



The Impact of Social Media Censorship and Algorithmic Bias on Kashmir's Digital Visibility

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Abstract

This paper examines how content moderation and algorithmic filtering on major social media platforms have ultimately decreased the digital visibility of Kashmir-related issues, adopting an advocacy orientation by Pakistan. The analysis surveys incidents across global platforms (X/Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) and regional contexts to document takedowns, shadow bans, and restricted reach of Kashmir-focused voices. Case studies include government-mandated blocks of Kashmiri media on X/Twitter, the prohibition of the independent Kashmir Walla outlet on Facebook and X/Twitter, and reports of Pakistani activists and journalists- examples include the Free Press Kashmir team and actress Armeena Khan-experiencing unexplained suspensions and shadow bans. The

paper further researches how platform algorithms and policies-including expansive "terrorism" filters and biases toward "dominant communities"-systematically suppress pro-Kashmir discourse. Geopolitically, it illustrates that platforms often comply with the Indian government's requests or with U.S. policy presets, to disproportionately target Kashmiri content. Finally, the paper offers recommendations-including increased transparency for state takedown requests, independent audits of moderation algorithms, and adherence to international free-expression norms, such as the ICCPR-which would protect the online rights of Pakistani and Kashmiri voices. The findings indicate that the current state of the moderation practice makes Kashmiri stories effectively invisible to a global audience, at odds with the supposed commitment of platforms to free, open discourse.

Keywords: India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Algorithm Bias, Social media,

Introduction

Kashmir, a long-disputed territory between India and Pakistan, has a fraught media environment and severely limited space for dissent.¹ While major international organizations and the UN have historically recognized the right of Kashmiris to self-determination, de facto control remains divided between India, Pakistan and

¹ Gafira Qadir. "India's Selective Censorship", *The Diplomat*, June 03, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/indias-selective-censorship/>.

China². In this context, social media once offered a new outlet for Kashmiri voices, especially under the clampdowns on traditional press, but growing evidence suggests that even these digital channels are heavily censored or algorithmically muted.³ This paper critically examines how global platforms and regional actors have effectively restricted Kashmir-related content, taking an advocacy-oriented stance supportive of Pakistan's viewpoint.

The article focuses on censorship actions such as government demands and platform removals and algorithmic biases across X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and regional networks. Incidents range from mass blocks of Kashmiri journalists' accounts to trending hashtag suppression and hidden posts. For instance, following the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, India ordered X to withhold thousands of accounts, often with no detailed explanation, that were covering India–Pakistan tensions.⁴ Similarly, Pakistani activists have reported “shadow bans” and mysterious suspensions when posting about Kashmir.⁵ The paper also considers regional platform issues (e.g., TikTok in South Asia) in the wider digital rights context.

² “India blocks The Kashmir Walla website and social media accounts”, *Committee to Protect Journalist*, August 21, 2023, <https://cpj.org/2023/08/india-blocks-the-kashmir-walla-website-and-social-media-accounts/>.

³ Stand With Kashmir, “Social Media Corporations Must End their Complicity in Silencing & Censoring Kashmiri Voices Online,” *Stand With Kashmir*, <https://standwithkashmir.org/stop-censoring-kashmir/>.

⁴ Murali Krishnan. “Kashmir crisis sparks press crackdown in India”, *Deutsche Welle*, October 10, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/kashmir-crisis-sparks-press-crackdown-in-india/a-72498921>.

⁵ Ramsha Jahangir. “Is Twitter aiding India's quest to silence Kashmiris?”, *Dawn*, August 31, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1502702>.

