Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis Journal
ISSN: 3007-2700 (Print); 3007-2719 (Online)
Volume 4, 53-72, 2026
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Digital Representation and Gendered Harm: A YouTube-Search Result Analysis of Kalasha Community in Pakistan

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Received: 21-09-2026 Revised: 20-10-2026 Accepted: 03-11-2026 Published: 10-11-2026

Suggested Citation: Sidra Iqbal; Farhan Mushtaq; Dr. Qaisar Shareef; Dr. Huma Sadaf. "Digital Representation and Gendered Harm: A YouTube-Search Result Analysis of Kalasha Community in Pakistan." *Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis Journal* 4 (2026): 53–72.

Abstract *- Digital platforms have become important sites for representing indigenous communities, yet online portrayals may reproduce cultural stereotypes and gendered objectification. This study examines the visual and textual representation of the Kalasha community in YouTube search results, focusing on potentially harmful framing and community perspectives. A mixed-method design combines systematic content analysis of 391 thumbnails retrieved using the query "Kalasha Valley" with five semi-structured interviews conducted in Bumburet in October 2025. The quantitative analysis found that 52.9% of sampled thumbnails contained high- or medium-level threat indicators, with women prominently represented. The study also examines associations between representational features and observed engagement indicators, while interviews explore concerns about digital representation, dignity, and cultural identity. The findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive representation, community participation in digital storytelling, and culturally responsive platform governance. However, the results are bounded by the sample and do not establish causal effects or the operation of YouTube's internal algorithms.*

Keywords - Kalasha, Indigenous Representation, YouTube, Gendered Representation, Cultural Identity, Digital Governance, Pakistan

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1.0 Introduction

The Kalasha community inhabits the valleys of Rumbur, Bumburet, and Birir in Chitral District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, collectively known as Kalashadesh. Recognised for its distinctive cultural heritage, the community is widely regarded as Pakistan's only surviving indigenous non-Muslim community practising a pre-Islamic polytheistic and animistic religion known as "Kalasha Dastoor". This religious system encompasses the worship of multiple deities, a cycle of festivals referred to as "khawsáṅgaw", and everyday practices structured around notions of purity and impurity. The community also speaks Kalashamon, an endangered Dardic language characterised by conservative linguistic features.[1] Its vulnerability reflects the wider global decline of linguistic diversity, documented by UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Endangered Languages.[2] The preservation of Kalasha identity is therefore closely connected to the continuity of its language, religious practices, cultural traditions, and collective ways of life. The community faces interconnected demographic, economic, religious, and cultural pressures. Although the Kalasha historically constituted a larger proportion of the population in parts of Chitral, contemporary estimates place their population at approximately 3,000–4,000, following a reported figure of 4,160 in 2016.[3] This decline cannot be attributed to a single cause. Previous research has documented concerns about religious conversion, including pressures associated with extremist groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan.[4] Economic insecurity also encourages some young men to migrate to urban areas in search of employment, potentially affecting community continuity. Meanwhile, tourism, despite providing important livelihood opportunities, can commodify cultural practices and transform traditional rituals into spectacles for external audiences.[5] Together, these pressures illustrate the complex relationship between cultural preservation, economic survival, and the community's representation to the wider world. Institutional recognition and the protection of minority rights constitute another important dimension of Kalasha vulnerability. Although Pakistan's Constitution provides protections for religious minorities, concerns have been raised about the administrative recognition of "Kalasha Dastoor" and the difficulties community members face when their religious identity is not adequately reflected in official records. According to reported accounts, this exclusion can create difficulties in identifying Kalasha children and families within systems intended to accommodate

[1] A. Kochetov, P. Arsenault, J. H. Petersen, S. Kalas, and T. K. Kalash, "Kalasha (Bumburet Variety)," Journal of the International Phonetic Association 51, no. 3 (2020): 468–89, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025100319000367.
[2] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 3rd ed. (2010), https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187026.locale=en.
[3] M. Ubaid, "Preserving Cultural Identity: The Kalasha Community's Resilience and Heritage Conservation," in Sustainable Management of Historic Settlements in Asia, ed. N. Jigyasu and A. K. Sharma (Springer, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-6736-6_16.
[4] M. K. Ali, M. I. Chawla, and G. Shabbir, "Cultural Heritage and Extremism in Pakistan: Re-Focusing on the Kalasha of Chitral, Pakistan," Pakistan Social Sciences Review 4, no. 1 (2020): 988–1000, https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2020(4-I)80.
[5] S. Uddin, Cultural Commodification in Kalash Valley: A Case Study of Bumburet Village, District Chitral (MPhil thesis, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2019), https://thesis.pide.org.pk/thesis/cultural-commodification-in-kalash-valley-a-case-study-of-bumburet-village-district-chitral/.

religious minorities, including educational arrangements.[6][7] Such concerns point to a potential gap between formal constitutional guarantees and their practical implementation. A reported legislative development in 2026—the approval of the Kalasha Marriage Bill by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cabinet—may represent progress towards recognising the community's identity and family rights.[8] In addition, UNESCO's inscription of "Suri Jagek", the Kalasha traditional meteorological knowledge system, on its List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding has drawn international attention to the need for cultural preservation.[9] These developments underscore the importance of sustained institutional support rather than treating cultural protection as a solely symbolic commitment.

Beneath these physical and bureaucratic constraints but digital media have added yet another dimension to the ways in which indigenous culture is represented, explored, and potentially contested. The open and affordable nature of smartphones, the mobile internet and user-generated content have enabled a greater stream of imagery and commentary about peoples whose lives have largely been experienced before and after ad hoc forays into the field and media accounts by researchers. YouTube is mainly relevant here as the design of its search results in a visual thumbnail, a descriptive title and an engagement indicator create concrete, accessible representations of the Kalasha community, which may communicate otherness and spark interest, but, which risk typifying and sexualising the stereotypical representation of this ethnic group. The efficacy of this content is not to be found in visibility alone but also in the way it frames the community for audiences unfamiliar with Kalasha culture. But, we cannot equate the visible 'what' with possible 'so whats.' Observations of content 'lenses' can be made through cursory visual and textual qualities of pages. Impact must be inferred by other means by referencing content delivery in respect to harassment, change to intended audiences, tourism, and the sustainability of 'disturbed cultures.' Still; the narratives of community members may give some indication of how some representations are experienced and perceived but conclusions cannot be drawn based on the existence of these narrative accounts alone. Like that conclusions about the makeup of thumbnails or titles equate to conclusions about the makeup of Youtube's internal recommendation algorithm and moderation policies can also not be inferred.

