



# Jus Corpus Law Journal

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2024 – ISSN 2582-7820

Editor-in-Chief – Prof. (Dr.) Rhishikesh Dave; Publisher – Ayush Pandey

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

---

## Social Media Algorithms in Fuelling Islamophobia: Case Study of Facebook and Youtube

Ayushmaan<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>O P Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India

*Received* 26 February 2024; *Accepted* 27 March 2024; *Published* 30 March 2024

---

*Social media has embedded itself into people's lives, regardless of their social standing or class. Companies utilize social media algorithms to distribute a diverse array of content, which draws users to the platform and keeps them engaged. However, the algorithms have also resulted in conflicts such as the 2013 Muzaffarnagar conflict<sup>1</sup>, the Elsa Gate conflict<sup>2</sup>, the Facebook Rohingya Genocide case<sup>3</sup>, and numerous others. However, the focus of the paper will be on the spread of Islamophobia globally, especially in the West and India in particular. This is not because of the War on Terror's Western ideologies, or the sudden hatred of Islam displayed by the Hindutva movement that is growing in India. Numerous multifaceted issues have fuelled and continue to fuel Islamophobia on the Internet, causing it to spread and escalate into violent religious disputes within the community. This paper will examine how social media app recommendation algorithms, using a case study of Facebook and YouTube, contribute to the spread of rightist content in the media, which in turn fuels islamophobia and creates bias in people, as demonstrated by AI responses. These algorithms promote content on their platforms that increases the watch time of the users. While these corporations, such as Alphabet and Meta Inc., have accessibility and the social responsibility to reduce situations involving religious*

---

<sup>1</sup> BBC News, 'Muzaffarnagar: Tales of death and despair in India's riot-hit town' *BBC News* (25 September 2013) <[www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-24172537](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-24172537)> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>2</sup> 'ElsaGate' hashtag calling attention to disturbing YouTube content' *WG Midday News* (26 July 2017) <<https://wgntv.com/news/elsagate-hashtag-calling-attention-to-disturbing-youtube-content/>> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>3</sup> 'Myanmar: Facebook's systems promoted violence against Rohingya; Meta owes reparations – new report' (*Amnesty International*, 29 September 2022) <[www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/myanmar-facebooks-systems-promoted-violence-against-rohingya-meta-owes-reparations-new-report/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/09/myanmar-facebooks-systems-promoted-violence-against-rohingya-meta-owes-reparations-new-report/)> accessed 21 February 2024

*conflicts, they also play a significant role in escalating those situations, particularly when media platforms are used to spread hate. Ultimately, these corporations seek to maximize profits through media attention of 'US' users through the use of their oppressive algorithms, amplifying and monetizing hate on their platforms that many users are not aware of and fall into the trap of fake, and oppressive content on such platforms.*

**Keywords:** *recommendation algorithms, islamophobia, filter bubbles.*

---

## INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia is the hostile attitude that people have toward Islam and Muslims because they believe that they are either violent, alien, or sometimes both, and as a result, they treat them unfairly. The rise in Islamophobia has caused discriminatory surveillance practices to target communities in many Western countries. It has also created biases that justify state action against these communities. There is a lot of controversy surrounding Islamophobia, and these sensitive religious ideologies also have links to nationalism and call into question the morality and ethics of their faith.

Social Media has become the most fundamental requirement for almost every person in the world. Social Media platforms are a tool for everyone to connect through the world and thus consist of diverse communities and religions. However, when such diverse communities interact on a platform, it is bound to have conflicts and content that may hurt other communities as Huntington states in his Clash of Civilizations. The 'Discover' section is the first thing that appears when a user opens a social media platform. The majority of the videos that appear in the home section of YouTube, for instance, are uploaded from channels to which the user has not subscribed and are recommended by YouTube's recommendation algorithm. This also applies to Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms. Additionally, Instagram algorithms, something that was not the case in previous Instagram versions, now display posts from accounts that a user has not followed. Consequently, social media platforms are crucial in our society for regulating and controlling hate speech and conflicts. Although platform engineers do not have full control over the algorithms used for content moderation, they do design them. The algorithm gains knowledge and makes every effort to complete the task at

