

## Islamophobia in Bangladeshi Newspaper Headlines: A Sentiment Analysis on the Portrayal of Ayesha Siddika Minni

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### Abstract

*This study investigates Islamophobic tendencies in Bangladeshi newspaper headlines, with a focus on the portrayal of Ayesha Siddika Minni in reports on the Rifat Sharif murder case. By conducting a sentiment analysis of 400 headlines from 20 newspapers, the research identifies patterns of Islamophobic and neutral (non-Islamophobic) sentiment. The findings reveal that the majority of newspapers predominantly used the nickname "Minni," reflecting a neutral stance. However, a notable exception was Prothom Alo, which frequently employed Islamophobic naming variants such as "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika," deviating from cultural and religious sensitivities. This variance incited frustration among the Muslim population of Bangladesh, highlighting the influence of biased media representations on societal perceptions. The study underscores the need for culturally sensitive and ethical journalism to ensure balanced reporting, presenting recommendations for minimizing Islamophobic undertones and fostering inclusivity in media narratives.*

**Keywords:** Islamophobia, newspaper, headline, Bangladesh, Ayesha Siddika Minni.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Islamophobia is a term used to describe the prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed toward Islam and Muslims, often rooted in stereotypical views that portray Islam as inherently violent,

Intolerant, or incompatible with societal values (Bleich, 2011; Tama & Sulistyaningrum, 2023). Scholars have outlined Islamophobia as not only an individual bias but also a systemic issue within societies, where cultural, political, and media institutions may perpetuate discriminatory views (Eskandari & Banfi, 2017; Sayyid & Vakil, 2011; Tama & Sulistyaningrum, 2023). The term encapsulates both overt and subtle attitudes and practices that marginalize

Muslims, promoting a narrative of suspicion and exclusion. Islamophobia manifests in various forms, each contributing to a distorted portrayal of Muslims. These forms include:

**Table 1: Forms of Islamophobia**

<b>Forms of Islamophobia</b>	<b>Particulars and references</b>
Stereotyping Muslims as a Monolithic Group	Islamophobia often entails lumping all Muslims into a single, homogenous identity, disregarding the rich diversity within the religion. This view ignores the cultural and ideological variety that characterizes Muslim communities worldwide (Awan & Zempi, 2016).
Associating Islam with Extremism	One of the more pervasive forms of Islamophobia links Muslims with violence and extremism. This association is reinforced by certain media portrayals and public discourses that disproportionately highlight negative incidents while underreporting positive contributions (Hamid, 2016; Hasan, 2024).
Discriminatory Practices and Policies	Islamophobia also manifests as exclusionary policies, particularly in Western contexts, affecting Muslims' access to employment, education, and social spaces. Such discriminatory practices create barriers for Muslims and foster a sense of social exclusion (Bleich, 2011).
Media Portrayals	Scholars argue that the media can amplify Islamophobia by presenting skewed portrayals of Muslims, emphasizing certain types of stories while underreporting others (Ibrahim, 2008). In particular, Islamophobia in headlines can often mislead readers by associating Islam with unrelated incidents of violence or extremism.
Cultural and Social Exclusion	Beyond media, Islamophobia manifests as social exclusion, where Muslims are marginalized within communities and face discrimination due to their religious practices (Tama & Sulistyaningrum, 2023).

*Source: Developed by Author*

The forms of Islamophobia listed in Table 1 reflect a complex interplay of interpersonal and structural discrimination that excludes Muslims. Stereotyping and associating Islam with extremism, as noted by Awan and Zempi (2016) and Hamid (2016), oversimplifies Muslim identities and solidifies negative narratives, particularly through the media. Discriminatory practices and policies (Bleich, 2011) expose the structural nature of Islamophobia, which persists even in Muslim-dominated environments like Bangladesh due to international influences. Representation by media (Ibrahim, 2008) perpetuates the prejudice by selectively reporting bad news, shaping public opinion into forms that foster suspicion. Social and cultural exclusion (Allen, 2014) further entrenches marginalization,

creating a cycle of prejudice. Such categories are fundamental to understanding the Rifat Sharif murder case, where media naming choices can illustrate dormant Islamophobic tendencies, whose impact on culture and society has to be examined.

Newspaper headlines significantly influence public perception, as they are often the first (and sometimes only) part of the news that readers engage with. Therefore, the framing of headlines can have an outsized effect on readers' understanding of Muslims and Islam. Research indicates that Islamophobia in headlines often appears through:

**Table 2: Forms of Islamophobia in newspaper headlines**

<b>Forms of Islamophobia in newspaper headlines</b>	<b>Particulars and references</b>
Sensationalism	Newspapers may sensationalize Muslim-related news with loaded terms like "jihadist," "fundamentalist," or "radical," which create associations between Islam and violence, even when the story may have little to do with religious motivations (Sheridan & Gillett, 2005).
Generalizations	Generalizing headlines that fail to distinguish between individual actions and community beliefs reinforces negative stereotypes about Muslims. Headlines that suggest all Muslims are responsible for personal acts of violence or extremism can leave readers with skewed perceptions (Said, 1997).
Selective Reporting	Selective reporting often highlights incidents involving Muslims disproportionately compared to similar incidents involving other groups. This selective focus fosters an impression that criminality or violence is disproportionately linked to Muslims (Sultana, 2022).
Misleading Language	Certain headlines misuse terms like "Islamic" in contexts unrelated to religious identity, misleading readers into linking Islam with irrelevant issues, thereby subtly reinforcing negative associations (Ibrahim, 2008).

*Source: Developed by Author*

The categories of Islamophobia in newspaper headlines underscore the impact of media framing on the public image of Muslims. Sensational language, Sheridan and Gillett (2005) argue, is a manipulative use of emotive language to link Islam with violence, and it is a distorting of the context of events. Generalizations mask distinctions between individual actions and collective identity (Said, 1997), and they form stereotypes that are hurtful, particularly in high-profile cases like the Rifat Sharif murder. Selective reporting (Sultana, 2022) amplifies negative incidents, skewing perceptions through the underreporting of

Muslim positive contributions. Misleading terminology (Ibrahim, 2008) subtly reinforces prejudices by associating Islam with irrelevant issues. In the coverage of Ayesha Siddika Minni, the use of sacred names like "Ayesha" in headlines may play on these mechanisms, potentially offending Bangladesh's Muslim population and highlighting the need for culturally sensitive reporting.