Although scholarship has addressed media representation, online stereotyping, and the relationship between digital platforms and cultural identity, the specific representation of indigenous communities in Pakistan's platform-based search environments warrants further investigation. In particular, YouTube search results concerning the Kalasha community provide an opportunity to examine how visual and textual framing intersects with gender, cultural identity, and audience engagement. This study addresses that concern by analysing search-result material retrieved using the query "Kalasha Valley," identifying recurring patterns of representation and examining associations between selected representational characteristics and observable engagement indicators. It also incorporates semi-structured interviews with

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[6] M. Q. Sodhar and M. Ali, "A Descriptive Study of the Kalash Community: A Religious, Cultural, and Ethnic Minority Group in District Chitral," Pakistan Vision 26, no. 2 (2025): 16–28, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/studies/PDF-FILES/2_v26_2_25.pdf.

[7] M. A. Baig, "Deconstructing the Fable of Inclusive National Identity in Pakistan: Account of Dwindling Kalasha Indigenous Identity in Chitral," CARC Research in Social Sciences 2, no. 3 (2023): 117–26, https://doi.org/10.58329/criss.v2i3.44.

[8] The Nation, "Historic Milestone for Kalash Community," February 13, 2026, https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Feb-2026/historic-milestone-kalash-community.

[9] A. Ahmed, "Kalasha Culture Listed as Intangible Cultural Heritage," Dawn, November 29, 2018, https://www.dawn.com/news/1448305.

community participants to explore their perspectives on digital representation, dignity, and cultural identity.

The study contributes to research on digital media and indigenous representation by combining systematic analysis of YouTube search-result material with qualitative community perspectives. Its central contribution is to establish an evidence-based account of how the Kalasha community is visually and textually framed in the sampled results, while examining the gendered dimensions of these portrayals and their possible implications for digital governance. By distinguishing measurable content patterns from participants' interpretations and broader policy concerns, the study offers a more cautious and context-sensitive basis for discussing culturally respectful representation and platform accountability in Pakistan.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study pursues three interconnected objectives:

1. To examine how YouTube search results retrieved using the query "Kalasha Valley" visually and textually represent the Kalasha community.
2. To identify recurring patterns of gendered and potentially harmful representation and explore interview participants' perceptions of their implications for cultural identity and dignity.
3. To examine associations between selected representational characteristics and observed engagement indicators and discuss their implications for digital governance and culturally sensitive platform accountability.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ1.How do YouTube search results retrieved using the query "Kalasha Valley" visually and textually represent the Kalasha community?

RQ2.What recurring patterns of gendered and potentially harmful representation are identifiable in the sampled search results?

RQ3.What associations, if any, exist between selected representational characteristics and observed engagement indicators in the sampled results?

RQ4.How do interview participants perceive these representations in relation to cultural identity, dignity, and digital governance?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 The Kalasha Community: From Cultural Documentation to Digital Representation

Scholarship on the Kalasha community has evolved from ethnographic documentation towards questions of religious freedom, political recognition, cultural preservation, and minority rights. Early contributions, including Robertson's account of Kalashadesh[10], Morgenstierne's linguistic documentation[11], and Loude and Lievre's study of winter festivals and rituals[12], established a foundation for understanding Kalasha cultural and religious practices. More recent scholarship has increasingly examined the structural conditions affecting the community's survival. Khan investigated religious freedom within Pakistan's Islamic state framework[13], while the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) documented concerns involving forced religious

[10] George Scott Robertson, The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1896).
[11] Georg Morgenstierne, Indo-Iranian Frontier Languages, vol. 1 (1929), Archaeological Survey of India, Central Archaeological Library, https://asi.nic.in/asi_books/14416.pdf.
[12] Jean-Yves Loude and Viviane Lièvre, Kalash Solstice, translated by G. Romaine and M. Intrator (Islamabad: Lok Virsa, 1988; originally published 1984).
[13] T. Khan, Kalasha Valleys: A Call for Indigenous Cultural Survival (master's thesis, Central European University, 2009).

conversion, land acquisition, and the non-recognition of Kalasha identity.[14] Baig conceptualises this marginalisation through "identity subordination"[15], arguing that the exclusion of the Kalasha community is connected to broader ideological constructions of Pakistani nationhood. Similarly, Fuchs and Fuchs situate the experiences of religious minorities within Pakistan's wider social and political structures.[16] In contrast, Ubaid foregrounds cultural resilience and community agency, including engagement with UNESCO initiatives.[17] Collectively, these studies establish the political and cultural context of Kalasha vulnerability but leave its digital representation comparatively underexplored.

2.2 Indigenous Communities and Digital Vulnerability

Indigenous communities' benefits from digital media is discussed at international forum. cultural projection, intercultural communication, and self-identification, while creating at the same time risks of stereotyping, harassment, and the circulation of cultural. there is also a great deal of research in sensitive material. Still, much of this work is often settler-colonial in scope. like Australia, North America and Latin America.[18] As Carlson and Frazer demonstrate how the settler gaze is performed in the way the Indigenous Australians are represented online, including self-edits and fears that the younger generation will share the cultural material.[19] Salehi et al. point to the existence of "cyber-racism, hate, and bullying, and the distribution of sacred content without consent". as concerns affecting Indigenous Australians, while also highlighting the potential benefits of. digitally empowered cultural acceptance.[20] And in case of Guarani culture, Smailhodzic also emphasises the tension between intercultural connection and external pressures, suggesting that digital participation necessitates an intentional community approach.[21] Foyet and Child elaborate on this. rhetoric by looking at the ways in which majority platforms are failing to meet minority activists' needs about privacy, language moderation, and surveillance.[22]

These studies demonstrate that digital is neither empowering nor altogether prejudicial. Nevertheless, findings from other political and cultural settings cannot automatically explain the experiences of indigenous minorities in Pakistan. The relationship between religious identity,

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[14] National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), Saga of Survival: A Report on the Protection, Preservation and Promotion of Constitutional Rights of Indigenous Kalash People (2023).

[15] M. A. Baig, "Deconstructing the Fable of Inclusive National Identity in Pakistan: Account of Dwindling Kalasha Indigenous Identity in Chitral," CARC Research in Social Sciences 2, no. 3 (2023): 117–26, https://doi.org/10.58329/criss.v2i3.44.

