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Spread of Religious Hatred through Digital Media in Pakistan: The Case of Tehreek-E-Labbaik Pakistan

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Abstract

The rise of digitalisation that led to the rapid increase in the usage of social media platforms has unfortunately strengthened religious extremism in an already polarised society of Pakistan. This study aims to determine the extent to which a far-right religio-political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has propagated religious hatred content against both Muslim and non-Muslim communities on social media. Moreover, this study also explores the manner through which TLP has spread content based on religious bigotry on digital space. Framing theory was applied while analysing the speeches of TLP leaders'. The research methodology employed to test the hypothesis and address the research questions was quantitative questionnaire-based survey. The collected data was presented using the tools of graphical representation to make it easy for the readers to easily interpret the factual information. The findings of the online questionnaire and analysis of TLP leaders' speeches addressed the three research questions of the study. The results show that TLP has used digital media as a tool to spread religious hatred on cyber space, since it has promoted sectarianism against Muslim communities and exploited sensitive religious issues – blasphemy and finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) – against non-Muslim communities through their speeches there were later uploaded on digital media. The researcher has recommended the government authorities to initiate legal action against the leaders of TLP for instigating religious hatred under Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016.

Keywords: *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), Religious Hatred, Social Media, Sectarianism, Blasphemy, Finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).*

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Introduction

Pakistan – the land of pure has seen yet another victim of religious hatred. Tahir Ahmad Nasim, reportedly a mentally-challenged person who was accused of committing blasphemy, was shot dead in a courtroom in Peshawar by a 19-year-old madrassa-going student named Khalid Khan on August 26, 2020. The incident took place days after the video of late Nasim went viral on social media, wherein he had falsely proclaimed himself a prophet. The video was shared as a tool to spread religious hatred, labelling Nasim an Ahmadi, however, after his murder, it was confirmed that Nasim had left the Ahmadiyya community long ago (Khan, 2020). This isn't the first time that a person is killed due to the propagation of religious extremist content on social media.

Religious hatred – enmity against an individual or a group of people based on their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs – is a longstanding menace that has been thrashing the social fabric of Pakistan for decades. The basis for the independence of Pakistan wasn't religious hatred for Hindus and other minorities, it was anti-majoritarianism. The founder of the country, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had all his life struggled to make Muslims believe that the religious majoritarianism of Indian National Congress (INC) would never allow them to flourish in the United India. Thus, it can be concluded that Jinnah was never of the view to enforce the same ideology on Hindus and other religious minorities by pronouncing the country as an Islamic empire. Wasim (2020) argues that Jinnah's reluctance to not exclude the religious minorities from the state affairs is an evidence that anti-majoritarianism – not hatred against Hindus and other communities – was the foundation of Two-Nation Theory, or at least it shaped a very substantial portion of it. All these values and principles of Jinnah were not only forgotten, but intentionally expunged from national memory after his early demise, subsequently religious hardliners started manipulating the Two Nation Theory to meet their own political ends.

In the light of Jinnah's 11 August speech that he gave in the country's first constituent assembly meeting, it can be rightly said that Pakistan was created on the principles of equal citizenship for all, and the religious minorities were supposed to enjoy equal and full constitutional rights. However, three severe wars with India – a Hindu-majority country; becoming an ally of US and supporting militants against the soviet forces in Afghanistan; and the state's policy of appeasement while dealing with the extremist and sectarian elements, among other issues and events, have religiously polarised the society of Pakistan that often leads to the spread of religious hatred against non-Muslim communities living across the country.

History and Making of TLP

Before commenting on the history and making of TLP as an organized political force in the country, it is pertinent to mention the series of events that turned the religious movement Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLYRA) into a registered political party TLP in 2017.