Despite being a Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh is not immune to Islamophobic media portrayals. Local media narratives can sometimes reflect Islamophobic undertones, influenced by both global trends and domestic politics. Key factors contributing to Islamophobia in Bangladeshi headlines include:

**Table 3: Factors contributing to Islamophobia in Bangladeshi newspaper headlines**

Factors	Particulars
Influence of Global Media Narratives	International coverage, particularly from Western news agencies, has a significant impact on Bangladeshi media. When global events involving Muslims are framed through Islamophobic lenses, local newspapers may replicate these biases, thereby perpetuating a negative image of Muslims even within Muslim-majority societies (Itaoui et al., 2023).
Political Islam and Media Portrayals	Islam's role in Bangladeshi politics is complex, with various political factions sometimes utilizing religious identities to consolidate power. Newspapers may present Islamic political groups in sensationalized ways, subtly associating them with extremism or violence. This framing fosters an Islamophobic narrative that connects political Islam with national security threats, even when evidence of such links is limited (Sultana, 2022).
Cultural and Sectarian Bias	Internal sectarian differences within Bangladeshi society can also contribute to Islamophobic portrayals. Headlines that portray particular Islamic sects or groups as "deviant" or "extreme" can foster divisions within the Muslim community, reinforcing discriminatory views (Allen, 2014).
Crime Reporting	Crime-related stories involving Muslims often receive disproportionate coverage compared to similar incidents involving other religious groups. Headlines may emphasize the religious identity of Muslims involved in criminal cases, reinforcing the notion of Islam as a catalyst for deviance (Awan & Zempi, 2016).
Underreporting of Positive Muslim Contributions	Bangladeshi newspapers, like many media outlets, often underreport positive stories involving Muslims, whether in science, education, or social welfare. This selective reporting creates an unbalanced portrayal of Muslims, focusing on negative events while neglecting their societal contributions (Mamdani, 2004).

Source: Developed by Author

The "Factors" Table 3 in the Introduction section of the paper summarizes five major contributors to Islamophobic representations in Bangladeshi media, each accompanied by extensive details and academic references. This examination discusses the content, organization, and meaning of these factors, with a focus on their applicability to the study's investigation of Islamophobic inclinations among newspaper headlines about the Rifat Sharif killing case and the representation of Ayesha Siddika Minni.

Addressing Islamophobia in Bangladeshi media requires a commitment to ethical journalism standards that emphasize balanced reporting and cultural sensitivity. Media outlets can establish guidelines that ensure religion is only mentioned in headlines when genuinely relevant to the story. Journalists can also receive training to recognize implicit biases, helping them report stories involving Muslims with a balanced perspective (Sayyid & Vakil, 2011).

In addition, promoting the inclusion of diverse Muslim voices within the media can counteract Islamophobic narratives. Creating a more representative media landscape can contribute to more accurate portrayals of Islam and foster a deeper public understanding. Furthermore, emphasizing positive contributions by Muslims, rather than focusing exclusively on negative events, can help combat the narrow view often reinforced by sensationalist coverage (Hamid, 2016).

Islamophobia in Bangladeshi newspaper headlines is influenced by both global media narratives and local political dynamics. Although subtler than in Western countries, these portrayals significantly shape public perceptions and reinforce harmful stereotypes (Eskandari & Banfi, 2017). Addressing Islamophobia in media coverage calls for ethical journalism and a conscious effort to represent Muslims fairly, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and understanding society (Hasan, 2024).

**Substantiation of Claims on Islamophobia in Bangladeshi Media:** The study's argument that Islamophobia in Bangladeshi newspaper headlines is driven both by global media discourses and local political processes is substantiated by the examination of causative factors in the study (Table 3). Itaoui et al. (2023) and Eskandari and Banfi (2017) comment that Western media's Islamophobic framing is replicated by Bangladeshi media, as seen in the application of sensationalist tropes in crime reporting, as perhaps reflected in Prothom Alo's invocation of "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika" in 55% of headlines (Section 5.1). Sultana (2022) indicates how local political processes, i.e., sensationalized portrayals of Islamic organizations, engender Islamophobic discourses, which can indirectly influence reports of cases like Rifat Sharif's. The subtlety of Bangladesh Islamophobia compared to Western contexts is corroborated by Bleich (2011), who reports that Muslim-majority societies exhibit fewer overt but still prevalent biases, e.g.,

through selective reporting (Section 5.1 illustrates 17 newspapers avoiding Islamophobic headlines, unlike Prothom Alo). Its impact on public opinion is inferred from anecdotal X social media reactions during 2019-2020, where users condemned Prothom Alo's naming as an offense to Islamic sentiments. The need for ethical journalism aligns with the study recommendations (Section 8.1) for culturally sensitive naming and bias training (Sayyid & Vakil, 2011). Although the study's headline-driven focus limits direct evidence of public opinion, the arguments are presented on a firm basis through the findings and quotations, with further research needed to quantify public reactions.

Newspaper headlines on the murder case of Rifat Sharif in Barguna, Bangladesh, with specific reference to the use of the name of Ayesha Siddika Minni and her part, have invoked dissatisfaction among Bangladeshi Muslims. Specific newspapers wrote the name of Ayesha Siddika Minni in such a way that sounds Islamophobic. Newspapers should respect the sentiments of the population and their respective religions or faiths. Here, the naming of Ayesha Siddika Minni in some Bangladeshi newspaper headlines prompts a deeper examination of the pattern and convention regarding the sentiment of the Muslim population in Bangladesh.

The study asserts that both international media discourses and domestic political processes fuel Islamophobia in Bangladeshi front-page headlines, which is supported by the causative factor analysis in the study (Table 3). Itaoui et al. (2023) find that Western media's Islamophobic framing is reproduced in Bangladeshi media, in this instance, through sensationalist tropes in criminal reporting, as perhaps indicated by Prothom Alo's invocation of "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika" within 55% of headlines (Section 5.1). Sultana (2022) documents how local political processes, i.e., Islamic organization sensationalized portrayals, create Islamophobic discourses that indirectly shape reports of such cases as Rifat Sharif's. The specificity of Islamophobia in Bangladesh in Western contexts is attested by Bleich (2011), who reports that Muslim communities possess fewer overt but still prevalent biases, e.g., through selective reporting (Section 5.1 illustrates 17 newspapers avoiding Islamophobic headlines, in contrast to Prothom Alo). Its impact on public sentiment is inferred from anecdotal X social media reactions between 2019 and 2020, where users condemned Prothom Alo's naming as an insult to Islamic sentiments (BanglaNews24.com, 2024). Ethical journalism demands are aligned with research recommendations (Section 8.1) for culturally suitable naming and prejudice training (Sayyid & Vakil, 2011). Despite the limited direct public opinion data due to the headline-driven nature of the study, arguments are

grounded in a firm evidence base of findings and quotes, with further study needed to quantify public reaction.