[16] M.-M. Fuchs and S. W. Fuchs, "Religious Minorities in Pakistan: Identities, Citizenship and Social Belonging," South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies (2019), https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2020.1695075.

[17] M. Ubaid, "Preserving Cultural Identity: The Kalasha Community's Resilience and Heritage Conservation," in Sustainable Management of Historic Settlements in Asia, ed. N. Jigyasu and A. K. Sharma (Springer, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-6736-6_16.

[18] James Euteneuer, "Settler Colonialism in the Digital Age: Clash of Clans, Territoriality, and the Erasure of the Native," Open Library of Humanities 4, no. 1 (2018): Article 14, 1–24, https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.212.

[19] Bronwyn Carlson and Ryan Frazer, "'They Got Filters': Indigenous Social Media, the Settler Gaze, and a Politics of Hope," Social Media + Society 6, no. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120925261.

[20] N. Salehi, G. R. Marshall, M. H. Maziarfar, A. Zubrinich, N. Madani, M. Nickbakht, and A. A. Moustafa, "A Double-Edged Sword Perspective on Young Australians' Use of Social Media: A Structured Narrative Review," Health Promotion Journal of Australia (2025), https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.70093.

[21] E. Smailhodzic, "Navigating Tensions between Indigeneity and Social Media Participation: A Case Study of the Guarani Community in South America," Information Systems Journal (2025), https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12574.

[22] M. Foyet and B. Child, "COVID-19, Social Media, Algorithms and the Rise of Indigenous Movements in Southern Africa: Perspectives from Activists, Audiences and Policymakers," Frontiers in Sociology 9 (2024): 1433998, https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1433998.

state institutions, cultural marginalisation, and digital communication requires context-sensitive investigation. The present study therefore examines the Kalasha case without assuming that the mechanisms documented in other regions operate identically in Pakistan.

2.3 Gendered Representation and YouTube Search Results

Digital representation is not only about community visibility; it is also about the framing of a community, its members, cultures, and identities for external audiences. The specific concern with gender derives from an awareness that the visibility of women may be disconnected from respectfulness and contextual specificity. Sexualisation, objectification, and commodification are separate but potentially overlapping modes of representation that may all be at play sexualisation positioning the subject as sexual; objectification reducing people to bodies or objects for consumption; and commodification positioning cultural identity or individuals as commodities or attractions in the marketplace. These categories of representation are analytically useful if they are applied using specific coding criteria rather than assuming content is of interest because it was produced by girls.

The existing literature on YouTube representation gives two appropriate analytical lenses. The first relates to search systems and algorithmic visibility. Autocomplete suggestions for race-identifying searches conducted by Ha, Kong, and Jhaver highlighted reinforcement of stereotypical, discriminatory, and conflict-oriented portrayals. These findings should encourage further reflection on the extent to which platform-mediated informational environments influence the visibility of minority groups,[23] although autocomplete results alone do not constitute conclusive evidence of the rankings of particular search results on the Kalasha platform. The second approach is visual and textual framing. Thomson and Bock think about YouTube thumbnails as visual gateways that use framing of images and faces and textual overlays as signposting cues that establish meaning without immediately drawing the viewer in.[24] As Sagheer et al. look at Pakistani YouTube channels, Islamic imagery and other cultural cues can be used as effective mechanisms for audience engagement.[25] This offers a contextual structure to treat titles and thumbnails as representational artifacts rather than a market test for curiosity triggers. Again, this does not show that any attention grabbing or culturally unique content is intrinsically negative.

2.4 Research Gap and Study Contribution

The reviewed literature identifies important relationships among minority identity, gendered representation, digital participation, and platform governance. However, the specific representation of the Kalasha community in YouTube search results remains insufficiently examined within the literature reviewed here. In particular, limited attention has been given to the combined analysis of thumbnails, titles, engagement indicators, and community perspectives. This study addresses that gap by examining search results retrieved using the query “Kalasha Valley,” identifying recurring visual and textual patterns, investigating associations between selected representational characteristics and observed engagement indicators, and incorporating interviews concerning cultural identity and dignity. The analysis distinguishes observable content

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[23] E. Ha, H. Kong, and S. Jhaver, “Examining Racial Stereotypes in YouTube Autocomplete Suggestions,” New Media & Society (2025), https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448251346503.

[24] T. Thomson and M. A. Bock, “Designing the Visual Gateways into Crime News: A Comparison of YouTube Thumbnails from Journalists and Non-Journalists,” Journalism Practice (2023), https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2288921.

[25] Iram Sagheer, Ashmal Yasir, Umar Safdar, and Shareena, “Decoding the Visual Language: A Semiotic Analysis of YouTube Thumbnails,” Pakistan Islamicus: An International Journal of Islamic & Social Sciences 4, no. 3 (2024): 67–85, https://pakistanislamicus.com/index.php/home/article/view/165.

from participants' interpretations and broader social implications. It also treats platform accountability and digital governance as areas for critical discussion rather than assuming that search-result patterns alone demonstrate algorithmic discrimination or wider social harm.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This article is based on three overlapping ideas: framing theory [26], social identity theory [27] and digital colonialism [28]. These three ideas provide the foundation for an analysis of representational choices, what they mean for collective identity, and what they imply for social and political power in digital spaces.

3.1 Framing Theory

Based on framing theory, the process of communication highlights certain parts of reality (making them more salient in a given context) and even marginalizes or suppresses other elements.[29] The frames can also be created through selection of the image, its composition, the title and caption within the images. YouTube thumbnails and titles can highlight certain aspects of Kalasha while ignoring the cultural, social, and contextual factors that are needed for full understanding. Framing theory will assist in analyzing how the diverse results draw up visual and textual representations of the community, this way avoid subjectivity in assuming the frames are true and cannot be manipulated by the viewer.

3.2 Social Identity Theory

Theories of social identity view group status as a vital element of collective and individual groups, and infer where and when representation matters to marginalised communities about cultural validation or replication of group exclusion.[30] For Kalash communities, stigmatizing, or cultural mimic representations may threaten dignity and recognition where community identity is already constrained by social and institutional environments. This approach is used to interpret what interviewees say about the shown content, and explore how important certain representations may be. It does not necessarily presuppose that exposure to this content will result in identity threat or behavioural responses.