It all started in late 2010, when the then Punjab governor Salman Taseer decided to defend Asia Bibi – a Christian woman who was falsely accused of blasphemy and was acquitted by Supreme Court in 2018 after spending nine years on a death row. While supporting Asia in her case, the late governor also criticised the blasphemy law of Pakistan, Article 295-C to be exact. He maintained the fact that the aforementioned article is a man-made law that needs to be revisited since it has been misused a number of times to settle personal vendettas. On August 04, 2011, Taseer was shot dead by his own security officer named Mumtaz Qadri for giving critical statements against the country's controversial blasphemy law, for supporting Asia and visiting her in the jail. In the wake of Taseer's assassination, Qadri was glorified by religious groups in Pakistan. Various Sunni-Barelvi religious groups came under one umbrella to stage protests in the major cities of the country, against the arrest and trial of Qadri, which according to them was unjust and contrary to the teachings of Islam.

In 2015, four religious groups – Sunni Tehreek, Fidayan-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwat, Aalmi Tanzeem-e-Ahle Sunnat, and Pakistan Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat – came under one umbrella and formed TLYRA and appointed firebrand cleric Khadim Hussain Rizvi as its chief. After its formation, TLYRA had maintained its focus on four major functions – to preserve the blasphemy law in its current form, mobilise people to build a strong pressure group for quick and safe acquittal of Mumtaz Qadri, to protect the cause of the finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and to initiate crackdown against the members of Ahmadiyya community living in Pakistan.

In October 2015, despite the pressure from TLYRA and other religious groups, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) that had awarded death sentence to Mumtaz Qadri, following the rejection of Qadri's mercy request by then president Mamnoon Hussain (Masood, 2016). Subsequently, the government authorities executed Qadri on February 29, 2016, after which the clerics and religious hardliners took to the streets to protest against the government's decision to execute their hero – a murderer. It was the time when TLYRA managed to earn admiration from the masses as it had painted itself as the lone saviour of Holy Prophet (PBUH)'s integrity and honour in a country that consisted of almost 96% of Muslim population.

A month later, TLYRA used Qadri's *chehlum* – a religious ritual observed by majority of the Muslims of South Asia – to urge their followers to march towards the parliament and protest against the hanging of Qadri. The leaders of TLYRA also made speeches on the occasion, lionising both the criminal and the crime he committed in the name of religion (Haider, 2018). With the passage of time, TLYRA started getting more popularity since its chief Rizvi had begun talking on other socio-religious issues as well to attract more followers. He used to openly criticise religious minorities and government for taking progressive steps during his sermons that were then shared on social media.

In 2017, the top leadership of the extremist religious party announced that they had become a political party and that they would contest elections under the banner of TLYRA, which is now commonly known as Tehreek-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Since then TLP has been exploiting Islam, spreading religious hatred, and using some sensitive socio-religious issues such as blasphemy law and the matter of the finality of

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for their political gains. Their religious-hatred campaigns on social media against Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities are examined in the study using quantitative questionnaire-based survey analysis as the research methodology.

TLP and Spread of Religious Hatred on Social Media in Pakistan

Soon after making an announcement to join electoral politics, TLP under the leadership of far-right firebrand cleric Khadim Hussain Rizvi – who is known for his derogatory and bigoted rhetoric towards the religious minorities – started using social media platforms as a tool to propagate religious hatred for political gains. The most glaring example of religious-hate-based political campaigns was witnessed in 2017, during the campaign of NA-120 by-election in Lahore, when TLP strongly criticised its political rival former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on religious grounds, terming him a ‘blasphemer’. In all the speeches made in that election campaign, TLP spoke about Mumtaz Qadri, vowing to take revenge from then ruling party PML-N for Qadri’s execution. The government didn’t take any action to stop the hate campaign of TLP, knowing the fact that Khadim Rizvi had termed Nawaz Sharif a blasphemer for giving a statement against forced conversions in 2017 after attending the event of Holi (Hussain, 2017).

In November 2017, TLP organised a sit-in by blocking the main highway connecting Rawalpindi and Islamabad over changes in the oath undertaken by parliamentarians and the electorate. In Election Bill 2017, the wording of the oath – about finality of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) – was changed from ‘I solemnly swear’ to ‘I declare.’ On the occasion, TLP spread religious hatred against the Ahmadiyya community of Pakistan, on grounds that they allegedly lobbied with PML-N to change the oath-wording in Election Act 2017. Basit (2020) argued that although the mainstream media didn’t cover TLP’s Faizabad Dharna in 2017, the party successfully employed social media platforms to mobilise its supporters across Pakistan.

