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Homosexual Media Exposure and Attitude toward Homosexuals: Moderating Role of Religion

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Abstract

Online streaming platforms over the past 10 years are growing faster than ever in this new millennium of digitized technological innovation. These platforms have not only revolutionized the means of media consumption, but they are producing unexpected effects on the masses as well. For the most part, these platforms have captured the masses around the globe through enormous entertaining content by distributing diverse films and television series. This research aims to investigate the impact of homosexual media on attitude formation and moderating role of religion on the relationship between content exposure and attitude toward homosexuality. In this study, a questionnaire was adopted as an instrument to collect the data. A sample of 440 adults and young adults was selected by using convenience sampling technique. Further, by using concept of 'Symbolic interactionism' the study aimed to understand how media exposed people to its content and how religion moderate between media exposure and attitude formation. Findings of this research suggested that majority Pakistani adults and young adults hold a negative attitude towards homosexual people. Furthermore, moderating displaying evidence on the absence of any consequential and significantly conditional role of religion among the relationship between exposure of homosexual content and attitude of adults and young adults.

Keywords: *Attitude toward Homosexuality, Online Streaming Platforms, Religion, Symbolic Interactionism.*

Introduction

Media exposure to diverse content is increasing in this age of digital technology. The concept of a global village could be really experienced now where mediated content penetration to diverse communities is magnificent. People are exposed to the content which is still illicit to their community and prohibited to local media. It is evident that media exposure creates significant effects on critical thinking and beliefs of the consumers, particularly media has an inspiring power to influence youngsters (Gehrau et al., 2016). Media helps in shaping an individual's views, attitudes, and behaviors, particularly for those who do not have reach to other sources of information (Espino et al., 2021).

Its crucial role as an entertainment provider helps the individual in shaping attitude towards a social phenomenon. The reach and exposure to notions that may have been foreign for certain societies are becoming more common and are being accepted by the people (Cordeiro et al., 2018). However, we can see the different acceptance and rejection rate depends upon the phenomena measured on social and religious grounds. Acceptance and rejection of the content also depends upon the media message and interaction of the audience to the media because media exposure constructs mediated reality through comparison and self-production. As globalization is continuing to flourish, many cultures around the world are witnessing a paradigm shift. Societies are changing their attitudes to the phenomenon of homosexuality more aligned with Western positive approach (Martel et al., 2004). This study aims to investigate:

- The impact of homosexual media exposure on attitudes toward homosexuality among young adults and adults.

- The moderating effect of religion on the relationship between homosexual media exposure and the attitude of young adults and adults toward homosexuality

Literature review

Media Exposure and Homosexuality

Homosexuality is a social phenomenon that is being romanticized by mainstream media in television programs, films, music videos, and even in content produced for online streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, HBO Max, Amazon Prime Video, etc. (Harrington, 2003; Hart, 2004). The age of digitization has extended the exposure to homosexual media which is emerging as a strong reason for increasing positive attitude toward homosexuals. The lesbian and gay portrayal of characters was not a part of media and homosexual characters were absent from the mainstream media for a very long time. But in the past decade homosexual characters have paved their way into mainstream media with Ellen Morgan being the most publicized lesbian character played by Ellen DeGeneres on television (Bonds-Raacke et al., 2007).

Now, there has been a continuous effort made by the media to make itself a diverse and inclusive ecosystem. Of the 300 most-viewed programs in 2019 (including broadcast, cable, and streaming), 92% of these shows had diverse characters including LGBTQ characters. These characters now with the help of the on-screen experience help the consumers to learn more about sexual minorities (Nielsen, 2020). Media exposure to homosexuality, whether it be through news or entertainment media, demonstrated more positive results for acceptance and willingness to learn about homosexuality and homosexual individuals. It was concluded that individuals who consumed more news media were more willing to learn about homosexuality and homosexual individuals, whereas those who consumed entertainment media were accepting it more (Gonta et al., 2017).