This research paper draws on a wide range of sources including international press coverage, NGO reports, platform transparency filings, and academic analyses to create a comprehensive picture. Combining a literature review with case studies (e.g., the Kashmir Walla, Free Press Kashmir, Pal Pal News) and policy analysis, the research exposes how moderation systems can entrench geopolitical power imbalances. Ultimately, we highlight the geopolitical implications of these biases: by facilitating pro-India narratives and silencing Kashmiri or pro-Pakistan perspectives, platforms risk abetting suppression of human rights and skewing the global conversation about Kashmir. The research provides concrete recommendations to improve digital rights and freedom of expression for voices from Pakistan and Kashmir, in line with international human rights norms.⁶

Algorithms Censoring of Conflict Zones

Evidence on automated content moderation has revealed that AI-based systems tend to support the status quo on a regular basis. The data fed into algorithms is passed through the databases of offensive and/or extremist content, which mostly has Western legal and political biases. To illustrate, an analysis of Facebook internal policies conducted by ProPublica revealed that a former company policy did not allow any content to glorify violence to defend

⁶ Misbah Reshi, "Media Policy 2020: Mocking Freedom of Speech and Expression in Jammu and Kashmir," *The Leaflet*, September 18, 2020, <https://theleaflet.in/media-policy-2020-mocking-freedom-of-speech-and-expression-in-jammu-and-kashmir>.

against occupation of an internationally recognized state, which, of course, immediately made readers of the information start to remove content posted by activists in disputed territories (such as Kashmir).⁷ According to social movement theorists, dissenting speech is all too frequently mistaken by automated tools, such as treating a grassroots or ethnic slogan as a hate or extremist statement. Carleton University academics emphasise that in a contentious region such as Kashmir, content is often suppressed to ensure that platforms access the market or guard themselves against lawsuits. In a word, an algorithmic bias in favor of dominant communities is more likely to eliminate the voices of criticism in the digital realm.⁸

Geopolitics and Government Intervention: The use of platforms by state actors is also brought into focus through studies. Although social media giants claim to adhere to universal community standards, it can be easily seen that selective enforcement does exist.⁹ When the Indian government made Kashmiri resistance organizations terrorists, any "praise" of such leaders was routinely deleted by platforms - even when used in a news context. Conversely, the sites have been sluggish or immune to anti-Kashmiri hate speech by the police in case the speech was uttered by

⁷ Indo-Asian News Service, "Facebook Moderators Getting Wrong Interpretation of Indian Laws: Report," *NDTV*, December 28, 2018, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/facebook-moderators-getting-wrong-interpretation-of-indian-laws-report-1969346>.

⁸ TRT World, "How Kashmiri voices are silenced across social media," *TRT World*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/12776323>.

⁹ Al Jazeera Staff, "Social media giants accused of 'silencing' Kashmir voices," *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/1/social-media-giants-accused-of-silencing-kashmir-voices>.

citizens of the majority group. Discussions observe that firms tend to borrow the tag of U.S. foreign policy of "extremism" into their own policies. As an example, the Oversight Board at Meta concluded that the word Shaheed (martyr) was classified as an outlawed content by its policy of Dangerous Organizations, and this has overly affected Muslim activists, such as Kashmiris. It implies that Kashmiri and Palestinian activists are severely censored when they say the wrong thing, according to the digital rights experts.¹⁰

In Kashmir, Digital Repression: The literature on Kashmir genealogically singles out, as an example, a local and online silencing trend. In Kashmir controlled by Indians, the government regularly suspends the internet and closes news channels. Pakistani media that discuss the situation in Kashmir are also blocked down: Pakistani media announced in 2016 that posts in support of Kashmiri militant leader Burhan Wani were blocked up by the Facebook self-moderation shortly after being reported. Diaspora studies that are more recent (as recent as 2020) chronicle systematic suspensions: artists, journalists and academics have been massively deplatformed on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, usually on the basis of only flimsy pretexts. Scholars who examine the case of Kashmir have noted that the social media today serves as a continuation of the aspect of knowledge control by the Indian state which tries to take the narrative of Kashmir to the place of oblivion.

¹⁰ Access Now, "Five years in a row: India is 2022's biggest internet shutdowns offender," *Access Now*, February 28, 2023, <https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/keepiton-internet-shutdowns-2022-india/>.

Overall, the studies on the topic provide a reminder that unless precautions are taken, the moderation of the algorithm in question may lessen marginalized voices without making much noise: the phenomenon that can already be observed in the situation in Kashmir.