It is pertinent to mention that during the 21-day Faizabad Dharna, TLP leaders including its chief, Khadim Rizvi delivered speeches full of religious hatred against the leaders of PML-N – especially then federal law minister Zahid Hamid – and the Ahmadiyya community. All those speeches had gone viral on social media with the co-ordinated efforts by TLP digital media team. Basit (2020) concluded that TLP has utilized social media as an alternative medium to perfection. However, the services of major social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were suspended by Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) in major areas of Pakistan as TLP was using these platforms to incite religious hatred after the Faizabad operation, according to a news report published in English daily Pakistan Today.

A year later when Supreme Court was about to announce the final verdict of Asia Bibi case, TLP launched a full scale religious hatred campaign against her, even naming institutions, government officials and others and threatened them in their speeches that were later uploaded on social media (Ahmed, 2020).

In October 2018, TLP announced countrywide protests following the decision of Supreme Court to acquit Asia Bibi in false blasphemy case on grounds of lack of evidence and clear contradictions in the statements of witnesses. Analyst Umer Farooq wrote an article on TLP, hate speech and use of digital media, wherein he noted that the mainstream media was directed to not report the TLP protests launched in major cities, but the top leadership of TLP was barely deterred. TLP patron-in-chief Pir Afzal Qadri's videos of giving fatwa (religious decree) of assassinating the senior most judges of Supreme Court – including then CJP Asif Saeed Khosa – and asking the generals and top brass of Pakistan army to declare revolt against Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javaid Bajwa, had started making the rounds on digital media within hours. At that time, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the state of Pakistan was going through a civil-war like situation, when thousands of TLP workers went out of control after listening to the TLP leaders' speeches – that were full of religious hatred and inciting violence – on digital media. The government had tried to control the cyber space by blocking the services of social media platforms in some vulnerable areas but all in vain as the damage was already been done. (Farooq, 2018). The researcher of this study is agreed with the opinion of the author that the TLP protest was a perfect example of efficient use of digital media tools to activate a lunatic segment of the society that had interrupted civic life in Pakistan.

The PTI government, weeks after signing an agreement that was brokered by Pakistan army with TLP, directed the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to initiate a crackdown against the top leadership of TLP. Subsequently, a number of TLP leaders including Khadim Hussain Rizvi and Pir Afzal Qadri were arrested and charged with sedition and terrorism. Then in 2019, FIA's cyber-crime wing arrested two activists of TLP for doing propaganda based on religious hatred on social media against the Lahore High Court (LHC) judges, who gave the decision about Khadim Rizvi, as reported by Pakistan Today.

Rationale for the Study

The people of Pakistan belong to several ethnicities and religions and therefore celebrating diversity and having inclusive policies are key for an inclusive and progressive Pakistan. In the last couple of decades, especially post 9/11, religious extremism and sectarianism have become the leading threats to the pluralist culture and society of Pakistan. Religious minorities no longer feel safe in the country.

The situation has become so deteriorated now that some segments of society are even getting death threats and fatwas [religious decrees] of apostasy for raising their voice against certain practices and laws on social media. The researcher believes that the portrayal of increasing culture of intolerance and aggressive behaviour on social media platforms by the so-called Islamic preachers can proved to be disastrous and create massive unrest in the society. This study might be helpful for the policy makers and law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in countering religious hatred on social media in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, most of the militant organisations follow either the Sunni-Deobandi or Ahl-e-Hadith school of thought of Islam. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Harkat

ul Mujahedeen (HuM), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are the prominent proscribed Deobandi organisations. Meanwhile, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State (ISIS), Hizb-ut Tahrir (HuT) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are Ahl-e-Hadith banned outfits. On the contrary, TLP is the only religious organisation belonging to the Sunni-Barelvi sect of Islam that had been involved in violent activities (Zahid, 2018).