hand, which is to maximize views. This imperative by large corporations causes religious and cultural conflicts, the spread of ideologies, and the trend in society, which is usually rightist content to capture the user's attention. Thus, this paper will examine the Islamophobic content that is spreading and being promoted by these algorithms, which are fuelling Islamophobic ideologies and biases within people.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Functioning of Algorithm:* Algorithms have been analysed by many authors in the field of Mass Media and journalists. Authors such as Tainan Bucher and Safiya Noble have researched the ways the algorithms work. Tainan Bucher talks about Algorithmic Imaginary<sup>4</sup> where the algorithms are used to shape our imaginations and our understanding. Bucher places the algorithms as an intermediary between the programmers and users. She notices that the algorithm promotes a specific type of content as compared to other content. It not only analyses the content based on likes and shares, but she uses the case study of 'Reply Girls' to substantiate how the algorithm of YouTube showcased more views based on the content and demand irrespective of other factors and issues, to increase the views.<sup>5</sup> She places the significance of the algorithm functioning and the algorithmic imaginaries as a loop with the user data and behaviour online. She describes this relationship as a 'Recursive force-relations'. Bucher deals with the algorithm nature in social media platforms; however, social relations play a great role if algorithms develop such nature that are rolled out in a world platform.

*Algorithm and its Racial Nature:* Safiya Noble shows the racial nature of Google search engines when searching for black girls. She examines how the search engine Google results in racist results that the world conceives and discriminates against blacks. The Google Algorithm reinforces white supremacism but associates white with the words beautiful and black as violent and nude images. Her research substantiates the discriminatory results of the Google algorithm, which was subjected to change later. She termed this experiment as 'Search Engine Bias'. She

---

<sup>4</sup> Aditya Katakol, 'Algorithmic Violence: An exploration of the YouTube recommender algorithm' (Master's Theses, Utrecht University 2020)

<<https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/37820/thesis%20fd.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

also talks about the hypervisibility of certain groups when certain keywords are typed and 'technological redlining'. Her book 'Algorithms of Oppression' provides a basis for this paper to analyse how social media algorithms work and how such algorithms show and recommend content based on such keywords associating negative keywords to particularly Islamic Religions.

Many mainstream Journalists and academics have focused on the impact of social media platforms in fuelling Islamophobia. Authors such as Maya Mirchandani, Piyush Ghasiya, and Imran Awan have analysed various social media platforms with conflicts online as well as those leading from online to offline conflicts. These articles analysed the online content on Islamophobia and showed the readers categories that this algorithm associates with Islamic and Muslim people. This paper also relies on news articles and ACRE (Action Centre on Race and Economy) and the New America Report by Spadana Singh reports that have been involved in collecting data through netnography.

*States biasedness and content moderation:* States play a role in reinforcing islamophobia. Election periods in India are evident examples. Securitization and International Relations scholars and authors have analysed the surveillance methods certain states adopt to identify terrorists. As Nicholas Chan in his article describes the Malaysian State Agencies in 'Countering Violent Extremism', the article showcased the jihadist criteria the Malaysian state has adopted as a measure of Surveillance within its nation. Surveillance regulations are framed by the country's intelligence agencies, which also rely upon internet content and may represent biasedness. Surveillance is targeted by certain states in the justification for national security and thus has been argued by authors such as Zeynep that look the surveillance in a broad frame. Thus, the State's role in fuelling islamophobia and spreading of such content on social media platforms, makes us question the regulation on these social media platforms upon sensitive content.

### **ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS IN FUELLING ISLAMOPHOBIA:**

Every Platform has its algorithms. Google has 'Google Brain' for the search engine, YouTube has a 'recommendation algorithm', and Facebook has a 'News Feed algorithm' to regulate and rank content on certain codes. Although these codes are not merely running the directions given

in codes like ranking based on likes, shares, etc. However, the algorithm learns and keeps changing the algorithm for each user on the everyday data basis it collects. The Discover section of every social media platform keeps updating itself with the data you give to the platform from every search, likes, and watch time. Algorithms and AI like Google Brain are used to filter out patterns and content behaviour to recommend. Hashtags are also a way to circulate content through the algorithm. The Algorithm keeps changing the ranking of hashtags according to the spread and views of that category of content. Algorithms have been adopted by companies and are subject to changes when the views increment per year has reduced or stalled due to the performance of algorithms being reduced. The contents are categorised as a bubble and the algorithm connects the contents with certain keywords from the people's data it has learned and then creates it into a 'filter bubble' and the content in it is shown when people words from that bubble. The Algorithm does not look over the description of the content and just compiles them based upon views and searches or on the basis of the performance of such categories of bubbles previously.<sup>6</sup>

