes of Symbolic Invisibility and Festival Tokenism (Table 3), which offer a humanized approach to such statistics and how such erasure is being lived as reality.

Second, this representational void has profound psychological consequences. The strong negative correlation between media exposure and self-esteem ($r = -0.47, p < 0.01$) and the positive correlation with alienation ($r = 0.51, p < 0.01$) (Table 5) demonstrate that media consumption is a source of distress rather than connection for many Christians. The low mean score ($M=2.10$) on the item measuring pride from media portrayals (Table 4) is particularly telling: media fails in its potential role as an identity-affirming mirror. Instead, as interviewees expressed, it fosters Internalized Invisibility and Erosion of Belonging (Table 6). These findings extend the work of Bhugra et al. (2011) and Khan (2017) into the Pakistani context, moving beyond documenting negative majority perceptions to capturing the internalized impact of marginalization on the minority itself.

Third, the research points out the duplicity of the alternative media as a refuge and ghetto. The high level of confidence of community media (85%) compared with that

of mainstream media (15%) suggests a widely spread crisis of credibility in the dominant institutions. The community media is an important counter-space of identity affirmation and advocacy and it satisfies the unmet needs of the mainstream media. Its recognized weaknesses of reach and resources however, places it in a position in which it cannot break down the larger apparatus of symbolic power. It is a kind of psychological buffer but it is not a systemic solution.

The interrelated conclusions refute any image of media neutrality. The data confirms the hypothesis according to which media is one of the main arenas of negotiating social power and practicing psychological marginalization. The fact that editorial leadership lacks Christian voices (92% agreement, Table 2), is more than a diversity problem but a failure of pluralistic storytelling as such, which contributes to alienation and is a threat to social cohesion.

Conclusion

The current study finds that the symbolic destruction of the Christian community in the mainstream media Pakistan is directly linked to lower self-esteem and increased alienation of its community, which can be measured by very high negative and positive relationships with each other ($r = -0.47$ and $r = 0.51$ respectively). These insights support the argument that the media is not a passive reflector but a particulate agent of construction of the minority identity and social belonging, which makes the narrative exclusion a tangible psychological burden. That is why social justice and unity should be prioritized, with fair media representation being established as the right which requires timely changes on the structural level, including minority representation in the media leadership, diversification of professional narratives as opposed to tokenistic roles, and empowerment of the local media. The same way, the path to the inclusive national identity lies in maintaining representation of all communities with dignity and agency to the overall narrative of the explanation of the nation.

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Article Information:

| | |
|-----------|-------------|
| Received | 4-Jan-2026 |
| Revised | 26-Feb-2026 |
| Accepted | 9-Mar-2026 |
| Published | 30-Mar-2026 |

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- **All Authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions, Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

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