The researcher finds the rise of violent Barelvi adherents quite alarming as the country has never witnessed this before. Since the Sunni-Barelvi sect adheres to mystical Islamic practices – the counter narrative to the radical interpretation of Islam and an imperative threat for the terrorists who have slaughtering people in the name of religion, thus the Barelvis have always been closer to a moderate and peaceful version of Islam. Hence, the swing in their ideology and attitude pose a major threat to the national cohesion and security. The rise of TLP shows that the followers of Barelvi Islam are now using the same violent tactics as other hardliner religious groups. The difference between the followers of Barelvi school of thought and those following other sects appears to be fading.

Most importantly, the way TLP does politics on a sensitive issue like blasphemy law, one can't even imagine how dangerous it can turn out to be. Thousands of TLP followers have accounts on social media where Khadim Rizvi's lectures and speeches are available, the extremist religio-political party has employed social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to expand its support-base and propagate religious hatred content.

Considering the aforementioned facts in mind, the researcher believes that it has become a more and academic duty to thoroughly examine the TLP movement, its religio-political outlook, and specifically its use of digital media as a tool to spread religious hatred in Pakistan. All the above-mentioned publications and data-based reports have thoroughly analysed the menace of religious hatred in Pakistan, its history, rise, and aftermaths; the way its propagation of content in the cyber space multiplied with the increasing usage of digital media platforms in Pakistan was also comprehensively studied. However, as far as TLP and its use of social media platforms for spread of religious hatred content is concerned, the researcher believes that many different dimensions and concepts are left to be scrutinised to know more about the working mechanism of TLP.

Despite the gaps and limitations of the above-mentioned publications and data-based reports, they were very helpful in providing a clear guideline to the researcher, through which he will be able to highlight all the missing aspects in this study to make it more inclusive. To be very specific, the study will closely evaluate the frames and approaches used by TLP leaders in their speeches and statements given to spread religious hatred against both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse how TLP has spread religious hatred in an already polarised society of Pakistan.

- To analyse the speeches and sermons of prominent TLP leaders through which they have spread religious hatred.
- To determine the policy-based actions or strategies for government authorities to counter religious hatred speech of TLP on digital space.

Research Questions

R1: To what extent TLP has used social media platforms as a new medium to spread religious hatred in Pakistan?

R2: To what extent TLP has ventilated sectarianism while spreading religious hatred against Muslim religious communities on social media?

R3: What are the significant sensitive religious issues exploited by the leadership of TLP in the process of spreading religious hatred, especially against non-Muslim religious communities, on social media.

Methods

In this study, an extremist religio-political outfit Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) is taken as a case study to discuss its role in the rise of the propagation of religiously-motivated hatred content and campaigns on social media in Pakistan in the recent years through using quantitative questionnaire-based survey analysis as the research methodology. Taking the research questions of this study into account, close-ended questions have been asked in this research. Since the population of Pakistan is comprising 60% of youth, so in this study, all the students who are currently studying in the private and public universities of Pakistan are considered as the population. The researcher of this study has used convenience sampling as a technique to select the sample for data collection. In this study, the students of seven prominent universities representing all the provinces and regions of Pakistan are selected as a sample to get diverse opinions for data analysis.

Applying convenience sampling, the students of following universities were selected with a sample size of 85:

- Students of University of the Punjab represented Punjab
- Students of University of Karachi represented Sindh
- Students of University of Peshawar represented Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Students of Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences represented Balochistan

- Students of National University of Sciences & Technology represented Islamabad
- Students of Karakoram International University represented Gilgit-Baltistan
- Students of University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir represented Kashmir

Results

Since the sample size is small, so the researcher hasn't used any data analysis tool or software to calculate the data, the Google Forms graph provided enough data to conclude the results. The findings of the questionnaire-based survey research have proven the fact that the usage of social media platforms, especially Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, has been increased and still growing with passage of time. The alarming reality is that with the increase in the usage of digital platforms, the spread of religious hatred has also been increasing exponentially, as observed by the respondents of the questionnaire. The results show that apart from TLP, other religious-political parties also frequently propagate religious hate content on digital media for political gains. As far as the TLP is concerned, the findings of the survey very clearly indicate that TLP not only spread religious hatred, but also promote sectarianism and exploit sensitive religious issues to target non-Muslim religious communities on social media.