The continual exposure to homosexual media helps in developing an individual's attitude towards how they feel about homosexual individuals. It is identified that if homosexual people are shown in limelight in mainstream media, then the audiences will grow to have more tolerance towards homosexual people (Harrington, 2003; Hart, 2004). Media consumers will tend to make relationships with the characters that are being portrayed on television (Bond & Compton, 2015). The exposure to homosexual media will have a similar effect on the media consumer and it can be predicted that the exposure to lesbian and gay characters could help individuals in identifying and empathizing with homosexual individuals which can then lead to the formation of positive attitudes towards them (Olson et al., 2006; Calzo & Ward, 2009). Moreover, heterosexual individuals who do not know homosexual persons in real life, still willing to advocate for homosexuals just by the media interaction (Bond & Compton, 2015). This positive attitude then encourages the youth to have both online and offline contact with homosexuals (Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2020; Feng et al, 2012). Media has become a tool that helps young individuals to view homosexuality in a positive light and they show more acceptability towards it (Sharpe, 2002).

Homosexuality and Attitude.

Individual' attitude toward homosexuality is still obnoxious in many countries. Most countries consider homosexuality a crime and punish homosexual people through fines, imprisonment, and a sentence to death (BBC, 2016). Therefore, the majority people in a society have hostile behavior toward homosexual people (Poushter & Kent, 2020); Physical attacks, personal rejection by family, and derogatory jokes show hostile and rejected behavior of society (Reasons & Hughson, 2000). Beliefs and culture associated to the community infuse ideology based on prejudices and wired behavior towards lesbian and gay people (Ventura et al., 2004). They are more likely to suffer intolerance, harassment, mockery, and threat of violence (Subhrajit, 2014), subjected to social exclusion. Even heterosexual males are reported as not being comfortable with homosexual males due to their highly effeminate physical appearance attitude and behavior. Another reason behind the discomfort is a consideration of homosexuality as a sinful act as well (Azrowani et al., 2012).

Perception about homosexuality appears over time and gradually changes from noticing homosexuality as criminal behavior to non-criminal behavior, and homosexuality as pathological changes to non-pathological (Cao et al., 2010; Landicho et al., 2014). As globalization is continuing to flourish and the world becoming a global village, many cultures around the world are changing their attitudes toward homosexual behavior to be more aligned with Western ideologies (Martel et al., 2004). For many years, scholars have studied the factors that may influence attitude toward lesbian and gay people. They assumed the stronger gender identification associated with more negative attitude toward homosexuals among men than women (Gulevich et al., 2021). The prevalence of such ambiguous attitudes suggested the individual attitude toward homosexual remained quite conservative such as women reported being more comfortable working with male homosexuals than men (Lim, 2002).

Moreover, individuals from different cultures varies in perception toward homosexual relying gender belief systems prevalent in their cultures (Kyes & Tumbelaka, 1994) as there is a different relationship among gender identification and attitude particularly toward gay men and lesbian women (Gulevich et al., 2021). Gender identification is connected with the acceptance of stereotypes about men and women. Person with high gender identification is more likely to associate with stereotypical features to themselves, and have more stereotypical characteristics, positive or negative attitude towards similar or opposite personality (Bosson & Michniewicz, 2013), as masculine men have reported gender identification more positively than feminine men (Glick et al., 2015).

However, gender differences have not been viewed significantly examining attitude toward homosexuals, but dislike behavior toward lesbian and gay people is observed in particular people who have strong traditional gender attitudes (Kite & Whitley, 1998). For similar reasons, individual with greater authoritarianism is likely to have a negative attitude toward lesbian and gay people (Altemeyer & Altemeyer, 1996). In addition, researchers provided evidence about the relationship between gender role beliefs and attitudes towards homosexuality that demonstrated a significant association between attitudes toward homosexual people and generalized

conservative belief systems; in this case they observed an average association between authoritarianism and negative attitude toward homosexuality (Whitley & Lee, 2000). Consistency of existing literature support mediating role of social dominance orientation of individual on gender-related prejudice and attitudes toward gay and lesbians (Pratto et al., 1997), and gender play role as a mediator for the cohort differences in tolerance toward gays and lesbians (Cheng et al., 2016).

H1: There is significant association between homosexual media exposure content and attitude toward homosexuals of adults and young adults.