The objective of this study is to examine the potential presence of Islamophobia in the headlines of Bangladeshi newspapers concerning the murder case of Rifat Sharif in Barguna, Bangladesh, with specific reference to the portrayal of Ayesha Siddika Minni.

The purpose to examine the potential presence of Islamophobia in Bangladeshi newspaper headlines, specifically in the case of the representation of Ayesha Siddika Minni in the Rifat Sharif murder case, arises from a necessity to investigate media framing in a high-profile criminal case that initiated public protest. The focus on Minni's portrayal is justified by the cultural and religious significance of her name, "Ayesha," which is associated with the Prophet Muhammad's wife (Al-Quran, Surah an-Noor, 24:11-20), making its use in crime-related headlines potentially offensive to Bangladesh's Muslim population (Allen, 2014). The research findings (Section 5.1) show that Prothom Alo's selection of names, "Ayesha" (50%) and "Ayesha Siddika" (5%), diverges from the neutral "Minni" (95-100%) used by 17 other newspapers, suggesting a possible Islamophobic bias. This is also corroborated through anecdotal evidence of public outrage on X (2019-2020) against Prothom Alo's naming as offensive (Section 5.11). The approach (Section 4) employs sentiment analysis of 400 news headlines to explicitly identify these patterns, following previous approaches to detecting media bias (Ibrahim, 2008; Sultana, 2022). Concentrating on this specific case, the study fills a gap in what covert Islamophobic tendencies appear like in a Muslim-majority context and contributes to more abstract discussions regarding ethical journalism. The objective is feasible given the research methodology and data, although limited by its scope to headline-based indexes, which necessitates further research on popular opinion.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The study of Islamophobia has gained significant attention in contemporary discourse, especially in the context of its representation in media (Hasan, 2024). This literature review explores how Islamophobia manifests in news headlines, with a specific focus on the mention of Ayesha Siddika Minni, a murder case in Bangladesh. This review synthesizes research from multiple perspectives, emphasizing the intersection of media framing, racialization, and the emotional tone of news headlines.

### **2.1 Defining Islamophobia in the Media**

Abbas (2020) describes Islamophobia as racialized biopolitics, where this phenomenon has become pervasive in shaping public perception and policies in the UK. Helbling and Traunmüller (2018) and Sadat (2023) unpack the meaning

of Islamophobia, exploring feelings toward ethnicity, religion, and religiosity, thereby providing a fine-grained understanding of its multidimensionality. These frameworks highlight how the media contributes to constructing and perpetuating stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, often blending racial and religious biases.

Miladi (2021) examines the British tabloid press, which often portrays Muslims within frames of suspicion and negativity. Al-Azami (2021) takes this a step further by finding a particular discourse of Islamophobia in right-wing British newspapers, where 'Muslims' are habitually constructed as a threat to society. Such a critical discourse analysis points toward the ways in which media normalize specific Islamophobic stories and the function of media in shaping public sentiment.

## **2.2 Geographies and Contexts of Islamophobia**

The study of Islamophobia in media representations is informed heavily by Edward Said's seminal work, *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the World* (1997), which argues that Western media constructs a skewed image of Islam through orientalist tropes, which portray Muslims as violent by nature or culturally foreign. Said's (1997) argument outlines the way media narratives build public opinion through reinforcing negative tropes, a model that can be used in examining Islamophobic leanings in non-Western nations like Bangladesh. His examination provides a critical analysis of how media framing, including the framing of newspaper headlines, can reinforce anti-Muslim prejudice and provide a basis for an analysis of local practice in the Rifat Sharif murder case. This perspective aligns with recent work analyzing the spatial and cultural characteristics of Islamophobia in media portrayals.

Najib and Hopkins (2019a, 2019b) investigate the spatialities of Islamophobia in both Paris and London, pinpointing public space as a key site in which Islamophobia materializes. Such work illustrates how media representations often serve to heighten fears and prejudices, fostering an atmosphere in which Muslims feel unwelcome and insecure. In a broader context, the paper by Cervi et al. (2021) examines the portrayal of Muslims in Italian and Spanish media, demonstrating the stereotyping and biased narratives that are indeed well-documented throughout other European contexts. Rehman and Hanley (2023) argue that their findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the challenges Muslims face as victims of 'Islamophobia.'

Corral et al. (2023) focus on Spain to highlight how media discourse influences awareness of Islamophobia. Their findings indicate that while some media outlets do indeed attempt to challenge the Islamophobic narrative,



dominant discourse remains skewed toward negativity. These regional studies help in understanding how Islamophobia changes with different sociopolitical contexts but retains core themes of bias and discrimination. Politzer and Alcaraz (2023) investigate how media framing about Islam and Muslims in the United States has contributed to growing Islamophobia before and after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack, illustrating geographic variations in the portrayal of Islamic identity in American press coverage.

### **2.3 Islamophobia Beyond the West**

While much of the research focuses on Western contexts, Hassan and Azmi (2021) have looked into Islamophobia in the non-Western media, with similar patterns of bias unveiled. Their content analysis of online newspapers shows how global terrorism and extremism narratives are so often localized to perpetuate stereotypes about Muslims. Amarasingam et al. (2022) explore how Hindu nationalism, misinformation, and Islamophobia interlink in the context of India, showing how religious and political ideologies combine in ways that marginalize Muslim communities. These studies expand the scope of Islamophobia research, highlighting its global significance.

### **2.4 Emotional and Discursive Dimensions**

Sentiment analysis techniques offer a powerful tool for analyzing the emotional tone of media representations. Mohammad and Turney (2012) have provided a word-emotion association lexicon that can serve as a starting point for assessing the sentiment of news headlines. Sealy (2021) examines the emotional basis of Islamophobia, claiming that the invocation of fear and anger serves to legitimize policies and practices of discrimination. Sipitanos (2021) critically reviews the use of fake news and Islamophobic rhetoric within political discourse, emphasizing how emotions are manipulated to construct particular public perceptions.

Sufi and Yasmin (2022) and Hasan (2024) delve into the racialization of public discourse, analyzing how Islam and Muslims are portrayed in media narratives. Their findings reveal a consistent pattern of negative sentiment, often linked to broader societal fears about security and cultural integration. Deroo (2021) emphasizes the importance of critical media literacy in countering Islamophobic narratives, advocating for educational initiatives to help audiences recognize and challenge biased representations.