Before answering the research questions, it is pertinent to mention that 97.6% of the questionnaire respondents know about TLP and its chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi, moreover, 85.9% of the respondents know that TLP actively uses digital media, and most importantly, majority of the respondents are aware of the postings and activities of TLP on social media. These statistics are mentioned just to make sure that the results of this survey hold significant worth since the respondents are well-aware individuals with respect to the research topic in question in this study.

The first research question (R1) deals with the extent to which TLP has used social media platforms as a new medium – since TLP doesn't get much coverage from the mainstream media – to spread religious hatred in Pakistan. The results of statement 1 evidently answered this question, making it very clear that TLP has used social media as a tool and a new medium in spreading religious hatred to a great extent, as 74% of the respondents supported this opinion in the survey.

Moreover, the results prove the fact that the leaders of TLP often promote sectarianism and exploit sensitive religious issues such as blasphemy and finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in their speeches and statements that are later posted on social media. The results of statement 2 undeniably confirms the fact that TLP has been using digital space to promote sectarianism against Muslim communities in Pakistan. The detailed analysis about TLP's promotion of sectarianism is discussed in the part of answering next research question.

Apart from promoting sectarianism, the results of statement 11 attested that the top leadership of TLP have over and over again spread religious hatred through

misinterpreting certain Islamic principles, core beliefs, and laws related to Islamic jurisprudence in their sermons that were later posted on social media. At least 85% of the respondents have expressed their agreement with the aforementioned statement.

The findings of survey approves the opinion that TLP has significantly exploited two sensitive religious issues, blasphemy and finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), to primarily attack and spread religious hatred against non-Muslim religious communities that are residing in Pakistan. In total, seven statement were drafted in the questionnaire regarding TLP's hostile attitude towards non-Muslim communities; the results of these statements are comprehensively analysed in the part of answering the last research question. Since, promotion of sectarianism and exploitation of sensitive religious issues were also taken as indicators to measure religious hatred, thus it can be comfortably said that TLP has spread religious hatred to an enormous extent.

The second research question (R2) deals with the extent to which the leaders of TLP has ventilated the flames of sectarianism while spreading religious hatred against Muslim religious communities on social media. This research question has been extensively answered by the findings of survey as four statements namely 2, 3, 4, and 5 were drafted while taking this research question into account. The response of statement 2 undeniably answers the research question as 80.2% of the respondents are of the view that TLP has been using digital space to promote sectarianism against Muslim communities. The researcher has specifically analysed TLP's aggressive behaviour towards three mainstream Muslim communities; Shia, Deobandi, and Wahabi.

The results of statement 3 verify that the leaders of TLP often promote sectarian religious hatred against Shia community in their sermons that are then uploaded on social media platforms, nearly 78% of the respondents share this opinion. The responses of statement 4 point out that religious hatred against Deobandi community has also been spread by TLP on social media through igniting the flames of sectarianism. Furthermore, the results of statement 5 accomplish the fact that Wahabi community is also among the victims of TLP's sectarian religious hatred speeches that are later posted on social media; nearly 78% of the respondents share this opinion.

The third and last research question (R3) deals with the significant sensitive religious issues that were and still are being exploited by the leadership of TLP in the process of spreading religious hatred, especially against non-Muslim religious communities, on digital media. To answer this question, three statements namely 12, 13, and 14 were drafted. The results of statement 12 confirm that TLP abuses sensitive religious issue while spreading religious hatred against non-Muslim communities in their statements and speeches that are then posted on social media platforms. The statement, however, didn't address the exact sensitive religious issues which have been exploited.

The results of statement 13 reveal that blasphemy is one of the significant sensitive issues that has been frequently exploited by the leaders of TLP while spreading religious hatred mainly against non-Muslim communities; out of total 85 respondents, 75 unequivocally expressed this opinion. Moreover, the findings of statement 14 disclose that the issue of finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is

another significant sensitive issue that has been misused by TLP as a tool to attack and spread religious hatred against non-Muslim communities, primarily the Ahmadiyya community, in their speeches that are later posted on digital media.