Moderating Role of Religiosity among Homosexual Media Content and Attitude

Scholars have worked to understand the factors those increase negative attitude toward homosexuality and could be the determinants of the rejection of homosexuality (Adamczyk, Pitt, 2009; Adamczyk, 2017; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Rowatt, et al., 2006). One of the important factors, religion, has been discovered to be a major predictor of an individual's attitude towards homosexuality since long (Larsen et al., 1983), and confirm that religion plays a central role in defining our attitudes toward different social constructs and facets of life. Homosexuality is one such concept that is greatly influenced by the religious orientation and religious commitment of an individual (Allport, 1954). It has been observed that an individual has two ways of experiencing religion. An individual who has an extrinsic orientation will practice religion casually and will selectively shape it or change it completely to fit their needs, whereas on the other hand an individual who has an intrinsic orientation will find their master motive in the religion and will live their lives in accordance to it (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Discussing the religious role, sample of Christian students found that intrinsic orientation positively predicted discrimination toward homosexuals (Herek, 1987). Further, investigation of the effects of an individual's religious approach on heterosexism observed that the individuals who were internalizing their religious teachings and who were incorporating those teachings into their daily routine were most likely to be heterosexist (Herek, McLemore, 2013). Similarly, analysis of South African Muslims involving same-sex marriages discovered that people disparage homosexuality based on religious doctrines. It was also observed that a community's attitude towards homosexuality involves refusal and confidentiality so that they can have a relationship with the community members (Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012). However, strong and the weak religious involvement of an individual concerning negative attitudes toward homosexual individuals among Christians and Muslim people could be seen (Roggemans et al., 2015).

Individuals who have strong religiosity when compared to those individuals with less religiosity are less likely to advocate civil rights for homosexual individuals (Johnson et al., 1997). Public opinions have shown time and time again that there is a notable association between religiosity and an individual's negative attitude towards homosexual individuals (Olson et al., 2006). The empirical findings reported that clergymen who lead life in a more unidimensional manner consider social issues through the lens of the holy scriptures and pose negative attitude against homosexuality (Wagenaar & Bartos, 1977).

H2: There has significant moderating role of religious among the relationship of homosexual media exposure and attitude among adults and young adults.

Methodology

The cross-sectional survey was conducting through convenience sampling technique and a total of 440 adult and young adults by using the explanatory design endeavoring the relationship between homosexual content and attitude toward homosexuality with moderating effect of religion. The adopted questionnaire was divided into four parts, fist taken demographic information, media exposure scale adopted from Maryam (2021) with 19 items, Attitude toward homosexuality with 22 items was adopted from Gonta et al., (2017) and religious commitment inventory with 10 items form Worthington et al., (2003). All items measured on five-point Likert scale by analyzed on SPSS Amos.

Results

Survey based quantitative data were collected from a total number of 440 respondents from the universities across the Punjab region. The demographics results revealed that male respondents represent 38.4%, of the total respondents where female made 61.4% contribution to the data collection process. It was also found that the highest percentage of these respondents age-wise existed in 18 - 21 while individuals who are 30 or above are the lowest in the percentage. These demographic results have been summarized in Table 1 shared below:

Table 1. Demographics

Items	Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	169	38.4%
	Female	270	61.4%
Age	18 - 21	187	42.5%
	22 - 25	180	40.9%
	26 - 29	58	13.2%
	30 - 33	11	2.5%
	34 or above	4	0.9%
Education	Bachelors	351	79.8%
	MS	49	11.1%
	M.Phil.	21	4.8%
	Ph.D.	19	4.3%
Total (N)		440	100%

Data analysis usually starts by checking the mean, median, standard deviation. The goal at this step is to define the over-all distributional characteristics of the data. Low standard deviations depict that the respondents replied nearest to

the mean value. On the contrary, a high standard deviation depicts more spread of values under the curve

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Media Exposure	440	1.00	5.00	3.3209	.94380
Attitude	440	2.00	5.00	3.6838	.49577
Religion	440	1.00	5.00	3.2884	.89090

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted by using principal component analysis for loading estimates of all measured variables. The items of variable “Media Exposure” found 25.2% total variance, “Attitude” found 52.2% total variance and Religion found 46.3% of the total variance. Prior to the EFA, the KMO measures of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test for factor analysis. The KMO of media exposure construct shows .825, Attitude towards homosexuality found .878. it means probability of significance of the Bartlett sphere formation verification was 0.00 shows goodness of fit significance values of measured variables. The table 2 shows Kaiser Major Olkin (KMO)

Table 3. Kaiser Mayer Olkin and Bartlett’s Test

Constructs	KMO Index	Goodness of Fit Significance Value
Attitude Towards Homosexuality	.916	.000
Media Exposure	.825	.000
Religion	.878	.000

For the CFA, a model that was derived from the EFA was set up and tested. The SRMR <0.10, RMSEA <0.08, CFI >0.90, TLI >0.90, RFI >0.85 were used to check the overall fitness of the model. As shown in Table 4, SRMR RMSEA shows goodness of fit measures. This indicates that the proposed model fits the data reasonably well.