3.3 Digital Colonialism and Platform Governance

Digital colonialism offers a lens to understand the unequal power relations in digital infrastructure, platform ownership, and the management of online interactions.[31] As a tool in the Kalasha case, digital colonialism asks who has access to digital places? Whose culture is well-represented? Who has a say in shaping the future of their community? How do we access the report functions, culturally relevant moderation and community interests in attention-based spaces? Still, presence of harmful material on YouTube search results does not by itself constitute an evidence of discriminatory design, strategic platform promotion or moderation failure. Evidence on platform policies, ranking algorithms and moderation decisions would be

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[26] Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," Journal of Communication 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–58.
[27] Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.
[28] Michael Kwet, "Digital Colonialism: US Empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South," Race & Class 60, no. 4 (2019): 3–26.
[29] ibid
[30] Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations, ed. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979), 33–47.
[31] Michael Kwet, "Digital Colonialism: US Empire and the New Imperialism in the Global South," Race & Class 60, no. 4 (2019): 3–26.

necessary. As such, digital colonialism is not a hypothesis that determines the meaning of the results but a lens through which they are to be understood.

Together, these theoretical perspectives form a coherent analytical system: framing theory explores how the Kalasha community is portrayed; social identity theory guides the understanding of this portrayal with cultural recognition and dignity; and digital colonialism places these issues within larger discussions about platform authority and digital governance. Combining these approaches allows the study to link observable YouTube content with the community's viewpoints while clearly distinguishing empirical results from broader theoretical or policy considerations.

4.0 Method

This study employed a two-phase, mixed-method design informed by community perspectives. In October 2025, the authors visited Bumburet, Kalash Valley, to film a documentary series for Pakistan Television Corporation and collect data for UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) inventorying. Despite obtaining relevant approvals and working with a local Kalasha coordinator and guide, the team initially encountered reluctance, particularly among women, to being filmed. Subsequent engagement suggested that concerns about disrespectful online portrayals of Kalasha women by tourists and content creators contributed to this reluctance, shaping the study's focus on digital representation.

4.1. Phase 1: Community-informed qualitative inquiry

Five conveniently sampled participants voluntarily took part in semi-structured interviews. Their accounts informed the study's harm categories and identified YouTube thumbnails as a primary unit of interest because participants perceived them as persistent and potentially misleading representations of Kalasha society. The interviews were human-translated and coded in two passes, with a reported Cohen's kappa of .80.

4.2 Phase 2: YouTube content analysis

A systematic review assessed search results for the term "Kalasha Valley" Searches were compiled via 107 screenshots containing 391 thumbnails. Incognito browsing helped lessen account browsing history bias but could not fully remove personalization or promise independence from the algorithmic ranking of YouTube. The unit of analysis was a search-result item each analysed through its thumbnail, title, and metadata, and search-result pages and screenshots as data records rather than as units of analysis. A coding scheme from Phase 1 identified visual and textual attributes of what could be observed compared with the subjective interpretation of what might constitute harm. Categorical levels of threat (no low medium, high) specified operationalized definitions and coding standards. Classification coding by AI (Claude 3.5 Sonnet) was followed by a second, human iterative pass. Cohen's kappas of.82 should be contextualized for the specified reliability process and coding layer. In general, this research is community-based rather than truly participatory. The results present the search results sampled and the community experience, without inferring cause and effect relationships or conclusions about the inner workings of the internal YouTube recommendation algorithm.

5.0 Data Analysis

The analysis examines YouTube search results and qualitative interviews at two complementary but distinct levels. Content analysis identifies visual and textual patterns, while interviews contextualise how participants perceive these representations. Although convergence between the two sources strengthens interpretation, it does not independently establish population-level social consequences.

5.1. Phase 1. Analysis

Phase 1 created seven coding categories: (A) "Religious Othering": e.g. "Kafiristan" & conversion-focused framing, (B) "Sexual Innuendo & Derogation": e.g. suggestions of renunciative rules & "available" women, (C) "Commodification": e.g. women and rituals as tourist "products", (D) "Targeting & Exploitation": e.g. marketing women to outsiders, (E) "Misinformation": e.g. fake traditions and clickbait, (F) "Visual Framing": e.g. image-stills without superimposed text, (G) "None": e.g. non-harmful. (Most thumbnails could be coded within more than one category). Categories A-D were deemed high threat, E was medium, F was low, and everything else was deemed no threat (clean travel/cultural-documentary).

The results showed that more than 50% of the sampled results had high or medium threat indicators, whereas 43.4% of results were low threat. Only 0.38% of the dataset (Table 1) consisted of clean travel or cultural content. These trends imply that non-harmful representations are scarcely visible in the sample.

They raise concerns about cultural stereotyping and dignity; however, claims regarding hostility, international perceptions, or tourism-related economic harm require further evidence.

Differences in view counts are interpreted as associations, not causal effects, because video age, channel size, and other potential confounding factors were not controlled.

Table 1. ***YouTube Search Result Analysis of Harm against Kalasha Community in Overall Data set***

Metric	Count	Percentage	Notes
Total Thumbnails Analysed	391	100%	105 Unique screenshots
HIGH Threat	43	11%	Category A – D
MEDIUM Threat	164	41.9%	Category E
LOW Threat	169	43.4%	Category F
NONE	15	0.38%	Category G
HIGH + MEDIUM combined	207	52.9%	Total Harmful Problematic Content

Across the full dataset of screenshots, 207 out of 391 videos (52.9%) carry HIGH or MEDIUM threat indicators Out of 391 thumbnails/search results only 14 were neutral, which demonstrates that Kalasha culture and community's whole digital existence is being equated to females. (table 1).

Table 2. ***YouTube Search Result Analysis of Harm against Kalasha Community in First 50 screenshots***

Metric	Count	Percentage	Notes
Total Thumbnails Analysed	156	100%	50 Unique screenshots
HIGH Threat	23	14.7%	Category A – D
MEDIUM Threat	83	53.2%	Category E
LOW Threat	50	32.1%	Category F
NONE	0	0.0%	Category G
HIGH + MEDIUM combined	106	67.9%	Concentration of harm in first 50 screenshots

What is even more alarming is that the first 50 results provide an indication of potential search visibility under the documented collection conditions, which had 156 video results were analysed and 67.9% of the said content had HIGH and MEDIUM threat recorded (Table 2). Also, no thumbnail representing NONE category was identified in first 156 results which means almost

67.9% content showed derogation of Kalasha community and almost all data in the first 50 screenshots had women in thumbnails. This result is alarming and important because a normal internet surfer who search for a video rarely scrolls till the end of the search results and his/her impression of the Kalasha community can be negatively impacted readily in the first few scrolls.