Analysis of TLP Leaders' Speeches

The researcher has also analysed a number of speeches and sermons given by the TLP leaders, especially its chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi that were still posted on various YouTube channels. Initially these speeches and sermons were uploaded on the official YouTube channels – namely Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi Official, Rizvi Media, TLP, and Labbaik TV, being run by the social media team of TLP. Later they were also uploaded and shared by other YouTube channels as well. The social media team of TLP has a very integrated network through which they have been running a number of official and unofficial YouTube channels to spread religious hatred against both Muslim and non-Muslim communities on digital space for political benefits.

In one of his speeches, former patron-in-chief of TLP Pir Afzal Qadri had been openly inciting hatred against Muslim and non-Muslim communities. “When someone asked me to not criticise Jews, Christians, Hindus, Deobandis, and Wahabis, Ahmadis and all the other religions and schools of thought of Islam, I questioned him, ‘Shall I become a non-Muslim’,” the TLP leader said in a public gathering (Islamic Videos, 2017). TLP chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi in one of his sermons said, “I am speaking against Deobandi community, if [government] wants to stop me, first they need to stop those who don’t believe in the honour of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH),” (Barvi Media 92 & Movies Production, 2017). Rizvi in his another sermon while replying to a speech of Deobandi scholar termed the latter a ‘dog’ and said, “Even the dogs don’t pee on your graves,” (TLP Media Rawalpindi, 2020).

Even the renowned Islamic scholars and most powerful and influential personalities aren’t safe from the badmouthing of TLP leaders, mainly Khadim Rizvi. The TLP chief heatedly abused Dr Tahir-ul-Qadri for condemning the killing of late Salman Taseer and terming Mumtaz Qadri a murderer (Hafiz Hamza, 2016). In another occasion, Rizvi abused and criticised Tariq Jameel for preaching Islam to actor Veena Malik and not honouring Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a proper manner in his speeches (Latest News, 2017). When Mumtaz Qadri was hanged in 2016, the TLP chief vehemently vilified former premier Nawaz Sharif and chief of army staff (R) General Raheel Sharif – both were the most powerful men in the country at that time (Nouman Yousaf, n.d.). Moreover in 2018, when Asia Bibi – a woman falsely accused of blasphemy – was acquitted by the Supreme Court, Pir Afzal Qadri openly incited violence by saying, “These three judges who have acquitted Asia Bibi should be murdered according to the teachings of Islam. If their subordinates can’t have access to them, then their drivers or security officers should kill them. General Bajwa isn’t acceptable to us in anyway. The Muslim generals should rebel against him. Imran Khan has proved that he is a Jewish child,” (Dajjal - The AntiChrist, 2018).

TLP chief Khadim Rizvi while spreading religious hatred against the Ahmadiyya community in one his speeches at a public gathering rigorously abused the religious icon of Ahmadiyya community and said, “Even the urine of dog and pig is better than

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and his teachings,” (Rizvi Media, 2017). Recently, when the issue of Minority Rights Commission was raised, Khadim Rizvi had outrageously criticised the PTI government for talking about the ‘rights of Ahmadis’. He also spread religious hatred against the Ahmadiyya community and accused them of ‘lobbying’ to get into the commission (Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi Official, 2020).

In one his speeches, the TLP chief openly insulted the Hindu community while calling them the ‘drinkers of cow urine’ (Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi Official, 2017). In another occasion, Rizvi said: “Hindus are the most discriminatory community in the world. Only the swords and horses of Mehmood Ghaznavi could deal with them,” while addressing a political gathering in Kashmir (Rizvi Media, 2018). When the PTI government decided to construct Hindu temple in Islamabad, Khadim Rizvi not only strongly opposed the move but also propagated religious hatred against the Hindus saying, “Islam had come to demolish the Hindu sculptures, not to design new ones,” (Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi Official, 2020).