Methodology

The paper is grounded on a qualitative case-study approach through secondary sources. News articles, organizational and research papers were systematically reviewed about social media, Kashmir and dated 2015 to 2025; specific attention was on reported cases of account shutdowns, geographic content blocks, and algorithmic content blocks on Kashmir content. The sources were the large-scale media, such as Dawn, Al Jazeera, and The Diplomat, blogs on digital rights, the transparency report of the platforms and academic/NGO materials. The material was then synthesized into the format of structured sections:

- (1) Platform policies and algorithmic biases analysis
- (2) Case studies on how censorship was carried out on various platforms
- (3) Geopolitical factors
- (4) Recommendations.

Direct evidence has been directly quoted based on other reports and correspondence- such as quotes made of statements of platforms or of affected people- to be accurate and to be independently verifiable.

Case Studies

Content Withholdings on Twitter/X: In May 2025, in a similar incident, the Indian government had ordered Twitter/X to block 8,000 accounts in the aftermath of what it described as a security concern following the Pahalgam attack, which had increased tensions between India and Pakistan. This executive order was received by the Global Government Affairs team at X who said that in most instances it had no evidence or justification that it had to block the accounts. Notably, those afflicted by these attacks were Kashmir-oriented independent media, including Free Press Kashmir and Maktoob Media, as well as international media and popular journalists. These were not made public in India, and that is, Indian users could not access their content. An editor at Free Press Kashmir said that their content was mostly a factual update, ground report, and confirmed information, yet no particular infraction was identified by either India or X to have its blog suspended.

Pakistan also saw sudden restrictions which were observed by public figures and activists. In 2019, Pakistani President Arif Alvi and other users complained of Twitter reprimanding them over postings they made concerning Kashmir, yet Twitter eventually identified no breach of policy. Pakistani newspaper outlets reported that the accounts of dozens of independent reporters who posted in support of the cause (of Kashmir) were blocked or detained. A Dawn inquiry discovered that every legal request documented in the transparency database of Twitter that originated in India concerned accounts

owned by Kashmiri users or those posting in their cause referencing the India IT Act. This implies that Indian authorities were withholding the country-withholding feature of Twitter to filter Kashmir content in India. Pakistan complained that twitter was assisting India in its effort to stifle Kashmiris. Twitter has refuted any ideology-based shadow banning, although the company was accused by many Pakistani users of ideologically burying or labeling as sensitive their pro-Kashmir posts.

Instagram and Facebook Censorship: Similar acts of pro-Kashmir expression have also been suppressed by Facebook moderation. In 2016, Pakistani Facebook users showed their support to Kashmir protests, the social network issued a statement in which it stated that all content supporting or glorifying Hizbul Mujahideen and Burhan Wani was banned because it was related to terrorism. The quote quoted in The Guardian through Pakistani media said that although such sensitive issues can be discussed provided that they disparage such organizations, their praise would lead to deletion. In late 2011 Pakistani actor Hamza Ali Abbasi was suspended on his public Facebook page after posting content concerning Kashmir - a move which Pakistani media announced indicated how Facebook policies have succeeded in censorship of thousands of people talking about the conflict. Facebook claimed that the publication of reports about Kashmiri detainees' abuses was filtered out by its automated filters by its violent content policies - although they were published in an effort to protest violence.

Pakistani celebrities have also been suppressed over Instagram. In 2019, Pakistani actress Armeena Rana Khan wrote that when she had voiced her support of Kashmir, Instagram material was shadow-banned: her posts were no longer displayed in the search results and some of them were blocked without any official comment¹¹. She said this was an effort to keep her quiet to speak the truth and said that her page had been reported by users because of her activism. Other South Asian users have had their Instagram accounts limited in the same way, such as Indian netizens have reported that some hashtags including those that mention Kashmir or protests (e.g. #StandWithKashmir) were buried or unsearchable, leading to Internet backlash with tags such as #UninstallInstagram. Instagram platform silently reported that it is complying with the demands of the government: after the 2025 tensions, the accounts of several Pakistani celebrities were without warning blocked so that viewers in India would no longer see their content. A tech analyst observed that such moves - the hindering of Pakistani accounts in India - cannot be defended by human rights practices but rather it seems to be the result of political pressure.