Table 4: Goodness of Fit Measures

SRMR (<0.10)	RMSEA (<0.08)			CFI (>0.90)	TLI (>0.90)	RFI
	LO 90	PCLOSE	HI 90			
.071	0.71	.000	0.74	.759	.757	.679

Construct reliability value 0.7 above or higher suggests good reliability. The acceptable range is between 0.6 and 0.7 as shown in Table 5. The variance of media exposure is 1.86 estimated. The probability of getting a critical ratio as large as 11.908 of media exposure in absolute value is less than 0.001. In other words, the variance estimates for media exposure is significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two tailed). Similarly the probability of getting critical ratio as 13.70, variance of attitude and religion are significant different from zero at 0.01 level (two tailed). It means these statements are approximately correct under assumption.

Table 5: Variance of the all variables

Constructs	Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	P
Media Exposure	.186	.016	11.908	***
Attitude	.902	.066	13.703	***
Religion	.718	.056	12.824	***

Table 6: Coverience of the Variables

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
ZMed_E <-->	Inter_M	1.871	.209	8.931	***
Inter_M <-->	ZRel_E	3.419	.253	13.540	***
ZMed_E <-->	ZRel_E	.070	.049	1.413	.158

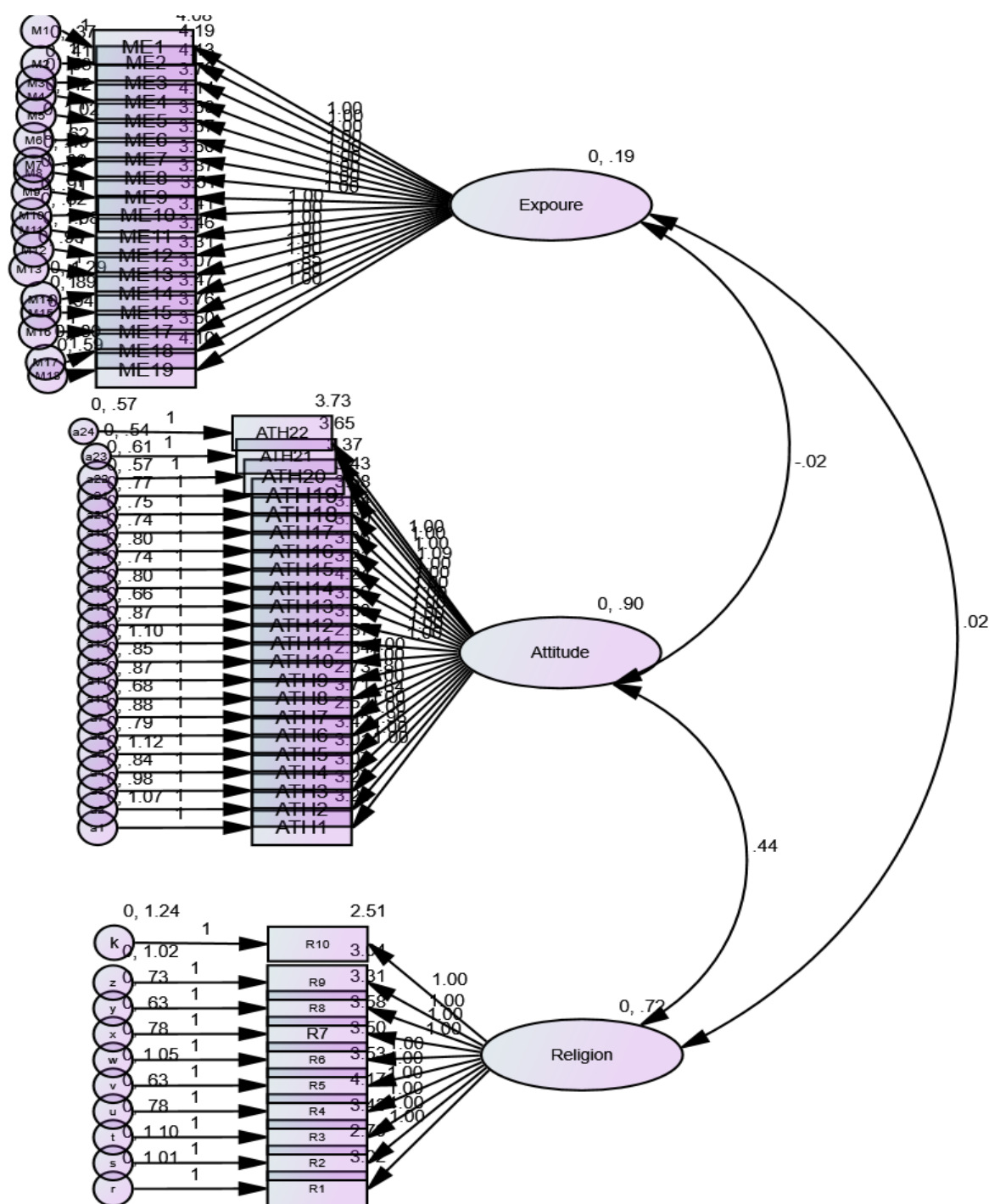


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

The Path Analysis showing the direct and interaction effect between contiguous, outcome and regulating variables. The results of the analysis showed the predictor variable i.e., Media Exposure have negative weak effect on student's attitude towards homosexuals. On the contrary, religion