While addressing his followers at a gathering in mosques, the TLP chief glorified those who killed Hindus and Sikhs in Kashmir and said, “Those who conquered Kashmir, killing Hindus and Sikhs, they are praised in both worlds,” (Understanding Sikhi, 2020). When the PTI government had announced to construct Kartarpur Corridor and Gurdwara Darabar Sahib Kartarpur at Punjab’s Narowal district, Khadim Rizvi denounced the government and propagated religious hatred against Sikhs. “Pakistan wasn’t made to facilitate Sikhs, it wasn’t made to construct their religious worship places, and it wasn’t made to equate Sikh’s waste [while referring to Kartarpur Corridor] with the State of Medina. Those who love Sikhs shall migrate to Amritsar,” the TLP chief had said (InKhabar, 2019).

Conclusion

After scrutinising the research topic and conducting an in-depth quantitative questionnaire-based survey research, the findings of the study decisively answered the key research question that deals with the extent to which TLP has spread religious hatred on social media. The results clearly indicate that the leaders of TLP have propagated religious hatred content against both Muslim and non-Muslim communities through their statements and speeches that had been shared on digital media. The frames and dangerous approaches used by the TLP leaders such as promotion of sectarianism and exploiting sensitive religious issue have been comprehensively examined.

In the introduction chapter, the main ideas and broader themes of the study are discussed, especially the history and making of TLP as an extremist religio-political party, to better understand its foundations, way of functioning, and political interests. While studying the existing literature on the research topic, some gaps were observed since apart from a handful of newspaper reports, no comprehensive research has been conducted specifically on TLP and its use of digital media to spread religious hatred. Thus, the research through its findings shed some light on the unexplored areas regarding the research topic. To analyse the frames and approaches used to TLP while

spreading religious hatred on social media, framing theory was applied to get desired results.

Then quantitative questionnaire-based survey was used a research methodology and university-going students were selected as the population of the study. After applying convenience sampling, the students of seven prominent universities representing all the provinces and regions of Pakistan were selected as the sample of the study. In the discussion and analysis chapter, all the research questions were answered and all the hypothesis were addressed with the support of results of the study, and in the end an analysis of TLP leaders' speeches was presented to further prove the key findings of the study.

Key Findings of the Study

- After conducting survey research, it has been found that TLP spread religious hatred against both Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities on social media.
- The findings of the research indicate that the leaders of TLP spread religious hatred through promoting sectarianism against Muslim communities on social media.
- TLP spread religious hatred through exploiting sensitive religious issues – blasphemy and finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) – against non-Muslim communities on social media.
- TLP has adversely affected the social fabric of Pakistan by spreading religious hatred on social media.

Limitations of the Study

Due to certain time and resources constraints, only 85 respondents were taken as the sample of population. So, the researcher didn't get the chance to record some opinions and information that could have further enhanced the results of the study. Although the universities from all the provinces and regions of Pakistan were selected, but many few students from Balochistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir filled the questionnaire, most probably due to internet connectivity issues. Due to lack of resources, the researcher couldn't explore more data collection methods, especially interviews and focus group discussion. The results of the study could have been more accurate if a variety of data collection methods were used.

Recommendations for Government Authorities

Taking the alarming findings of the study into consideration, it is strongly recommended to immediately approach the management of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube – through writing an official letter since these social platform don't have their offices in Pakistan – to request them to permanently suspend the official handles of TLP as the religious hatred content being shared from their accounts has been affecting the Pakistani society at-large and it could create serious security issues across the country. Meanwhile, the government authorities must initiate legal action against

the top brass of TLP for continuously instigating violence and spreading religious hatred under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016.

The government must also coordinate with social media corporations to combat the propagation of internet content that incites violence. Moreover, Facebook, Twitter, and Google have already publicised about promising platforms like the “Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism” that was launched to assist researchers in this regard. Implementing finest practices will diminish vicious rhetoric while ensuring easy access to social media in Pakistan. Another line-of-action authorities should consider is keenly countering religious extremism through propagating more moderate teaching of religion. Through NACTA, in collaboration with civil society, speeches and sermons by moderate Islamic scholars such as Javed Ghamidi should be promoted at mass levels to counter extremism on social media.

The state of Pakistan seriously needs to consider the aforementioned recommendations since it a need of the hour to draw a line between freedom of expression/speech and hate speech. If the state continues to tolerate the hostile attitude of TLP towards both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, then the other extremist groups would start doing the same for various purposes, and eventually the general public of the country would suffer. The government of Pakistan needs to force the writ of state against the extremist religious groups like TLP to counter the narrative that state-impunity is being given to such radical elements.