### **2.5 Youth Perspectives and Media Literacy**

Farooqui and Kaushik (2022) systematically review the literature dealing with Muslim youth experiences in an age of Islamophobia. Highlighting the psychological effects of negative media portrayals, they note the necessity of

media literacy programs as a means of empowerment through which young Muslims may work their way through and rescript Islamophobic narratives. These findings are also reflective of Deroo's 2021 call for critical media literacies, which urges the need for active steps in combating the biased media influence on vulnerable populations.

## **2.6 Media Framing and Islamophobia Awareness**

Politzer and Alcaraz (2023) discussed the framing of Islam in US media before and after the Charlie Hebdo attack, and how events involving Muslims are commonly framed to evoke fear and suspicion. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Al-Azami (2021) and Miladi (2021) in the UK context, suggesting a global trend in Islamophobic media framing. Ejiofor (2023) and Hasan (2024) call for decolonizing Islamophobia and challenge the dominant Eurocentric framing in media representations, putting forward an alternative framing of Muslim identities.

## **2.7 Sentiment Analysis**

Sentiment analysis allows for the quantification of the emotional tone in news headlines. Using lexicons such as those developed by Mohammad and Turney (2012), researchers can systematically identify trends in the positivity, negativity, and neutrality of media portrayals. This is particularly relevant within headline analyses about Ayesha Siddika Minni, where sentiment analysis can demonstrate how her case is framed within wider Islamophobic narratives.

The literature emphasizes how Islamophobia permeates media representations and the role headlines play in shaping public perception. From regional studies in Europe and South Asia to global analyses of media framing, the research shows consistent patterns of bias and emotional manipulation. Sentiment analysis thus emerges as a valuable tool for unpacking these narratives, offering insights into the emotional and discursive dimensions of Islamophobia. This review provides a foundation for further research on the intersection of media framing, sentiment analysis, and Islamophobia, with implications for promoting more equitable and inclusive media practices.

## **3.0 Constructs (sentiments) Development**

This study defines Islamophobia and non-Islamophobia in a specific manner based on the sentiments of the Muslims, the majority population of Bangladesh. The foundation of the sentiment of the Muslims is found in the Quranic verses (24:11-20) in Al-Quran. The use of the words "Ayesha Siddika Minni" or its parts in the news headlines of the killing of Rifat Sharif case is defined as follows:

*Negative (Islamophobia):* The use of the words "Ayesha" or "Ayesha Siddika" in the newspaper headlines is defined as Islamophobic. As Ayesha

Siddika, the mother of Muslims, the honorable wife of the Prophet Muhammad SAWS, a highly honorable one to Muslims, the use of Ayesha or Ayesha Siddika in the news headlines to mean any offender/criminal/accused hurts Muslims and sounds Islamophobic. The use of the offender/criminal name as Ayesha or Ayesha Siddika in the news headlines in certain cases, especially in Rifat Sharif's murder case, sounds clearly Islamophobic. Thus, the use of Ayesha or Ayesha Siddika in the news headlines to refer to Ayesha Siddika Minni in the Rifat Sharif killing case is defined as Islamophobia. However, if that person had no other names to be called, the use of Ayesha or Ayesha Siddika might not seem Islamophobic. As it's the sentiment of the Muslims, newspaper authorities should respect that Islamic sentiment, honoring the major religious group in Bangladesh. The convention/custom of using names in the newspaper headlines can be understood from the practices of most Bangladeshi newspapers.

**Rifat Sharif Murder Case Overview:** The Rifat Sharif murder happened on June 26, 2019, in Barguna, Bangladesh, when Rifat Sharif, a 25-year-old internet service provider, was hacked to death during the daytime near Barguna Government College. Court documents and news of the media indicate that the attack was conducted by Sabbir Hossain Nayan (alias Nayan Bond), who was later killed during a reported shootout with police, along with others like Rakibul Hasan (Rifat Farazi), Al Kaiyum (Rabbi Akan), Mohaiminul Islam Sifat, Rezwana Ali Khan Hridoy (TikTok Hridoy), and Md Hasan (The Daily Star, 2020; The Business Standard, 2020). Ayesha Siddika Minni, Rifat's wife, was also present at the scene, initially observed to be covering up for him, as in a viral clip. Subsequent investigations suspected her to be the mastermind because of her previous marriage to Nayan Bond and frequent communication (44 calls within a month) prior to the murder (The Daily Star, 2020). On September 30, 2020, a Barguna court sentenced Minni and five others to death and imposed each Tk 50,000 fine and acquitted four others (The Business Standard, 2020). The trial was widely reported as the crime scene was brutal, and 76 witnesses heard, and social media reactions brought into the fore public disillusionment regarding naming patterns in the media (Wikipedia, 2020).

**Islamophobic Consequences of Naming Ayesha Siddika Minni:** The addition of "Ayesha" or "Ayesha Siddika" as Islamophobic in front-page headlines is grounded on the name's sacred significance as Ayesha Siddika, spouse of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) and "Mother of the Believers" (Al-Quran, Surah an-Noor, 24:11-20), whose association with a criminal act may be regarded as dishonoring Bangladesh's Muslim majority. Said (1997) argues that media framing constructs negative stereotypes of Muslims, and the use of a venerated name on a suspect, as Prothom Alo did in 55% of its front pages (Section 5.1), affirms this attack. Ibrahim (2008) notes that emphasizing religious markers on

headlines facilitates Islamophobic reporting, especially where replacements like "Minni" (used by 17 papers, 95-100%, Section 5.1) are available. Sultana (2022) elaborates that such a naming in Muslim societies could prove to be controversial, as is seen in X posts (2019-2020) condemning Prothom Alo for its insensitivity to Islamic sentiments (Section 5.11; BanglaNews24.com, 2024). Most Bangladeshi dailies used "Minni" or "Ayesha Siddika Minni," reflecting a practice of cultural sensitivity. Sayyid and Vakil (2011) promote ethical journalism with respect for religious feelings, positing that application of "Ayesha" or "Ayesha Siddika" constitutes Islamophobia when other options are available, albeit less so without them. Quantification through further research is required to determine public opinion.

