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Analysis of Online Religious Narratives and the Role of Social Media in Radicalization of Pakistan's Youth

Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of digital content creation triggering sectarianism, polarization and framing of radical narratives on social media. The radicals twist mainstream Islamic constructs through skewed interpretations to spread hatred and violence. The extremist and exclusivist narratives built on Takfeeri and Khawariji footprints, are stepping stone of an ideological pyramid leading to terrorism, attracting backlash and endangering sovereignty. The paper answers the question that how radical narratives are formed and calibrated with audience sentiments and circumstances, through specialized communication skills, deploying religious symbolism, charisma, oratory, semantics, jargons, and logic, engulfed in deceptive interpretive techniques to influence. AI(Algorithms) works as catalyst in creating a strange ecosystem of digital terrorism fueling violence, threatening harmony and stability. The tailored conceptual model, apply mixed methods, discourse and narrative analysis to discern themes, hypothesize and find correlation between variables in suggesting measures to curb virtual radicalization in chaotic-socio and geo-political environment.

Keywords: Radicalization, Extremism, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Terrorism, Cyber Indoctrination, Narrative Building, Sectarianism, Psychological warfare

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of digital content creation triggering sectarianism, polarization and framing of radical narratives on social media. The radicals twist mainstream Islamic constructs through skewed interpretations to spread hatred and violence. The extremist and exclusivist narratives built on Takfeeri and Khawariji footprints, are stepping stone of an ideological pyramid leading to terrorism, attracting backlash and endangering sovereignty. The paper answers the question that how radical narratives are formed and calibrated with audience sentiments and circumstances, through specialized communication skills, deploying religious symbolism, charisma, oratory, semantics, jargons, and logic, engulfed in deceptive interpretive techniques to influence. AI(Algorithms) works as catalyst in creating a strange ecosystem of digital terrorism fueling violence, threatening harmony and stability. The tailored conceptual model, apply mixed methods, discourse and narrative analysis to discern themes, hypothesize and find correlation between variables in suggesting measures to curb virtual radicalization in chaotic-socio and geo-political environment.

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Introduction

Extremism is the bedrock of terrorism (Baqai, 2011). Various socio-political and socio-economic factors exacerbate extremist and sectarian tendencies. Islamic civilization like other ideological edifices has faced the dilemma of symbiotic evolution of neo-radical versions, leading to internal rifts. The issue of succession, the legitimacy of leaders, and their

reign divided the faithful into groups. The plots led to the assassination of the second, third, and fourth caliphs. Islam during expansion nurtured a number of ideological and political differences leading to gory civil wars among tribes of *Ummayds*, *Abbassid*, and *Fatimides*. This era saw conspiracies, rebellion, and outcasting of Khawarij. The dialectic approaches are inherently vulnerable to



radicalization (Dawson, 2018). The radical Islamic doctrines evolved since then still remain opaque, marred by politico-ideological, historical, and sociological underpinnings. This paper aims to scrutinize the contemporary online narratives, and sacrilegious content causing civil strife in the virtual world. Cyber indoctrination springs from religious schism and disregard for *ijtihad* (reasoning) and *Ijma* (consensus).

The literature covers the ideological and historical lens, ignoring the behavioral aspect of radical narratives. Important intersections and cleavages of radical thought processes are overlooked due to the scarcity of empirical evidence, resulting in flawed analysis of extremist perspectives. However, this wholesome conceptual approach of psychological and behavioral perspectives debunks the extremist 'tool-kit' used to normalize violence (Loza, 2007). It is significant to examine important tools employed in building an appealing and popular radical narrative for cyber society. The art of conveying it to the audience in an interactive way; using audio, video, and editing aids on websites remained an uncharted territory. This analytical research bridges gaps and answers the problem as to what are the factors contributing to radicalization in the virtual world, and how extremists are distorting the Islamic perspective of peace and harmony.

Pakistan is a diverse society, both ethnically and religiously. The country has two hundred thirty-five million people with a significant youth bulge. Religion embodies a significant force in Pakistan's state and society (Haqqani, 2010). Since independence, various extremist and sectarian waves have tormented the social fabric. The nation had paid a heavy price in the eradication of multi-national terrorist outfits, during the war on terrorism. However, the recent onslaught of social media extremism, in the backdrop of the re-emergence of terrorists and insurgents on Pakistan's western border poses an imminent threat to security. Pakistan is ranked eighth among the top ten countries facing highly organized religious violence, given its chaotic timeline filled with extremism. Instances of vigilante attacks; and incendiary speeches riling up the crowds to attack members of minorities, and their congregation places are common. The events of the kidnapping of a lady accused of running a brothel in Islamabad; lynching of a student alleged of blasphemy at the University of Mardan; Sri Lankan emigrant in

Sialkot; attacks on a Christian in Sargodha; on a lady wearing calligraphic shirt in Lahore (Malik, 2021); on Hindu Samadhi in Karak have proved eye-openers (Rashid, 2023). Numerous reported and unreported incidents of vigilante justice, dharnas (sit-ins), sectarian clashes, mob attacks on private properties, and even military installations, depict a reign of terror concerning policymakers. This situation requires a proactive approach in halting upcoming waves of religious extremism, capable of forming a nexus with proscribed militant organizations. The potential socio-political impact of mob justice requires an unequivocal declaration that these fanatical actions in any form cannot be tolerated by the state (Singay, 2020) as envisaged in the National Action Plan (NAP).