has not significant role in the relationship. It means moderating displaying an evidence on the absence of any consequential and significantly conditional role of moderator. Henceforward, it was also statistically revealed that media exposure has weak negative role, nor their religion is pivotal to sustain the effect of these students on the attitude toward

homosexuals. The results based on the empirical evidence are illustrated in the Figure 2 and Table 7 shown below:

Figure 2: AMOS Model for Path Analysis Showing Structural Relationship

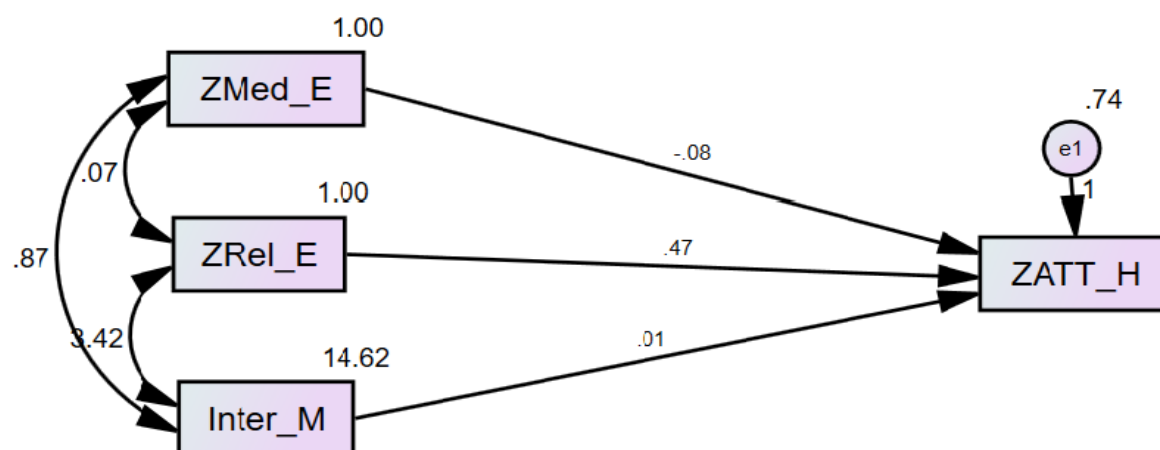


Table 7: Regression Results of Direct Effects of Model

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
ZATT_H <---	ZMed_E	-.083	.157	-.527	***
ZATT_H <---	ZRel_E	.474	.307	1.544	.123
ZATT_H <---	Inter_M	.010	.092	.111	***

Discussion

The present study carried 'Symbolic Interactionism' by Herbert Blumer which stated that an individual's negative attitude develops toward homosexuals after the media exposure, and who is employing religion as a framework of meaning will have a contradicting attitude toward homosexuals and homosexuality in contrast to an individual who does not apply and use religion as a framework of meaning. So, it can be stated that religiosity is a system of meaning and is a factor that can shape the attitude of a person towards homosexuality and homosexuals (Kuptsevykh, 2014). The positive or negative attitude of an individual toward homosexuality and homosexuals will be shaped by the extent that which the individual uses religious ideology as a system of meaning (Kuptsevykh, 2014).