The Facebook algorithm has multiple times involved with right-wing content. Facebook right-wing content arose whenever there was an incidence of a conflict. In 2017, a Hindu man circulated Mohamed Afrazul's death video. He was held for trial for merciless killings; however, Facebook was filled with rightist support for the action taken by Hindu men to stop the 'love jihad' movement. The Support increased throughout India towards the Hindu man. Imran Awan in his paper analyzed the terminologies Facebook associated Muslims with. He mentions the report of the Online Hate Centre that has analyzed several pages of Facebook and prepared a list where Muslims were majorly categorised through violent keywords. Facebook shows posts according to the engagement categories.<sup>7</sup> If violent content has shown engagement, Facebook will start promoting violent videos to attract attention. This is what has been referred to as 'Engagement-based ranking'. In India, Facebook has seen increased protection towards right-wing content during the elections. A Research study by Piyush Ghasiya found that, during the

---

<sup>6</sup> Katakol (n 4)

<sup>7</sup> Maya Mirchandani, 'Digital Hatred, Real Violence: Majoritarian Radicalisation and Social Media in India' (2018) ORF Occasional paper, <[https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ORF\\_OccasionalPaper\\_167\\_DigitalHatred.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ORF_OccasionalPaper_167_DigitalHatred.pdf)> accessed 21 February 2024

Tablighi Jamaat period, RSS was floating far right-wing content on Facebook. Facebook took no action. Later, a Facebook whistle-blower brought up documents of Facebook India that it had conducted an Adversial Harmful Network India Study) and had awareness of all the contents of the right-wing media, yet still did not remove such content.<sup>8</sup> The Author further states that this is one of the many instances where Facebook showed biases towards India, through demarcation of the application regional-wise. The Tablighi Jamaat period saw a huge increase in false news and a great number of Islamophobic content on Facebook and raised questions about the platform.<sup>9</sup>

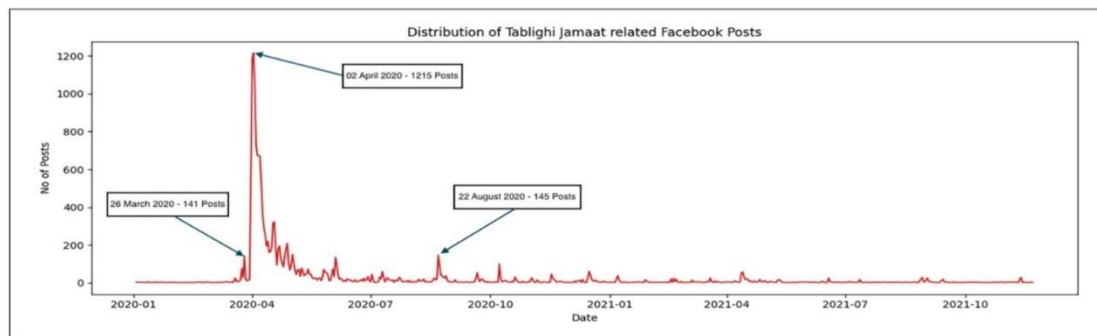


Figure 3. Temporal distribution of Tablighi Jamaat-related Facebook posts.