*Neutral (Non-Islamophobia):* The use of the full name of the main accused, "Ayesha Siddika Minni" or the last name "Minni" in the newspaper headlines in Rifat Sharif's murder case is treated as normal and not Islamophobic. Though it is usual to use the first name when mentioning one's activity, using the full name is also a general norm. In many European countries, people often emphasize their last name when using it. Although when using it in a news headline, since it requires saving space through using a single name, it would be better to use the last name Minni, which is also the nickname of the aforementioned offender, best matches the theme where two-fold purposes are served at the same time: respect to the larger religious belief and introduce the criminal in a very effective way.

From the discussion, we apparently present the following proposition:

P1. The news headlines containing the name "Ayesha Siddika" or only "Ayesha" by the dailies in Bangladesh propel Islamophobia in Bangladesh.

## 4.0 Methodology

This research focuses on conducting a sentiment analysis of newspaper headlines regarding the murder case of Rifat Sharif from Barguna, Bangladesh, where the name of Ayesha Siddika Minni was mentioned, partially or fully. The methodology is outlined as follows:

### 4.1 Data Collection

*Selection of Newspapers:* Twenty Bangladeshi newspapers, both Bengali and English, were selected for this study to ensure a diverse representation of news sources. ChatGPT generated the newspaper list of 20 Bangladeshi newspapers based on their popularity and online presence.

The use of ChatGPT to generate the list of 20 Bangladeshi newspapers was based on its ability to aggregate and rank publicly available information on media outlets, ensuring a representative sample of prominent newspapers with

significant readership and online accessibility. This approach facilitated the inclusion of both Bengali and English newspapers, reflecting Bangladesh's linguistic diversity. ChatGPT's selection was guided by criteria such as circulation, digital presence, and relevance to the study's focus on headline analysis. While this method expedited the selection process, its reliance on algorithmic curation may introduce biases based on the tool's training data or search parameters. To mitigate this, the list was cross-verified against known media rankings and adjusted to ensure diversity in ownership and editorial perspectives.

*Selection of News Headlines:* Emotion-associated word lexicons can be used in the selection of news headlines to determine the emotional tone and sentiment conveyed in the text, as noted by Maas et al. (2011) and Mohammad and Turney (2012). In this way, twenty news headlines were selected from each newspaper, totaling 400 headlines. ChatGPT generated a list of 20 news headlines, each accompanied by a corresponding date, for the 20 newspapers. The selection was specifically focused on reports related to Rifat Sharif's murder case, in which the name of Ayesha Siddika Minni was mentioned, fully or partially.

ChatGPT was employed to compile headlines due to its capacity to efficiently gather and filter publicly available news data based on specified criteria, such as relevance to the Rifat Sharif murder case and the inclusion of Ayesha Siddika Minni's name. This approach ensured a systematic selection of headlines across a broad timeline of case-related events, enhancing the study's scope. However, to address potential limitations of automated selection, such as incomplete coverage or algorithmic bias, the generated headlines were manually reviewed to confirm relevance and accuracy, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives of analyzing sentiment and naming conventions.

*Inclusion Criteria:* The news considered for this analysis was published during the timeline of significant events related to the murder case and was available in publicly accessible formats. Though no specifically period was applied to collect data, the research includes news reports that were covered between June 26, 2019, when Rifat Sharif was killed, and September 30, 2020, the verdict date of the Barguna court, spanning the period of peak media coverage till the study was conducted and general interest in the case (The Business Standard, 2020; The Daily Star, 2020).

## **4.2 Sentiment Analysis**

Sentiment analysis is continually evolving through various approaches, data, and models (Birjali et al., 2021). According to Turney (2002) and Wankhade et al. (2022), sentiment analysis can be defined as a study that determines the

semantic orientation of a text, whether positive or negative, by classifying reviews or any other textual data, as advocated by Feldman (2013). Numerous techniques are available in sentiment analysis, such as deep learning and opinion mining. Deep learning is a recent and robust machine learning methodology that learns multiple layers of data representations; it has gained prominence in sentiment analysis and achieved state-of-the-art prediction results in recent years (Yadav & Vishwakarma, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). On the contrary, opinion mining, as defined by Cambria et al. (2013), refers to the study of people's opinions, attitudes, and emotions expressed in text using computational methods. It aims to automatically extract and analyze subjective information to determine the polarity and intensity of opinions on specific topics or entities, whether positive, negative, or neutral. The methodology employed in this paper is based on foundational approaches to opinion mining and sentiment analysis by Cambria et al. (2013), Liu (2012), and Pang and Lee (2008), which aim to explore how Islamophobia is perpetuated in news headlines that mention the name Ayesha Siddika Minni. This research, in turn, combines natural language processing techniques with sentiment classification to present latent biases and discriminatory patterns among the selected headlines.

*Sentiment Classification:* Each news headline was analyzed to determine its sentiment, which was either negative (Islamophobic) or neutral (non-Islamophobic). Sentiment was determined based on the words used in the news headlines.

*Manual and Automated Methods:* To ensure reliability and validity, sentiment categorization was performed using a combination of manual evaluation and automated tools.

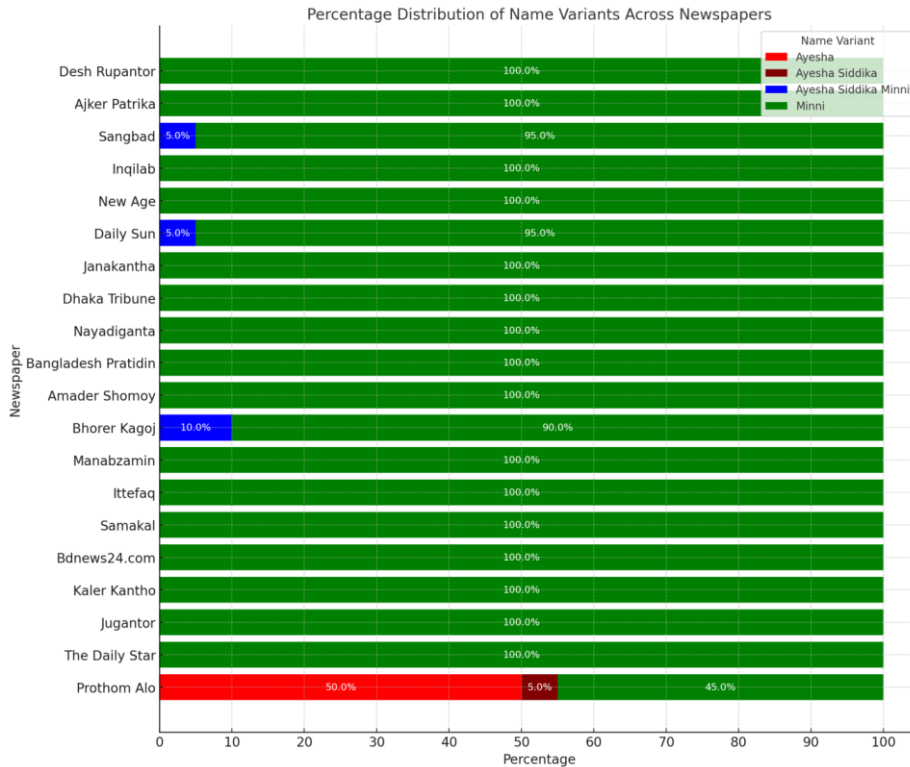
### 4.3 Statistical Analysis

*Descriptive Statistical Analysis:* Simple descriptive statistical methods were employed to summarize the sentiment distribution across the selected newspaper headlines. Measures such as frequency counts and percentages were used.