As shown below in figure 1, The quantitative results of the complete data set shows that a sexualized thumbnail lifts median views ~5.6x while a derogatory title lifts them only ~1.92x which answers the extent to which content creators are rewarded for sensational and harmful content (RQ3).

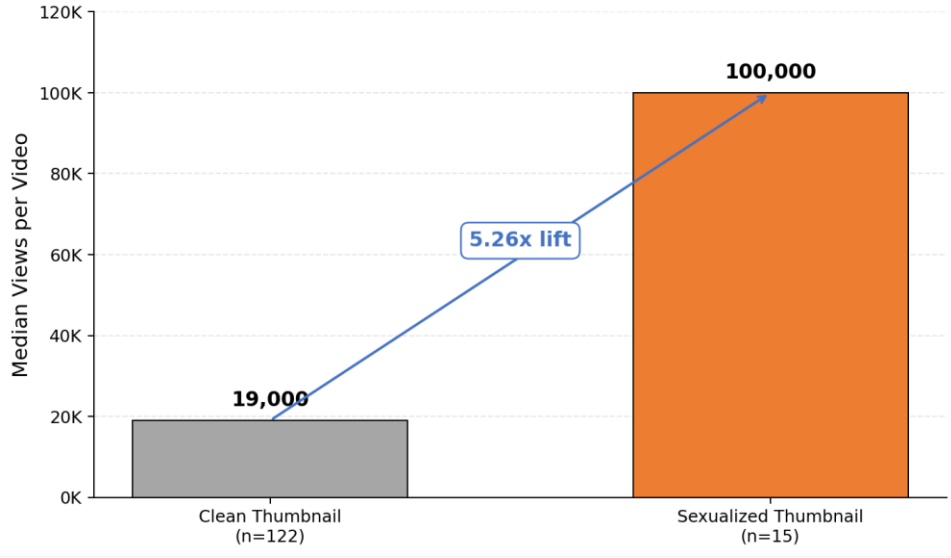


Figure 1. Sexualized thumbnails vs views

As shown below in figure 2, when comparing median views, harmful content outperforms clean ones in both dimensions (title and thumbnails). Averages, however, tells a different story because a few non-harmful viral hits skew the mean upwards, which is why the median is the more honest measure of observing the views. Altogether, the dataset indicates that harmful framing, particularly sexualized thumbnails were associated with higher observed view counts in the sampled results.

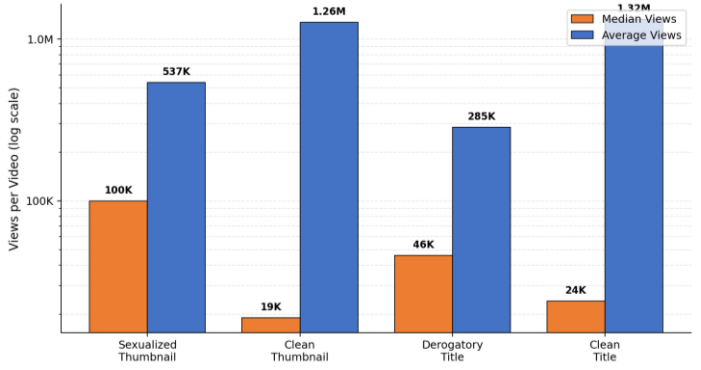


Figure 2. **Median vs Average views**

The title is read silently after the eye has already locked onto the image; by contrast, thumbnail does compositional work that outlasts any sentence and stays in visual memory which

is stronger. It places a body in a frame, purposely cropped out, has intentional gaze, addition of red arrows enhances targeting, pasting a drooling-face emoji convey meaning making and expectation, and lastly, Urdu texts that are harmful and targeted at Pakistani viewers never gets caught in a moderation filter unlike a title. In a thumbnail intentional framing and selection is crucial, and in this dataset the selection overwhelmingly features young women's faces, ornate dress, close-cropped portraits, and composite sexualized imagery.

Several records in this dataset carry a neutral or even respectful title attached to a harmful thumbnail such as title is *"Kalash Valley 2026 – The Hidden Culture of Pakistan | Full Travel Documentary"*; whereas thumbnail has cleavage-framed portrait of women. Similarly, the title is *"How Kalashi People Celebrate their Marriage?"* but the thumbnail text tells a different story *"Marriage market in Kalash Valley! Lahori girls also arrived; everyone was shocked hearing what the Kalashi girls said"* with red arrows pointing at individual women. Also in a title: *"Meet the Kalash People - The Most Isolated Tribe with Shocking Traditions | Travel Documentary"*; thumbnail overlay said *"THEY DID IT SHAMEFULLY IN PUBLIC"*.

In each case the title is filtered by policy-review system. The creators know, empirically, that the sampled results displayed engagement differences across the identified representational categories.

The people in these thumbnails are, with essentially no exceptions, young Kalasha women. The viewers of these thumbnails are, with essentially no exceptions, outsiders Urdu, and English-speaking audiences outside Chitral. Between the two groups sit three harm mechanisms that the qualitative reading makes hard to dismiss which are erosion of narrative sovereignty**;** individual targeting risk and normalization of the "come here to marry freely" pipeline.

The data uploaded on YouTube which appears in YouTube search results falls majorly into six overlapping frames in order of frequency and reach:

This is one of the most commonly occurring framed hook in the dataset. Twenty high threat flagged search results included the word *"hidden"* in the title or thumbnail, sixteen used *"secret"*, nine used *"mysterious"*, six had *"unseen"*, and three used the Urdu *"راز"* (raaz, "secret").

Titles are mostly less derogatory such as "*UNSEEN LOCAL LIFE OF KALASH VALLEY S02 EP. 27"* with 2.8 million views; *"Kalash Valley – Pakistan's Hidden Paradise | Unseen Culture & Incredible People"* with 180K views; "*Explore Kalash Valley PK | Chilam Joshi Festival 2025 | Hidden Secret of Pakistan"* with 289K views; "*Inside the Hidden World of Kalasha People"* with 1.2M views; "*Explore Hidden Kalash Valley PK | Secret Streets of Kalash | Pure Beauty Captured…"* with 200k views. Conversely, thumbnail text turns the same word into something more invasive. This framing is showcased in table 3 w.r.t. screenshot.