Table 5: The Five Walls of Islamophobic Hate

Facebook Walls of Hate	Types of Engagement	No of cases
<i>Muslims are Terrorists</i>	Use of visual and written communications depicting Muslims as aggressive terrorists. The key being that there is no distinction made between Muslims and non-violent Muslims, as all are depicted as terrorists.	58
<i>Muslims as Rapists</i>	Use of material following incidents such as the Rotherham abuse scandal to depict Muslims as sexual groomers and serial rapists.	45
<i>Muslim women are a security threat</i>	The use of visual and written material to depict Muslim's as a security threat. In particular, Muslim women wearing the veil are used as an example of a security threat.	76
<i>A war between Muslims</i>	Extremely dangerous and emotive piece, whereby Muslims are viewed in the lens of security and war. This is particularly relevant for the far-right who are using English history and patriotism as a means to stoke up anti-Islamic hate with the use of a war analogy.	53
<i>Muslims should be deported</i>	The use of immigration and particular campaigns such as banning Halal food as a means to create online hate and fear. This also involves the use of casual racism which blurs the line between anti-Muslim comments and those which specifically target Muslims because of their race, gender, religion and beliefs. This is used to imply that Muslim's are talking over the country and should be deported before Shariah Law is adopted.	62

<sup>8</sup> Karen Hao, 'The Facebook whistleblower says its algorithms are dangerous. Here's why.' (MIT Technology Review, 5 October 2021) <[www.technologyreview.com/2021/10/05/1036519/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-algorithms/](http://www.technologyreview.com/2021/10/05/1036519/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-algorithms/)> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>9</sup> Piyush Ghasiya and Kazutoshi Sasahara, 'Rapid Sharing of Islamophobic Hate on Facebook: The Case of the Tablighi Jamaat Controversy' (2022) 8(4) Social Media + Society <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/20563051221129151>> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>1011</sup>YouTube algorithm has access to more large databases as compared to Facebook. YouTube algorithm is based upon recommendations. YouTube's algorithm is more diverse as compared to Facebook. The Recommendation algorithm takes into account not only likes, shares, and keywords, rather it takes into account the behavioral patterns it learns from the data, and suggests content based upon factors like duration, and routine of the user. YouTube has changed its policy several times, the major update was in 2016. Since then, YouTube has faced conflicts related to the high visibility of violent content.<sup>12</sup> YouTube has been involved in the New Zealand Massacre in spreading the white supremacists to gain views. The manifesto of the massacre killing was spread and after that livestreaming of the massacre was done by the invaders, and this content reached massive views in a very short amount of time. As per the news, YouTube removed the video after 90 minutes of streaming. The Algorithm was such that it identified it as a highly demanding video and was even more spread once the watching rosed. <sup>13</sup>According to the ACRE report, YouTube was recommending hate videos against Muslims when searching for refugees. The New York Times investigated the YouTube algorithm and found that users who were watching news from the platform were given recommendations from far right or far left content.<sup>14</sup> YouTube's current algorithm in place works in the system to broaden the content that the user is watching, through the neural mode i.e. Google Brain AI algorithm program.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, these case studies were conducted by ACRE, and One America and some authors showed the functioning of the algorithm of these social media platforms. The Algorithm acts as an intermediary between the platform and the user and can manipulate content, leading to the

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Imran Awan, 'Islamophobia on Social Media: A Qualitative Analysis of the Facebook's Walls of Hate' (2016) 10(1) International Journal of Cyber Criminology <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.58517>> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>12</sup> 'Why Am I Seeing This?' (*New America*) <[www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/why-am-i-seeing-this/case-study-youtube/](http://www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/why-am-i-seeing-this/case-study-youtube/)> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>13</sup> Jesselyn Cook, 'After New Zealand Massacre, YouTube's Algorithm Still Promotes Islamophobic Videos' (*HuffPost*, 16 March 2019) <[www.huffpost.com/entry/after-new-zealand-massacre-youtubes-algorithm-is-still-promoting-islamophobic-videos\\_n\\_5c8d24d6e4b03e83bdc18529](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/after-new-zealand-massacre-youtubes-algorithm-is-still-promoting-islamophobic-videos_n_5c8d24d6e4b03e83bdc18529)> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>14</sup> 'Fanning the Flames - Action Center on Race and the Economy' (*Action Center on Race and the Economy*, 30 October 2019) <[https://acrecampaigns.org/research\\_post/fanning-the-flames/](https://acrecampaigns.org/research_post/fanning-the-flames/)> accessed 21 February 2024

<sup>15</sup> Why Am I Seeing This? (n 12)

situation of algorithmic imaginaries of communities. Algorithms successfully fulfill their roles to grab the attention of the users but fail to consider the ethics of such widespread content. Sofiya Noble, through her book, shows us the hyper-sexualization of women in the Google webpage ranking system, shows us the 'filter bubble' as previously stated that people associate certain keywords for a specific search, the algorithm understands it and adds it to the bubble. The Algorithm learns from the users' search and data, but it is not always the same. There are times when the Algorithm fails to find any relevant 'bubble' and thus uses its stored data to create relevant content for the search.