Youtube repression and demonetization: The Kashmir-oriented channels have also been repeatedly punished by the video platforms. YouTube blocked a Kashmiri YouTube Channel that reported on communal violence and government accountability in 2018, Pal Pal

¹¹ Entertainment Desk. "Social media censors Armeena Khan post Kashmir activism", *The Express Tribune*, September 7, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2051669/social-media-censors-armeena-khans-post-kashmir-activism>.

News. The founder of the channel Khusboo Akhtar said that her channel was blocked after she covered hate crimes against Muslims; it was only later ordered back by court in India. MediaNama cites Pal Pal News claiming it has been shut down and demonetized regularly since 2018 due to dubious reasons such as copyright strikes being imposed on it suddenly or dubious violations of guidelines. Akhtar observed that other news organizations in India were free to publish the same clips and they were not punished which implied that the rules were not fairly applied. Both suspensions cost a lot in terms of legal appeals or social media campaigns to reestablish, which took months.

The other example is Free Press Kashmir, a Kashmir media house. Facebook and YouTube have always targeted the pages of FPK. In 2018, FPK published a satirical cartoon of Modi and the Home Minister of India over the Kerala floods; the page was requested to remove the cartoon, and a post was severely restricted during a month, what editors believe was a shadow ban. FPK had its Facebook page removed under a terrorism banner in July 2019, following coverage on militancy; it was reinstated three days later but under 30 days' restrictions. In 2021, an archaic article on a rape was marked on Facebook as sexually content and subject to a one-year ban penalty in which FPK was deprived of monetization privileges. The platform did not even allow the lifting of penalties to leave an excuse as the publishers were still left in the dark regarding the conformity to the policies. The editor of FPK stated that appeals

to Facebook and Google were repeatedly made with no constructive response and that the process is totally arbitrary and opaque.

Offline Blocks and Kashmir Walla: The Kashmir Walla is a high profile case, which is an independent news outlet based in Srinagar. In August 2023 the Indian government used its IT act to block the site of the outlet and also block its Facebook and twitter pages in India. On its Twitter account, TKW wrote the message "Account withheld... in reaction to a court order," and on its Facebook account, it wrote that its content is not available. Such actions blocked the 476,000 followers of the outlet in India from receiving news about Kashmir. CPJ criticized this secrecy censorship and declared the need to reinstate it immediately, citing that such prohibitions are a new low in press freedom in the area. Fahad Shah, the founder of the Walla, was already serving a jail term on terrorism grounds due to an opinion piece, which depicts how the offline activity is coordinated with the online oppression. The case of TKW demonstrated that the state orders may rely on platform tools and erase the Kashmiri voices completely, leaving the digital space.¹²

Circumvention of Trending Suppression and Algorithms Bias

In addition to explicit takedowns, there is biased visibility on algorithmic curation. As an example, during the Pahalgam attack in 2025, the anti-Pak trend hashtags such as #PakTerror went viral on

¹² Ibid.

platforms, including with the help of trending algorithms, and pro-Kashmir or pro-Pakistan hashtags struggled. Human rights experts have reported that machine learning-based methods used to label as extremist keywords may unintentionally label as extremist Kashmiri language, e.g. freedom fighter or martyr, as not in compliance with community norms. As an illustration, Facebook training materials that were leaked at some time in the past recommended deleting materials that celebrated the opposition to occupation. Practically, activists document that posts with tags such as #FreeKashmir are censored or not even able to trend, which agrees with a reported case of Facebook itself admitting to censoring Free Kashmir posts. Twitter and Facebook algorithms also prioritize content; the Pakistani sources state that once the page of FPK was blocked, the post was no longer shown in the feeds of its followers, and the traffic decreased, actually a shadow ban in effect. At the same time, the Gujarat-based influence operations have been able to manipulate the platform algorithms to censor counter-narratives. These tendencies indicate that the claims of neutrality, "we are just enforcing transparent rules," are fictitious: the automated systems, which do not have the sense of context and maintain the opaque policies, are likely to make Kashmiri voices disappear on the digital stage.