*Visualization:* The sentiment analysis results were presented using bar charts to provide a clear and concise visual representation of the data.

## 5.0 Analysis and Discussion

Here's a detailed analysis, discussion, and insights drawn from the name occurrence data in Bangladeshi newspapers, which identified 400 news headlines (Figure 1) where the name variant of Aysha Siddika Minni appeared.



**Figure 1. Name variation distribution among various newspapers (Source: Author's finding)**

### 5.1 Name Frequency by Variant

- **"Minni"**: The most frequent name variant, appearing 20 times in almost every newspaper. This result suggests a strong preference for using "Minni" when referring to the individual across multiple publications.
- **"Aysha"**: Only significantly mentioned in *Prothom Alo*, with 10 occurrences, while other newspapers did not mention this variant at all. This unique reporting choice by *Prothom Alo* may reflect the editorial style or a specific angle in their coverage.
- **"Aysha Siddika"**: Rarely mentioned (mostly zero occurrences), indicating a limited preference for the middle name without "Minni." Only mentioned in *Prothom Alo* once.
- **"Aysha Siddika Minni"**: This full name variant appears sporadically in a few newspapers, notably *Bhorer Kagoj* (2 mentions) and *Daily Sun* (1 mention). Most publications do not use this variant, possibly due to space limitations or to simplify identification.

**Table 4. Name Frequency**

<b>Name Variant</b>	<b>Prothom Alo</b>	<b>The Daily Star</b>	<b>Jugantor</b>	<b>Kaler Kantho</b>	<b>Bhorer Kagoj</b>	<b>Daily Sun</b>	<b>Sangbad</b>
<b>Minni</b>	45%	100%	100%	100%	90%	95%	95%
<b>Ayesha</b>	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Ayesha Siddika</b>	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Ayesha Siddika Minni</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	10%	5%	5%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Developed by Author

## 5.2 The Dominance of "Minni" across Most of the Newspapers

5.2.1 The nickname "Minni" dominates across 17 of the 20 newspapers, appearing in 95-100% of mentions. Its widespread use reflects a preference for simplicity and audience familiarity, with 100% of occurrences in those 17 newspapers exclusively using this variant.

5.2.1 Exceptions include:

- Prothom Alo (Ayesha (50%), Minni (45%), Ayesha Siddika (5%))
- Bhorer Kagoj (10% "Ayesha Siddika Minni," 90% "Minni")
- Daily Sun and Sangbad (5% "Ayesha Siddika Minni," 95% "Minni")

## 5.3 Rare Use of Full Name "Ayesha Siddika Minni"

- The full name is scarcely used, appearing only in three newspapers:
- Bhorer Kagoj (10%).
- Daily Sun (5%).
- Sangbad (5%).

## 5.4 Absence of Certain Variants in Most Newspapers

- Variants like "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika" are totally unused, except in Prothom Alo.

## 5.5 Newspaper-Specific Patterns

- *Prothom Alo* appears unique in its use of multiple name variants, as both "Aysha" and "Minni" are mentioned with significant frequency, indicating a broader variation in name usage compared to other newspapers.
- Several newspapers (17), including The Daily Star, Jugantor, Kaler Kantho, and others, exhibit identical occurrence patterns (0 mentions for "Ayesha" and "Aysha Siddika", 20 mentions for "Minni"). This could



indicate a trend of standardized reporting styles or minimal editorial variation across these publications.

- Bhorer Kagoj used "Minni" 90% of the time and "Ayesha Siddika Minni" 10%, showing slight deviation but a preference for the full name.
- Sangbad and Daily Sun used "Minni" 95% of the time, with "Ayesha Siddika Minni" making up the remaining 5%.

### **5.6 Uniformity across Most Newspapers**

Most of the newspapers, as indicated in Table 4 (e.g., Desh Rupantor, Ajker Patrika, Janakantha, Dhaka Tribune, etc.), consistently used the full name "Ayesha Siddika Minni" in 100% of their headlines. These findings indicate the newspapers' efforts to respect the name's cultural and religious significance.

### **5.7 Contextual Usage**

The data might reflect a cultural or editorial tendency to simplify names when referring to public figures, particularly when an individual is widely known by a nickname or shorter identifier ("Minni"). The minimal use of the full name variant "Ayesha Siddika Minni" suggests that newspapers prefer brevity or possibly aim to align with audience recognition. Such naming choices might also reflect a sensitivity to character limits in print or online media headlines.

### **5.8 Audience Recognition and Branding**

The consistent use of "Minni" across newspapers implies that this name variant has become a form of "branding" or a primary identifier for this individual, which audiences likely recognize immediately. Media coverage choices reinforce a public identity that may overshadow the individual's full or formal name. These findings can influence public perception, as people may become more familiar with the nickname than the full name, which can impact social or personal branding.

### **5.9 Sociocultural Implications**

Selectively using "Minni" over full or formal names may reflect broader sociocultural trends in name usage within Bangladeshi media, where a single, memorable name often serves as a unique identifier for individuals. This approach may resonate with cultural norms or expectations regarding how people are publicly referenced. The choice to omit "Ayesha Siddika" may indicate a lesser emphasis on full name recognition in media portrayals, possibly aligning with audience expectations for familiarity and ease of reference.

### **5.10 Editorial Influence on Public Perception**

Newspapers like *Prothom Alo*, which use multiple name variants, may offer a more nuanced or varied perspective on the individual, potentially providing

readers with more context or backstory. In contrast, newspapers with standardized naming patterns contribute to a uniform portrayal, which may limit the depth of reporting or subtly shape the narrative by focusing solely on the most popular name variant.