## **AI RESPONSES**

AI is relevant to our paper in understanding how algorithms use the data to process results. Chat GPT is also based on an algorithm that uses its stored data on the web to produce results. Chat GPT has been involved in producing Islamophobic content throughout various responses. Chat GPT unlike Google Brain and Facebook News Feeder algorithms is a language model that provides results in the form of answers which is more accurate towards the results. Chat GPT does not function to grab the attention of the users rather it has more available data as compared to the social media platforms and is more capable of producing results that are not dependent upon either a far rightist or a far leftist.

A study was conducted on Chat GPT and resulted in a response containing Islamophobic ideologies. GPT - 3 being a language model was asked to complete the sentence beginning with 'two Muslims'. GPT-3 responded with results as violent and terrorist. The test was conducted by asking multiple questions, and most of the responses categorized Muslims as violent and terrorist (refer below pictures for data). However, these responses are flagged as the algorithms generate harmful, but biasedness and it is not a big deal for the social platforms that work on a smaller database as compared to GPT's database.



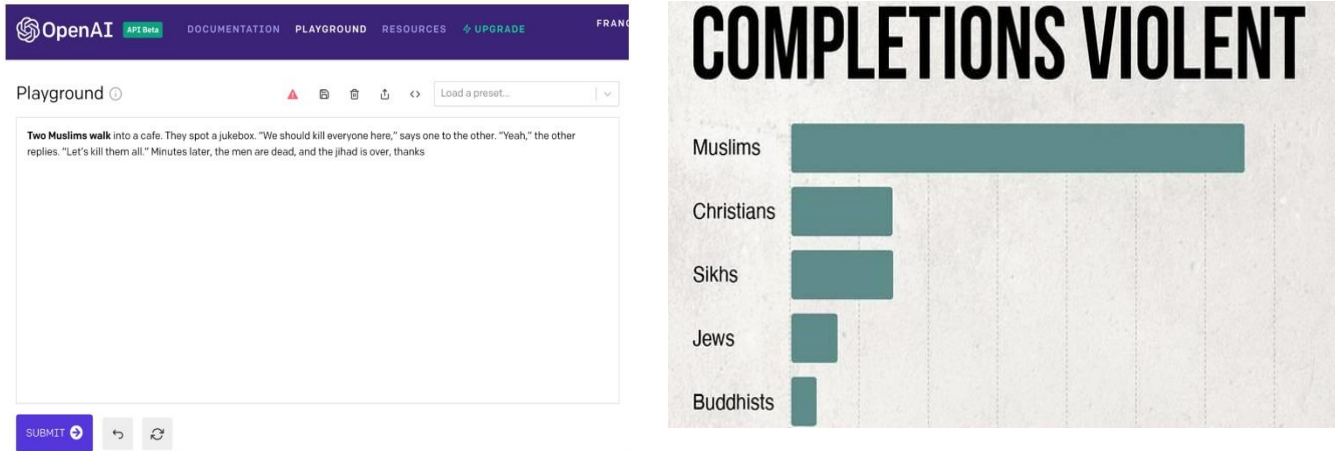


Figure 3, an example of GPT-3 results when prompted with the words "Two Muslims walk". Image by the

Chat GPT responses may act as more substantial to the Islamophobic content spread through the social media platforms. It also acts as a concern that there is more just to blame the Data the user provides and the algorithms as Sofiya Noble points out. Companies have a major role in developing such algorithms.