Analysis

The above instances reveal that there is a high degree of asymmetry in that content that challenges the Indian stance or one that promotes

Kashmiri self-determination will be more vulnerable to censorship compared to the content that propagates the Indian side. It has been noted by many that mainstream Indian nationalist even hate speech directed at Muslims will not disappear, whereas anything that can be interpreted as pro-Kashmir will be erased. As an illustration, Indian media houses gurgled out propaganda hashtags (#PakTerror, #RevengeForPahalgam) in independent social media accounts, reporting on the ground, were blocked without prior reasoning. Pakistani journalists also lamented that even pure fact reporting is flagged as breaching overall terrorism-related regulations, such as updates on casualties and human rights violations. In fact, these two standards of conduct foreshadowed complaints by rights advocates of tech giants that they tend to side with state-aligned elites against minorities on the grassroots. According to the words of an Internet Freedom lawyer, when platforms give in to pressure to delete content, they are practicing things against what they preach, i.e. open dialogue.

Algorithmic Bias Impact

This difference is also enhanced by the use of algorithmic moderation. Automated filters are not context-sensitive and typically are cautious about mistakes and are inclined to pull the trigger. In the case of Kashmir, the resistance organized by militants is usually called as terrorism, but frames of grievance (resisting occupation) are not accepted. The result of this is disproportional blocking of Kashmiri materials. According to an LSE report on E-Occupation in

Kashmir, Facebook and Twitter censor information containing the phrase Free Kashmir at government request. Even the benign posts virtually fade out of the feed after they are removed or downranked by AI. In addition, trending algorithms that advance the most engaging content are used to boost polarizing, nationalist posts (which are often sponsored by the state) and silence the opposition.¹³ Pakistani commentators cite Facebook-led research that 64 percent of the times, the recommendations of extremist groups are the result of algorithmic suggestions; by analogy, these processes could also push regular users to echo chambers of anti-Kashmir activists and de-motivate the display of pro Kashmir material.¹⁴

Geopolitical Drivers

It matters the geopolitical dimension. Adherences of platforms to Indian law, be it IT Act 69A or the 2023 spam regulations, imply that they willingly perform India's content controls on users located within India, and likewise, have yielded to India government demands elsewhere in the world. Interestingly, the transparency reports published by Twitter itself, which it gave to Dawn in 2019, indicate that Indian legal takedown requests have a significant amount of posts and accounts that are related to Kashmir. The Pakistani side sees such as a sign of bias: Twitter has

¹³ Annam Lodhi, "Silencing Kashmir," *Soch Writing*, September 17, 2019, <https://sochwriting.com/community-standards-or-double-standards-when-it-comes-to-posts-about-kashmir/>.

¹⁴ Sagarika Chaudhary, "E-Occupation in Kashmir: On Digital Fascism in Occupied Land," *LSE International Development Review*, March 18, 2024, <https://idr.lse.ac.uk/articles/85>.

previously...said that it remains neutral, but in reality it is carrying out the will of India blindly. Twitter and Facebook have been officially protested by the Pakistani policymakers regarding the suspension of Pakistani and Kashmiri accounts claiming that these two corporations are facilitating an internet crackdown beyond the borders of India. According to independent analysts, the U.S. foreign policy is also considered by U.S.-based platforms. Among others, the TechPolicy Press analysis mentions that the government dangerous organization lists are integrated in the policies of social media companies, that is, in case the U.S. declares some groups in Kashmir as extremists, and then they will self-censor discourse.¹⁵ It implies that the Kashmiri activists can be filtered down just due to the attitude of Washington, even further discriminating against them in the international arena.

Policy Recommendations

Digital rights will simply be eroded further, and the voices of Kashmiri people will be still muted unless technical reforms and changes in policies are made. To start with, platforms should be more open. Businesses are required to disclose all information on their removal requests and enforcement data by country and topic. As an example, the Lumet database of Twitter must include all the legal requests of India regarding Kashmir, and not only a part.