Drawing upon the Symbolic Interactionism theory, the current research investigates the moderating effect of religion on relationship between exposure of homosexual content and attitude of university students. With regards to the analysis, a total male respondent (38.4%) and (61.4%) were females between majority age range of 18-21 years old. EFA (Exploratory Factor Analysis) conducted by using principal component analysis, measured variables media exposure 25.2%, Religion 46.3% and attitude has reported 52.2% of the total variance. Prior to EFA, KMO shown in Table 3, goodness of fit significant values of measured variables. Although, For the CFA, SRMR <0.10, RMSEA <0.08, CFI >0.90, TLI >0.90, RFI >0.85 were used

to check the overall fitness of the model. As shown in Table 4, SRMR, RMSEA shows goodness of fit measures. This shows that the proposed model fits the data rationally sound.

The result of the research indicates that there is negative relationship among media exposure and attitude toward homosexual content. As reported by Detenber et al., (2007), there is negative and intolerance attitude toward lesbian women and gay men. Similarly, previous studies found the disgust-sensitive individual reported negative attitude homosexual (Wang et al., 2019). It is fact that majorities responded the negative attitude toward homosexuality and it should be acceptable in society (Lin et al., 2016). Many researches have examined the association between prejudice behavior and homosexuals (Crawford et al., 2014). A meta-analysis of 17 studies found the association among the disgust and prejudice toward gay men (Kiss et al., 2018), thus more negative attitude toward homosexuals (Inber et al., 2009) and likely to politically and social conservative (Crawford et al., 2014).

AMOS model for path analysis, regression weight showing the weak negative association between homosexual related media exposure and attitude among university students. It shown the direct effect of media exposure and attitude by interaction effect of attitude and religion. The results of the analysis showing the exogenous or predictor variables i.e., media exposure had weak negative effect on the criterion variable i.e., attitude towards homosexuals. Similarly, it has also found the insignificant regulating effect displaying evidence on the absence of any consequential and significantly conditional role of moderator i.e., Religion. The results of Wang et al., (2019) suggested moral foundations more likely to intervene the association between exposure and negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. In this context, Spierings (2018) found individual have strong Muslim background is a significant predictor of negative attitude toward homosexuality. At the same time, people from the many of Muslim societies having negative attitude toward gay men and women (Dudink, 2017). Specifically, the mosque attendance expected negative attitude toward homosexuality (Glas and Spierings, 2021).

Other studies pointed to varying results, individual's religious approach on heterosexism (Herek, 1987), churchgoers with intrinsic and extrinsic orientation detested homosexual orientation and homosexuals' individuals. Although, it has been observed that religiosity and conservative religious orientation is associated with an individual's negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Glassner & Owen, 1976). Similarly, individuals who have strong religiosity when compared to those individuals with less religiosity are less likely to advocate civil rights for homosexual individuals (Johnson et al., 1997). Moreover, individual who have negative attitude towards homosexuals were those were strong religious orientation (Hans et al., 2012).

Henceforward, it was also revealed that homosexual media exposure has negative role in maximizing the attitude toward homosexuals, nor their religion is pivotal to sustain the effect of media exposure of these students on attitude towards homosexuals. Public opinions have shown repeatedly that there is a notable association between religiosity and an individual's negative attitude towards homosexual individuals (Olson et al., 2006). In a study, an individual who follows his religion strictly and obeys the fundamentals of an individual's religion was

positively correlated with having a more prejudiced attitude towards homosexual (McFarland, 1989).

Conclusion

With the increase in homosexual representation in the content, researchers are being attracted to study the attitudes towards homosexuality and the factors that can contribute to altering the attitudes of heterosexual individuals toward homosexuals. A review of growing literature holds negative correlation has remained consistent over time (Eliason, 1995). The results of this research corroborated the weak negative correlation between the individual's media exposure and attitude towards homosexuals. It has been also observed that there is an absence of any consequential and significant conditional role of religion among media exposure and individual's attitude toward homosexual people. Evidence of the literature suggested that conservative religious attitude has direct effect on the individuals' attitude toward gay men and lesbian women (Hans et al., 2012)

Future Recommendation

- To check the media exposure in regard of homosexuality and its impact, future researcher should be conducted in depth interviews on the intersection, religion and societal factor.
- Future researcher could explore the impact of religious teaching on experiences of LGBTQ individual toward homosexuality
- In Pakistan, society is heavily impacted by the religion and homosexuality is still taboo. Future researchers could check the role of advocating for LGBTQ rights in Muslim majority specially in Pakistan.

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