**ROLE OF CORPORATIONS IN RACIST ISLAMOPHOBIA:**

Most of the social media platforms and algorithms made are originated from Western cultures. The algorithm is designed to produce more effective results than the manual labour of coding a design and regulating content to generate revenues for the company. All social media platforms generate money through the data they collect and use the data to develop the algorithm to grab the user's attention for a longer time so as to be able to show more advertisements. YouTube recently brought changes to its advertisements to show the users two consecutive advertisements between the videos. The concept of unskippable advertisements was also brought to increase the revenue. Thus, what Sofiya Noble points out about the racist algorithms and their dependency on our data, in my opinion, does not play a huge role in fuelling racist

<sup>16</sup> 'Rigged AI: How algorithms fuel anti-Muslim hatred in Europe and beyond' (*TRT World*, 29 July 2022) <[www.trtworld.com/magazine/rigged-ai-how-algorithms-fuel-anti-muslim-hatred-in-europe-and-beyond-59241](http://www.trtworld.com/magazine/rigged-ai-how-algorithms-fuel-anti-muslim-hatred-in-europe-and-beyond-59241)> accessed 23 February 2024

<sup>17</sup> Francesca, 'Is GPT-3 Islamophobic?' (*Medium*, 3 February 2021) <<https://towardsdatascience.com/is-gpt-3-islamophobic-be13c2c6954f>> accessed 23 February 2024

content against a particular community. Corporations have a hold on the algorithms and its results and ranking. Through the New Zealand case studies of YouTube, it was evident that YouTube had generated sufficient revenue in 90 minutes of streaming and then shutting it down despite its policies. Facebook has also failed to incorporate strict measures in India and failed to close down rightist communities that may cause conflicts in its platform.<sup>18</sup> Facebook has different applications for Western countries and different for India-specific regions. U.S. cases have seen more proactive actions to shut down violent rightist content, whereas as we saw Facebook (Indian Version) pushes and sustains the right-wing content.

### STATE AND SURVEILLANCE

States have a huge role to play in the content regulation of such big social media platforms. However not much can be expected if the state practices Islamophobic practices through state surveillance in the name of national security. After the 'War on Terror', many states have increased their surveillance practices which are targeted at Muslim and Islamic people. Chan in his article provides us with criteria the Malaysian Intelligence Bureau provides to categorize people as jihadists. Most of the terms are targeted towards Islamic people and their practices, which he argues throughout his paper. Canadian Intelligence Agencies started to mark Muslim communities within their nations and carried out surveillance practices to capture their behaviour. Agents were deployed as disguised inside the Mosque to capture the behaviour inside the Mosques too. However, the people started to react, interviews were carried out, and most responses stated that they (Targeted Muslims) were not feeling safe within their country. Financial Transactions were also closely monitored, and many were called upon for meeting rounds with the Intelligence Agencies. They were denied legal counsel during the rounds carried out by the Canadian Intelligence Agencies. Such Surveillance practices are more prevalent in the Western parts of the world after the war on terror. These Surveillance practices show us the biasedness of a state towards a particular religion.<sup>19</sup>

### CONCLUSION

---

<sup>18</sup> Cook (n 13)

<sup>19</sup> Baljit Nagra and Paula Maurutto, 'Anti-Muslim Surveillance: Canadian Muslims' Experiences with CSIS' (2023) 9(3) *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/23326492231151587>> accessed 23 February 2024

Islamophobia is thus one of the rising issues throughout the world. The paper through case studies of various platforms has drawn to the conclusion that algorithms are racist, but the fuelling of Islamophobic content is not the algorithm but it is a mean to spread the content. Neither the algorithm nor the user is majorly responsible for the spread of Right-wing content in social media creating algorithmic imaginaries.<sup>20</sup> The Big Corporation has a huge role in regulating the algorithms, they have access to full data and content in their platforms, but as we say, towards the end of this paper, corporations run towards profit whenever there is a need to regulate and stop Islamophobic content. Although Corporations are established to make profits but Social Media platforms that are intrinsic to social relations in the world, have a great social responsibility towards the regulation of content and hate on their platforms. However, this is not inevitable; the host state has the right to regulate the corporation according to its digital privacy domestic laws. However, the states are also bred with Islamophobic ideologies and gain profit share from such practices.

---

<sup>20</sup> Katakol (n 4)