Future Research

The researcher of this study strongly believes that further research is needed to closely analyse the words, themes, concepts and ideologies used by the leaders of TLP in their speeches while spreading religious hatred. In future studies, the researcher could explore and use critical discourse analysis as a research methodology to better understand the communication mechanism of TLP with respect to power. Moreover, future researches may be conducted with an aim to design an effective strategy or policy to counter religious hate speech on digital space while not curbing freedom of speech.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

This is an academic research questionnaire being designed as a part of my M.Sc. Thesis that I have been doing under the supervision of the esteemed faculty of Institute of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab. My research topic is "*Spread of Religious Hatred through Social Media in Pakistan: The Case of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)*." Please fill the questionnaire and help me in achieving my academic and research objectives. All the information related to your responses will be kept confidential.

Note: Only the students of University of the Punjab, University of Karachi; University of Peshawar; Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences; National University of Sciences & Technology, Karakoram International University, and University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir can fill this questionnaire.

Q1. What is your age group?

17-19

20-22

23-25

26-28

29 or above

Q2. What is your gender?

Female

Male

Transgender

Other

4

Q3. In which region do you live in Pakistan?

Punjab

Sindh

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Balochistan

Islamabad

Gilgit-Baltistan

Azad Jammu & Kashmir

Q4. In which university are you enrolled?

University of the Punjab

University of Karachi

University of Peshawar

BUIITEMS

NUST

Karakoram International University

University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir

Q5. Name your religion (if you don't believe in any religion, please either write 'Atheist' or 'Agnostic')

Q6. Are you an active user of social media?

Yes

No

Q7. How many hours you use social media on daily basis?

0-1 hour

1-2 hour

2-3 hour

3-4 hour

More than 4 hours

Q8. Which social media platform you use the most?

Facebook

Twitter

YouTube

Instagram

Other

Q9. Do you think the usage of social media platforms is rapidly increasing in Pakistan?

Yes

No

Q10. Do you think religious hatred is often spread on social media in Pakistan?

Yes

No

Maybe

Q11. Do you think religio-political parties of Pakistan spread religious hatred through their social media accounts for political benefits?

Yes

No

Maybe

Q12. Are you aware of a far-right religio-political party named Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and its chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi?

Yes

No

Q13. Do you know TLP actively use social media?

Yes

No

Q14. Have you ever read or watched anything uploaded by TLP on their official social media handles?

Yes

No

Maybe

Likert Scale

Statement 1: TLP has been using digital space as a tool to spread religious hatred in Pakistan.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 2: TLP has been using digital space to ignite the flames of sectarianism and religious extremism in Pakistan.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 3: TLP leaders often promote sectarianism targeting Shia community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 4: TLP leaders often promote sectarianism targeting Deobandi community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 5: TLP leaders often promote sectarianism targeting Wahabi community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 6: TLP leaders often target often target Ahmadiyya community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 7: TLP leaders often target often target Hindu community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 8: TLP leaders often target often target Christian community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 9: TLP leaders often target often target Sikh community in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 10: TLP leaders often target other non-Muslim religious communities in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 11: TLP leaders repeatedly spread religious hatred by misinterpreting Islamic principles, core beliefs, and laws related to Islamic jurisprudence in their speeches/statements that were later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 12: TLP frequently abuses sensitive religious issues while spreading religious hatred against non-Muslim communities in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 13: TLP often exploit the sensitive blasphemy issue while spreading religious hatred against non-Muslim communities in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 14: TLP regularly exploit the issue of finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) while spreading religious hatred against non-Muslim communities in their speeches/statements that are later posted on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 15: TLP has negatively affected the social fabric of Pakistan by spreading religious hatred on social media.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 16: The government authorities shall immediately contact the management of Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube to permanently suspend the social media accounts of TLP.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree

Statement 17: The government authorities shall initiate legal action against the TLP leaders for instigating religious hatred and violence under Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly Agree