Table 3. ***Framing of Text over Thumbnail: Voyeuristic Potential***

Screenshot No.	Text over Thumbnails
KV066_07	"کلاش شادی کا سب سے بڑا راز کیا ہے؟" ("What is the biggest secret of Kalash wedding?") "حیران کن حقائق!" ("Astonishing facts!").
KV079_02	"کلاش کے تہوار کی اصل حقیقت" ("The real truth of Kalash's festival")
KV107_01	"خون سے نہائی کی خونی رسم" ("The bloody ritual of bathing in blood") "SECRET RITUALS REVEALED!"
KV107_02	"یہاں کیا کیا ہوتا آپ دیکھ کر شرمندہ ہوجاءیں گے" (Whatever happens here you will be ashamed to see)
KV035_03	"پہلی بار کیلاش گلیوں میں چھپی خوبصورتی دیکھیں" ("See the hidden beauty in Kalash streets for the first time")
KV086_03	"PAKISTAN'S MOST MYSTERIOUS TRIBE"; "Qabristan mei kya hota?"

The grammar is the same in every case. The title just says what is hidden. The thumbnail would convey *we are about to show you what is hidden, the wedding, the graveyard, the rituals, the women, the beauty.* Referring to a living community "*hidden, shameful*" is a representative of voyeuristic gaze; the thumbnail texts then position the content into actual exposure.

This attitude conveys the viewer two things: (a) what you are about to see is rare and therefore valuable, and (b) the people in the frame did not expect to be seen i.e., concealed gaze. The second implication is what converts ordinary tourism footage into voyeurism.

More than thirty-five video results center their entire content pitch around Kalasha marriage practices, almost always phrased as a scandal against Kalasha women. The titles are mostly generic but the text over thumbnail is scandalous in nature.

Table 4. ***Framing of Text over Thumbnail: Elopement Frame***

Screenshot No.	Text over Thumbnails
KV001_02	*"لڑکیاں بھاگ کر شادی کیوں کرتی ہیں؟"* ("Why do girls elope to marry?").
KV015_03 / KV031_04	*"کلاشی لڑکیاں بھاگ کر مسلمان لڑکوں سے شادی کیوں کرتی ہیں؟"* ("Why do Kalashi girls run away to marry Muslim boys?") "*لڑکیاں کتنے میں بکتی ہیں!"* ("How much are Kalashi girls sold for!").
KV002_03	*"لڑکیاں بھاگ کر ہمبستری کرتی ہیں"* ("Girls elope for sex") paired with *"یہاں کے رواج آپ کو ہلا کر رکھ دیں گے"* ("The customs here will shock you").
KV021_03	*"کیلاش میں لڑکیاں بھاگ کر شادی کیوں کرتی ہیں؟ /کیا لڑکیوں کو پیسوں کے عوض بیچ دیا جاتا ہے؟ /کیلاشیوں کا مذہب اور شادی کی رسمیں کونی ہیں؟"* (Why do Kalash girls elope? / Are girls sold for money? / What are Kalashis' religion and marriage customs?).
KV072_01	*"یہاں دنیا کی خوبصورت ترین عورتوں کو پسندیدہ مرد کے ساتھ بھاگنے کی آزادی ہے"* ("Here, the world's most beautiful girls have the freedom to run away with their favorite man").
KV106_03	*"کیا یہ لڑکیاں شادی سے پہلے کسی بھی لڑکے سے محبت کرنا کیا ہیں؟"* ("Can these girls love any boy before marriage?").

The Kalasha community does practice a consensual, community recognized ritual of bride-initiated marriage which represents the importance of female autonomy in *Kalasha dastoor*.[32]

These remarks and framing strips away the cultural meaning of Kalasha marriage rituals, which is as sacred as any other religion for its people, instead such framing transform it into a Muslim community gaze of marriage anxiety ("running away", "promiscuous"). The human coders repeatedly note that this elopement centric framing is used as recurring theme in the derogatory_text_detail column of the dataset which justifies and normalize abuse and harassment of Kalasha women, both virtual world and in real life.

Thirty records contain the word *kafir* and eighteen use the term *Kafiristan*. Examples range from the 1.4M views documentary KV001_02 which brands the entire region in its title as *"کافرستان کی سیر"* ("Tour of the Land of Infidels"), to KV006_01 *"kafiristan in pakistan"* with 1.3M views

[32] W. Ali, F. Faisal, and A. S. Khatak, "Exploring Marriage Practices of Kalash Community in District Chitral," Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language 4, no. 2 (2018): 117–29, https://pjsel.jehanf.com/index.php/journal/article/download/157/143/273.

followed by other uploads which has more than 75k views. Same pattern was observed in the super imposed text of the thumbnails as well.

Literal meaning of *Kafiristan* is *"land of the infidels"*. People of the Kalasha community lived in the area called *Peristan* (adjacent parts of present day Afghanistan and Pakistan) during the colonial era in Afghanistan and India, the place was looked upon in comparison to the neighboring Muslim community and thus it was documented that this community is referred to by the locals as *Kafirs*. Using *Kafirstan* or *kafirs* as a travel-category label harms in two ways simultaneously: it erases the narrative of community's self-identity, and it reinforces centuries old religious hierarchy into modern tourism vocabulary. Unlike the "hidden" frame, which the coders often marked as LOW/MEDIUM, every record in the dataset that actually deploys *Kafiristan* was coded HIGH or MEDIUM because in a country like Pakistan where forced conversions are becoming a norm and blasphemy laws are misused drastically, it puts indigenous communities in threatened situation.

Twenty flagged records lead with *"Beautiful"* or *"khubsurat"* as the primary descriptor with Kalasha women in the thumbnails, and the most viewed video in this category stands at 5.1 million views. Once a thumbnail reframes the whole gender of a community as an aesthetic category, every subsequent decision from viewer to creator flows from the premise that the audience is there to rate.

Table 5. ***Framing of Text over Thumbnail: Objectification of women***

Screenshot No.	Text over Thumbnails
KV005_03	how beautiful is kalash valley girls #beautiful #girls #young #looks
KV035_02	*"کالاش لڑکیوں کی زندگی"* ("Life of Kalash girls") paired with *"چھپی خوبصورتی"* ("Hidden beauty").
KV101_01	*"کالاش وادی میں بے حجابی اور مفتی میزیاں اور مے خانہ کی عورتیں ہ" ("Unveiling and free customs and women of wine houses in Kalash Valley")*
KV040_02	*"Tribe With Shocking Traditions And Beautiful Women"*
KV102_03	*"یہاں دنیا کی خوبصورت ترین عورتوں کو پسندیدہ مرد کے ساتھ بھاگنے کی آزادی ہے"* ("Here, the world's most beautiful girls have the freedom to run away with their favorite man").
KV078_02	Tribe With Shocking Traditions And Beautiful Women In Pakistan
KV106_03	*"UNSEEN LOCAL LIFE OF KALASH"*; *"CHITRAL BEAUTY"* with a heart-eyes emoji.