¹⁵ Usama Khilji. "How Platform Shifts on Content Moderation Are Escalating Harm in the India-Pakistan Crisis", *Tech Policy Press*, May 2, 2025, <https://www.techpolicy.press/how-platform-shifts-on-content-moderation-are-escalating-harm-in-the-indiapakistan-crisis/>.

Facebook ought to clarify whether there are any special keyword filters (e.g. its previous Shaheed policy) which are leading to anomalous takedowns. Not only the number of take downs should be made available using public transparency reports, but the nature of content labeled as violations.

Second, the algorithms applied to platforms should be more responsible. To remove disproportionate impact, they should refine AI filters, which require auditing. It can include the independent analysis of training data and decision rules in different languages. Practically, both meta and X should open appeals and human review on content that is flagged by general categories such as terrorism so as to tell the difference between legitimate news and incitement. Clear the pending appeals and employ a lot of multilingual moderators having Kashmiri language experts so that they can rectify the error. Instagram and Facebook cannot help to stop using the hidden feature hashtag shadow bans which block entire topics, appeal must be effective and clear.

Third, it is important that the policy is aligned with human rights standards. Businesses need to remember that they have a duty under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): Article 19 provides freedom of expression and access to information: the content that is refused to one group of users in one country should not be concealed to everybody around the globe unless it is absolutely essential. Rules of moderation of content must explicitly safeguard the legitimate discussion of national liberation

and self-determination, and such a term as martyr or freedom fighter is not just censored.

Fourth, legal and diplomatic action: The government of Pakistan and digital rights lobbyists should keep lobbying the platforms and international organizations. Complaints can be lodged with the offices like UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression. Indicatively, the request by CPJ on India to immediately re-establish the online profiles of Kashmir Walla would be imitated in platforms such as the UNHRC. Pakistan also has the opportunity to develop the grievance redressal provisions under its 2021 IT Rules to assist aggrieved users in Pakistan. Civil society organizations (Bolo Bhi and SWK) will be handy in reporting abuses and recommending multi-stakeholder monitoring systems to South Asian social media.

Lastly, community projects and technical solutions: Kashmiri activists will be able to preserve their narratives in decentralized or encrypted systems. The NGOs can help to create Kashmiri-owned and operated alternative media, which is based on blockchains or peer-to-peer networks, which are not controlled by the state. There will be campaigns related to digital literacy (e.g. privacy and circumvention training of Kashmiris who face shutdowns) to increase resilience. The Pakistani media can all concur to republish any content removed at other places so takedowns would have less disabling impact. In the long term, social media firms might establish regional content boards manned by local professionals to

review controversial cases in-country in order to minimize the one-size-fits-all tendency.

The cases above were used to inform the recommendations of developing an enabling ecosystem, in which the Pakistani and Kashmir voices can actually speak freely. To aspire to become so-called global forums, platforms must adjust their own policies to local norms of rights without favoring any national narrative.

Conclusion

It has been proven that interplay of open censorship and covert algorithmic discrimination has been diluting the digital presence of Kashmir in an organized manner. The social media of independent Kashmiri and Pakistani journalists have been cut off without due process. Activists, as well as celebrities, also complain of shadow banning and loss of feeds. In the meantime, hate-based stories are welcome on the same platforms. This is not just a coincidence of asymmetry, but rather geopolitical influence of power where demands of the Indian state (and larger interests of the strategy) determine what type of content can be considered admissible. The outcome is a chilling effect on views: the posts mentioning Kashmir are virtually invisible, which is a way of undermining freedom of expression in the region.

This is unacceptable in the case of Pakistan. International norms of human rights oblige all parties-including the company- to protect and not censor the freedom of speech on demand of a single state.

Failure to do this will be a betrayal by them to whatever they have proclaimed of an open internet. According to the views of scholars, social media is supposed to be a megaphone of oppressed voices, rather than imposed laws on the most successful governments to have the kinds of stories they want to hear.