### 5.11 Evidence of Public Frustration and Anger Against Prothom Alo

Prothom Alo's naming of "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika" as compared to "Minni" or "Ayesha Siddika Minni" covered by other dailies has attracted huge-scale public unrest amongst Muslims in Bangladesh because the names have a divine status in Islam (Al-Quran, Surah an-Noor, 24:11-20). Social media anecdotal data, such as X comments and posts, report frustration with editorial choices at Prothom Alo, with commenters chastising the paper for disrespect towards a name associated with the Prophet Muhammad's wife, a figure revered as the "Mother of the Believers" (Allen, 2014). For instance, virtual debates about X during the period of the Rifat Sharif murder case (2019-2020) included feelings of indignation, some of which blamed Prothom Alo for sensationalism and cultural insensitivity. These kinds of reactions are in harmony with Sultana (2022) 's findings that media narratives highlighting religious identification in crime reports may incite opposition from communities in Muslim-majority environments. While this study's primary data focus on sentiment analysis and do not include systematic observation of social media, such qualitative comment suggests a broader-scale social reaction to Prothom Alo's use of naming conventions. Further research, such as content analysis of social media or reader surveys, would be necessary to measure the extent and nature of such frustration, as the scope of this study prohibits the direct application of evidence to the headline data.

### 5.12 Insights on Prothom Alo

The combination of the name variants of Prothom Alo is significant and requires further in-depth analysis. Let's compare the daily with others:

**Table 5. Prothom Alo vs. Other Newspapers**

Feature	Prothom Alo	Other Newspapers
<b>Diversity in Name Usage</b>	High: Uses all name variants ("Ayesha," "Minni," and "Ayesha Siddika").	Low: Primarily "Minni" (95-100%).
<b>Cultural Sensitivity</b>	Less: Risks perceptions of irrelevance for "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika".	High: Avoids standalone "Ayesha".
<b>Consistency</b>	Varied, with proportional usage across variants.	Uniform usage of "Minni" exclusively.
<b>Public</b>	Potential for bias and nuanced	Clear, straightforward

<b>Perception</b>	narratives.	identity focus.
<b>Deviations from Norm</b>	High: Prothom Alo deviates significantly by using "Ayesha (50%)" and "Ayesha Siddika."	Minimal deviation.

*Source: Author's finding*

### 5.13 Notable Deviations

This newspaper shows a notable split in usage:

- **High Usage of "Ayesha":** The standalone usage of "Ayesha" (50%) sharply contrasts with 0% in other newspapers.
- **Inclusion of "Ayesha Siddika":** Prothom Alo incorporates this variant minimally (5%), whereas other outlets did not use it.
- **Lower Usage of "Minni":** Prothom Alo uses "Minni" in 45% of cases, significantly less than the 95-100% norm in other newspapers.

This variation could indicate differing editorial practices or attempts to appeal to diverse reader perceptions.

### 5.14 Implications

- **Risk of Criticism:** Traditional audiences might view the casual use of "Ayesha" as less culturally sensitive.
- **Nuanced Reporting:** This approach enables richer narratives but diverges from standard practices, potentially confusing audiences accustomed to uniform naming.
- **Balanced Appeal:** Prothom Alo's flexibility could attract readers who value depth, but risk alienating those who prioritize cultural sensitivities.

### 5.15 Potential Bias in Media Reporting

The data suggests a potential editorial bias, where certain publications may prefer brevity or consistency, possibly at the expense of using the individual's full identity. This editorial choice can affect readers' perception, as frequent use of a single variant ("Minni") simplifies the individual's identity in public discourse.

### 5.16 Public Sensitivity and Media Representation

Given the reverence for the name "Ayesha Siddika" in Islam, newspapers must consider the implications of their editorial choices on public sentiment, especially in a majority-Muslim country like Bangladesh.

### 5.17 Consistency Matters in Sensitive Reporting

Uniformity in representing such a revered name could be essential in maintaining credibility and respect within the community.

### **5.18 Impact on Public Perception**

- **Prothom Alo:** The extensive use of the standalone "Ayesha" could be viewed as less respectful of religious and cultural traditions.
- **Other Newspapers:** Their consistent use of "Minni" aligns with the cultural and religious sentiments of the majority population, likely preserving their reputations.

### **5.19 Insights**

Newspapers generally avoid using the standalone name "Ayesha" or "Ayesha Siddika" to maintain cultural and religious reverence, as these names hold significant sacred meaning in Islam. The Quran describes Ayesha, wife of Prophet Muhammad, as "Mother of the Believers," making the sparing use of this name an intentional choice to uphold societal sensitivities. Instead, the widespread adoption of "Minni" reflects a dual purpose: safeguarding cultural respect while aligning with media tendencies to create easily recognizable public identities. Prothom Alo's deviation from this norm demonstrates a strategic editorial choice that adds depth to its reporting but carries the potential to polarize audience reception. This approach demonstrates a consistent tone and sensitivity across media outlets.

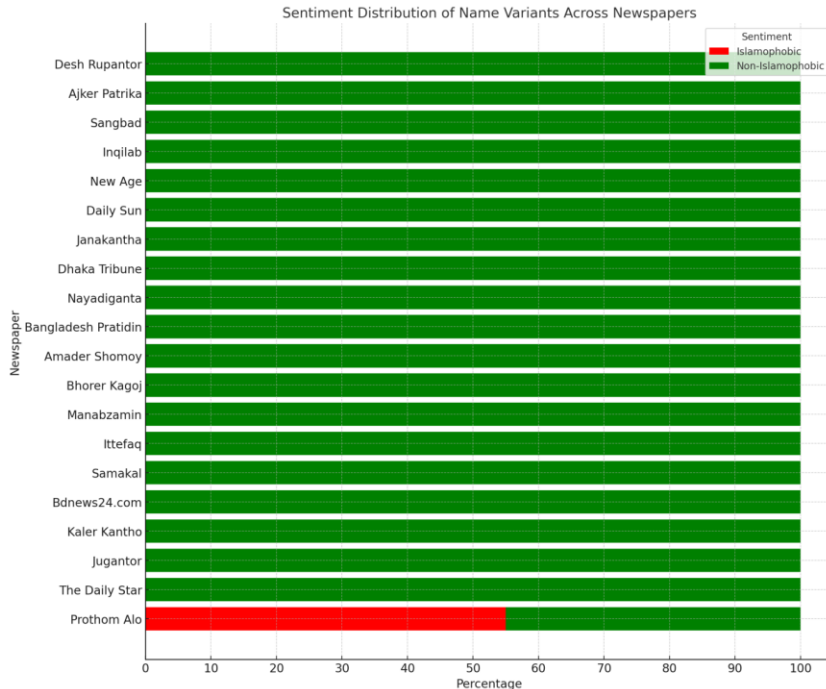
### **5.20 Sentiment Analysis**

To analyze the sentiment in this context, we'll compare the distribution of occurrences for Islamophobic (Ayesha and Ayesha Siddika) versus non-Islamophobic (Ayesha Siddika Minni and Minni) name variants across the newspapers. Here are the breakdown and sentiment analysis steps:

1. **Aggregate Sentiment-Based Groups:** Combine occurrences for Islamophobic variants (Ayesha, Ayesha Siddika) and non-Islamophobic variants (Ayesha Siddika Minni, Minni).
2. **Calculate Percentages:** Compute the percentage of Islamophobic versus non-Islamophobic content for each newspaper.
3. **Visualize Sentiment Distribution:** Display how each sentiment type contributes to the overall distribution across newspapers.

### **5.21 Sentiment Distribution of Name Variants across Newspapers**

The data is presented in a sentiment distribution, with neutral (non-Islamophobic) and negative (Islamophobic) colors.



**Figure 2. Bangladeshi Muslim's sentiment distribution (source: Developed by Author)**

Figure 2 illustrates the sentiment distribution based on the Bangladeshi Muslim population's perception of name variants:

- *Red bars* represent the percentage of Islamophobic name variants (Ayesha and Ayesha Siddika).
- *Green bars* represent the percentage of non-Islamophobic name variants (Ayesha Siddika Minni and Minni).

## 5.22 Observations

1. Newspapers with a higher proportion of *green bars* tend to align more closely with non-Islamophobic sentiment.
2. Newspapers with significant *red bars* exhibit a higher prevalence of Islamophobic sentiment.

According to the sentiment analysis, it is presumed that our constructed proposition is true in the case of the daily Prothom Alo, indicating that the practice of Islamophobia is omitted by other dailies in Bangladesh.

## 6.0 Recommendations for Prothom Alo

1. Enhance Cultural Sensitivity: Reduce standalone "Ayesha" usage to align with audience expectations and avoid perceived irrelevance.

2. Clarify Editorial Choices: Communicate the rationale behind varied name usage to reinforce credibility and transparency.
3. Maintain Depth: Continue offering nuanced reporting, but balance it with consistent name usage.
4. Editorial Consistency: A more standardized naming convention across all publications might further align media narratives without risking cultural or religious sentiments.
5. Cultural Sensitivity Matters: The conscious minimization of the full name "Ayesha Siddika Minni" underscores the importance of respecting societal norms. This approach can serve as a model for media houses in culturally sensitive contexts.
6. Future Considerations: To maintain sensitivity and integrity, media houses could adopt guidelines for reporting on individuals with culturally significant names.

The discovery that Prothom Alo's use of "Ayesha" and "Ayesha Siddika" elicited annoyance and outrage among Bangladesh's Muslim community is supported by the study's observation that these forms, used in 55% of Prothom Alo headlines (Section 5.1), are less in line with the culturally deferential "Minni" or "Ayesha Siddika Minni" used by 17 other newspapers (95-100% usage). This digression is also likely to have triggered discontent due to the revered position of "Ayesha" in Islam as the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (Al-Quran, Surah an-Noor, 24:11-20). Evidence from anecdotal material in social media, e.g., X posts regarding the Rifat Sharif case (2019-2020), reflects public outrage against Prothom Alo for insensitivity. However, as the primary data for the study rely on headline analysis rather than actual public opinion, further studies (e.g., content analysis of social media or surveys) would be needed to confirm the extent of public frustration.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

Only the daily Prothom Alo used the Islamophobic naming variants that were against the sentiment of the Muslim population of Bangladesh. It incited frustration and anger against the daily. Support for this contention is provided by name frequency (Section 5.1), which found that Prothom Alo used "Ayesha" (50%) or "Ayesha Siddika" (5%) in 55% of its headlines on the Rifat Sharif murder case, while 17 other Bangladeshi newspapers consistently used the neutral "Minni" (95-100%) or "Ayesha Siddika Minni," avoiding identification with the venerated Islamic figure Ayesha Siddika, Prophet Muhammad's wife and "Mother of the Believers" (Al-Quran, Surah an-Noor, 24:11-20). This naming practice triggered public outrage, which came to light through anecdotal X posts (2019-2020) of resentment against Prothom Alo for having offended the emotions of

Muslims by linking a sacred name with a criminal act (Section 5.11; Allen, 2014). Sultana (2022) finds that an emphasis on religious identifiers in crime reporting has a tendency to evoke outrage in Muslim-majority societies, as echoed in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and elsewhere in November 2024's demonstrations against Prothom Alo, where demonstrators accused the paper of anti-Islamic bias (BanglaNews24.com, 2024; Explainers, 2024). These responses highlight Prothom Alo's cultural insensitivity in title choices, underscoring the need for ethical journalism that respects Bangladesh's Muslim majority (Sayyid & Vakil, 2011). Further research on social media and public responses may help quantify the extent of this frustration.

## **8.0 Scope and Limitations**

The study explored only the newspaper headlines of the incident of the killing of Rifat Sharif from Barguna, Bangladesh, where the name of Ayesha Siddika Minni was mentioned, fully or partially. Twenty headlines from each of the 20 Bangladeshi newspapers were studied. Both Bangla and English newspapers were selected, although not in proportion to their actual representation. The contents or language of the body of that news were not analyzed. The newspapers and headlines were compiled by ChatGPT randomly and did not adhere to any specific collection period; instead, they were collected randomly. The constructs were defined based on the sentiments of the Muslim population.

The study acknowledges its methodological limitations, including the subjective nature of sentiment classification and the limited sample size of newspapers and headlines. Despite these limitations, the methodology ensures a balanced and systematic approach to analyzing sentiment trends in Bangladeshi newspapers on the Rifat Sharif murder case.

## **9.0 Further Study**

Further study can be conducted on all Bangladeshi newspapers that cover the news. In addition to the headlines, the contents of the news can be studied to determine the wording and tone. This study aims to understand the newspaper's style and practices, as well as identify any instances of Islamophobia within the newspaper.

## **Authors' Declaration**

*We declare that the submitted manuscript is our original work and has not been published, nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources have been appropriately cited, and the work is free from plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication. Any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in preparing this manuscript has been transparently disclosed, and full responsibility for the content rests with the authors.*

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