This frame is the most materially dangerous of all for the Kalasha women. Ten records use some variant of *Dulhan Mandi* (bride market) or the phrase *"are Kalash girls sold?"*. Voyeuristic frame sells a click but this commodification frame sells a trip to the valley. This frame converts religious othering and objectification of women into a transactional invitation for the viewer. This frame is linked directly to documented patterns of harassment, forced conversion, kidnapping and human trafficking risk for Kalasha women. People who travel there are very well communicated upon their arrival that Kalasha people marry in their own religious group and this framing is deliberate choice of the creator.

Table 6. ***Framing of Text over Thumbnail: Commodification frame***

Screenshot No.	**Text over Thumbnails**
KV044_01	*"UNCENSORED"* *"کلاش کے لوگ اپنی لڑکیاں بیچتے ہیں" (" Kalash people sell their girls")* *"حقیقت ایک کلاشی لڑکی کی زبانی" ("The truth from a Kalash girl's own words").*

KV002_01	*"شادی کرنی ہے تو یہاں آجائیں"* ("If you want to marry, come here!") with heart emojis.
KV013_03	*"پہلی شادی کرنی ہے تو یہاں آجایں"* ("If you want to do first marriage, come here").

This frame is one of the most severe and derogatory frames. Sixteen thumbnails in total were flagged as sexualized imagery which included skin show, AI generated images of women with heavy body type, loud makeup, naked legs and partially revealing bust dressed in Kalasha traditional clothes. The text on the thumbnails is equally harmful and sexualized in the corpus. The images included, for example, *a man holding the naked legs of a woman, cleavage-framed portraits of Kalasha women in traditional dress, tourists and kalash women shown in comparison of sexualized bodice.*

Table 7. ***Framing of Text over Thumbnail: Pervert frame***

Screenshot No.	Text over Thumbnails
KV085_01	*"kunwari suhagrat"* (virgin wedding night)
KV103_01	*"S3X IN PUBLIC PLACE"*
KV041_06	*"THEY DID IT IN PUBLIC" super imposed on a sexualized AI image of a Kalasha women and an old aged man.*
KV016_01	*"Meet the 16 year old Kalasha girl #hot #love"*
KV046_03	*#kalashgirl* with drooling-face emojis *"🤤🤤"*

The gender dimension of digital representation is particularly important where women are presented primarily through sexualized imagery, objectifying visual choices, or descriptions that reduce their identities to cultural attractions. Such representations may raise concerns about dignity, agency, and the control individuals and communities exercise over their public image. In the present study, these concerns should be interpreted through the coded characteristics of the sampled material and the perspectives of interview participants. The findings can therefore contribute to discussions of gender-sensitive digital representation, while claims about the direct effects of such content on women's safety or social relationships require additional evidence.

5.2. Phase 2. Semi Structured Interview Analysis

Five respondents gave the interviews. Names of the participants are concealed for safety and referred here to as participant A, B, C, D and E. The answer to RQ4 is evident in the responses of Kalasha community. Out of five participants three are women (Participant A: 21years old, college student; Participant B: 30years old, homemaker and poetess; Participant C: 58years old, homemaker) and two men (Participant D: 40 years old, school teacher and informal community historian; Participant E: 25 years old, part time tour guide and farmer). The interviews were conducted in Urdu and translated to English later. A composite narrative uses data from several individual interviews to tell a single story. The following composite interviews are grounded in documented community concerns and demonstrates major thematic categories found in the interviews.

Respondents consistently describe YouTube content as speaking for them without their consent and harmfully appropriate their culture.

For instance, Participant B responded to a question regarding how they see their cultural representation online as: "We have our own poetry, old, very old poetry full of wisdom. Our songs talk about the rivers, about the holy places, about the goats coming down from the high pastures. But they (content creators) say we are beauty queens; we have a mysterious culture or some hidden secrets. In fact, our culture is just like any other culture. They say all this with conviction and claims that they know us and understand us, they know nothing and understand nothing".

Similarly, participant B who is a teacher himself addressed this saying, “I will be precise. Very few people genuinely post respectful content. People mostly post malicious and uninformed content. They post harmful content uses our women, our religion, and our marriage customs as clickbait. We are a minority and we know that but we deserve better”.

Similarly, participant E, “I see two completely different valleys, and they are the same valley. The valley I live in is normal place, we work, we farm, our kids go to school, we make jokes, and we build our lives like all the people. The valley the YouTube videos show is some other place a mysterious and secret land. You are here in the valley; can you see any secret?”

The participants identify marriage and sexualized content as the most harmful category of online representation. The observed patterns of digital representation raise questions about their potential implications for cultural identity, community dignity, and the ways external audiences encounter the Kalasha community. Although these issues may also be relevant to tourism, gender relations, and cultural continuity, the present study does not directly measure those outcomes. They should therefore be understood as areas of concern and directions for further research rather than as demonstrated consequences of the sampled YouTube content.

Participant A discussed the trauma she faces due to sexualized content saying, “When I open the app and I see a face that looks like mine, like my cousin's, like my sister's and on top there is some Urdu writing saying 'the girls here are free'. We never said this. Nobody from our village said this.”. She continued saying, “I am studying so that I can become a doctor someday and for that I have to travel out of this valley as there are no high education institute here. But when I see these videos, I think what is the point? The men outside who watch this will not see me as a teacher. They will see me as another girl in the thumbnail”.

Participant C, the elder woman, compared this portrayal with her times and conveyed how disgusted she feels. She said, “When I was a young bride the visitors were few. They were well read people sometimes, film makers or men from the government. They sat with our elders and they listened. They asked permission before they wrote anything or clicked our pictures. Now? Now they come in cars. They put this thing (phone) in your face like you are a cow at a market. My granddaughter showed me one of these videos on her phone and I was shocked to see myself. I said, 'who is that woman?' and she said, 'Bibi, that is you. From last year. At the festival.' I had not known I was filmed. There was something written as well but I could not read. My granddaughter would not translate it. That is how I know it was bad.”.

She also said, “And the boys, the outsider boys who come here, journalist too, they now think we are not respectable enough. They say things to our girls that no man would have said when I was young”. This conveys that tourism enhanced by digital content is posing a significant physical threat to women of Kalasha community on ground in real life such as eve teasing and harassment.

Similarly, Participant D conveyed how this narrative is damaging to their community, “There is a particular phrase I hate the most that 'if you want to marry, come here'. This looks like an advertisement of our women. It tells men, especially men from outside Chitral, that Kalasha women are available, that our community has weaker social protections than theirs, and that they can come and 'pick' a woman. This is not just bad humour. This is the production of a market. And markets, once produced, attract buyers. We are no market!”

Participant E, conveyed similar dissent of the marriage market framing, “They (content creators) show them (Kalasha women) as a product. We men are not shown as representative of our culture. Because a man in the picture would mean there is a family. A family means there is a social structure and rules”.

These excerpt highlights how disheartening and traumatic the content is for Kalasha people and how aware they are of their online image and perception.

The persistent use of *'Kafiristan'* emerges as a significant harm category in the interviews as well. Respondents consistently assert *'We are Kalasha'* as both identity and resistance statement.

Participant B regarding the Kafiristan said, “This word is a wound. The British put it on us and these videos will not let it die. Every time I see 'Kafiristan' I feel that someone has come into my house and written 'infidel' on my wall. We are Kalasha. That is our name. We have a religion, we have gods, we have priests, we have festivals that are thousands of years old. To call us 'kafir' is to say we have nothing. We have everything. We respect everyone irrespective of religion and identity but we are labelled as someone not belonging here”.

Similarly, participant D hinted at the associated creator economy dimension of this word and how this word internalizes real world harm, “It tells the Muslim viewer ‘These are not your sisters, these are infidels, the ordinary rules do not apply’. Isn’t it why we are asked to forcefully convert. The video makers are not historians. They use this word because it converts to money. It converts to views. They do not care that we have asked, repeatedly, for it to be retired. We are Kalasha. We have a religion. We are not the absence of someone else's religion.”. He concluded saying, “People should know true and viral are two different things”. This statement calls for a cohesive localized monitoring policy of platforms like YouTube.

Similarly, participant A referred to how the tourist who come to visit during festival days behave, “The men who come here now, some of them. They come because they have watched a video that said Kalasha girls are easy or free or want to marry outsiders. They come with that idea already in their head.” She continued, “There are so many phones now. Hundreds. Last year during Chowmus, a man came very close to me with his phone while we were performing *Husatik* (a type of spiral group folk dance) and I asked him to please move, and he laughed. He said 'this is for YouTube; you will be famous'. He was not even asking me. I just want them to know we are not a tourist attraction we are living human beings”.

Participant D told how they are dealing with tourist flow, “We have now shifted the dates to the Georgian calender so that we can manage our festival dates. For example, in December during our winter festival Chowmus, which goes on for 9 to 13 days. we have now modified some things like we don’t allow outsiders in the valley for atleast 3 to 5 days during the festivals. Those are sacred ritual days. Since, tourist do not understand our boundaries we have made this change.”. Participant E told, “The foreigner tourists are very respectful towards our culture rituals and people, but from our own country the situation is different. Right now, tourism means a man with a phone. That is the model. The model has to change. If a visitor comes to learn to actually learn, to sit with an elder, to walk to a sacred site with permission, then yes, that visitor is welcome. We do not need more hunters with cameras. We need more guests.”.

The interviews conducted in Bumburet show that these frames do not stay online. They travel back into the valley as harassment, as staring outsiders, as the fear of being filmed without consent, and as a marriage-market narrative that invites strangers to treat Kalasha women as available. It is important not to treat the harm identified here as a set of isolated online incidents. The women interviewed during fieldwork described a continuous experience rather than discrete ones. For a community already reduced to three or four thousand people, this is not a reputational issue. It is another channel through which their cultural survival is being negotiated by people.

The findings have several potential implications for digital governance in Pakistan. First, digital platforms could consider whether their content policies and reporting mechanisms adequately address culturally specific forms of stereotyping, objectification, and

misrepresentation. Second, culturally and linguistically accessible reporting mechanisms may help communities communicate concerns about online content. Third, community-led digital storytelling and documentation could provide opportunities for the Kalasha community to participate more actively in representing its cultural identity. Finally, public institutions, civil-society organizations, researchers, and community representatives could collaborate on digital literacy and culturally responsible communication initiatives. These recommendations are proposed governance responses to the representational concerns examined in this study; they should not be interpreted as evidence that the study has independently established a failure of existing platform or state mechanisms.

6.0. Conclusion

The paper explored the digital visibility of Kalasha on the search engine results pages of YouTube for visual and textual framing, gendered representation and what this potentially means for cultural identity and digital governance. This research explored the visible representations found in the search-result material alongside qualitative interviews to gain insights from the participants about what significance they attached to these representations.

The findings reveal representational patterns that could be critically problematic for exploring cultural stereotyping, gendered display, and visibility of the Kalasha community. The qualitative data give some context to the participants' expressed worries about digital representation and community integrity. They inform the ongoing debate on indigenous representation and gender-sensitive digital communication in Pakistan. This does not mean that the identified digital content necessarily lead to harassment, changed audiences' behaviour, or influence on tourism, marriage, and cultural reproduction: the analysis alone cannot determine that this is the case.

That parallel is informative; associations between representational features and the view numbers observed in our research should not be taken as evidence that recommendation algorithms like those of YouTube explicitly promote harmful content. Our research concerns the presentation of search-result material in particular collection conditions, not the ranking, recommending, or moderation algorithms of the platform itself.

Though, these findings open the door to proposals for more culturally fine-grained representations online. These might include tools for reporting inappropriate representation, improved awareness of representations that are gendered or stereotyped by culture, community involvement in digital storytelling, and initiatives that promote digital literacy and knowledge of culture and history. All of these should involve communities and other key stakeholders.

This research has limitations. For example, the research outcomes have been based on a single platform and a single search query, how the search results were obtained, the scale of the qualitative interview sample, and the descriptive nature of the engagement measures. The findings are also unable to clarify how the internal mechanisms of YouTube algorithms work, nor how much influence the contents under sampling exert on social events. Further research may include comparative studies across platforms languages communities, time frames, and in-person research to examine how the audience responds to the contents, and how platform governance works.

In sum, the study demonstrates that visibility of and in digital spaces may not be enough, but the representation of that visibility also takes analysis. Its strengths include mapping of visible patterns, taking community perspectives into account, and raising questions related to gender and community identity and digital governance in Pakistan.

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