The latest mayhems reveal evolving patterns and links between social media sensationalism and online propagation/provocation in Pakistan. Social media apps glorifying the violence of perpetrators have proved a catalyst in a chaotic equation. There exist patterns of inadvertent patronization of radical thinking as well as planned exploitations. The AI tracks interest, and willingness for a cause, to donate funds, provides platforms for virtual and physical group activities, offers online training, and sponsors public causes (Akram & Nasar, 2023). These platforms are mostly driven by profitability mechanisms, collect data, and often compromise the subscribers' interests, and personal information to the data analytics firms, page owners, domain servers, and network providers, with disregard for data security. While predators and hackers lurking around these pages, stalk users for identity/data theft through malware, ransomware, and viruses expanding the reach of the dark web.

Methodology

The primary and secondary data are examined initially through an analytical framework using discourse analysis of ocular accounts, verbal nonverbal cues, gestures, tone, and tenor discovering the 'modus operandi' used in cajoling, instigating, persuading, and provoking users. The research assesses actor's motivations, methods, and influence on social media followers by scrutinizing their digital footprint. Initially, FGDs among diverse groups of students, teachers, lawyers, scholars, jurists, and cyber security experts were held to crystalize the problem, identify variables, and develop a hypothesis. Subsequently, the discourse

analysis of sampled videos comprising speeches, and lectures of scholars on various apps, blogs, websites, YouTube channels, and podcasts scattered over social media, explains the rhetorics and narratives. Similarly, edited videos and audio clips beside digital traffic and comments of followers/visitors over these contents were analyzed. Hundreds of links covering thousands of comments have been analyzed to confirm the positive and negative impact of radicalization/deradicalization on users.

Since (AI) algorithms exacerbate anarchy, and incite violent action through provocative material and suggestive violence. They work as engines of social media apps, bridging all gaps between controller and user, and working as moderating/intervening variables between content and radicalization. Artificial intelligence helps build rapport with the audience, turning them into followers. Extremist's manipulations of mainstream perspective, in a volatile socio-political environment make users vulnerable. Hence the fragile virtual atmosphere surrounding users in the cyber world is examined using quantitate analysis of structured questions. The survey measures the impact on the users by applying random (probability) through a snowball sampling technique.

Limitations

The paper ensures an unbiased analysis, with due reverence to religious scholarship and edicts. Hence the religious contents are not examined for *authenticity* and *validity* rather their usage/distortions by extremists in a malicious manner and their impact on viewers is a unit of analysis.

Problem Statement

Figure 1

Model of Digital Radicalization



The dissection of the process of cyber-indoctrination by extremist organizations is

The ubiquitous phenomenon of manipulation of mainstream online religious narratives by extremists and radicals prevailing on social media is hazardous but nearly uncontrollable. The extremists twist established historical facts and translations. They associate sentimental values with religious notions while peddling violent agendas to achieve their ulterior motives of creating unrest and anarchy. The juxtaposition of Islamic religious edicts, misinterpretation and misapplication of religious authorities, and isolated/out-of-context use of religious scriptures, traditions, customs, principles, and maxims pose serious threats to a diverse harmonious society. The use of invalid religious edicts has become rampant in distorting the consensus. Pakistan's delicate social equilibrium maintained through customary tolerance is disturbed by fabricated radical narratives spread through AI-based propaganda tools framing the audience, projecting confusion and chaos (FITNA) at masse on social media in a fifth-generation warfare.

Conceptualizing Digital Radicalization

This paper explores the eco-system around social media followers, where virtual content is generated, disseminated, propagated, and shaped into radical narrative(s). The process is reinforced through interactions, isolationism, debates, and discourse of radicalization. The internet and virtual world through its technological tools allow the extremist organization to improvise their actions anonymously and pseudonymously. They cast aspersions on mainstream popular versions to build and defend their odd but radical narratives.

essential in preventing the radicalization of Pakistan's youth. The questions as to why, when,

and how these oddly shaped narratives gain traction and recognition in the age of information technology, remain central research inquiry. There are conditions when users fail to safeguard themselves from the fifth-generation, psychological warfare. Similarly, it also assesses the situations where mainstream scholars inadvertently become part of manipulation due to their subtle approaches and rhetoric.

Historically, puritanical extremist versions due to obscurity, absurdity, and impracticality have been rejected by the masses. The conservative intolerant tendencies can be easily twisted to suit the extremist versions. The geo-political, socio-political, and socio-economic challenges across the world also impact on narratives. Thus, mainstream narratives are criticized for being ineffective in the redressal of grievances. The right-wing radical and aggressive narratives are projected as daring, practical, and rational by the extremist leadership. The presence of

these volatile contextual factors pushes Muslims into the realm of an extremist eco-system. These push factors fuel indoctrination leading to radicalization and recognition of violent perspectives as solutions. The peculiar environment of the cyber world encompassing a wide audience, increases the probability of participation from people having identity crises, political insecurity, grievances, and hostility towards Western hegemony.

Social media algorithms control weblinks/content shown to the subscribers/followers. These apps/websites track surfing history, cache, and collect analytics of viewed links, pages, reels, audios, visuals, etc., and suggest content based on the interest, patterns of behavior, and keywords of search history. Thus, the initially curious follower becomes psychologically inclined and receptive to content. The survey reveals the respondents' (social media users) behaviour;

Figure 2

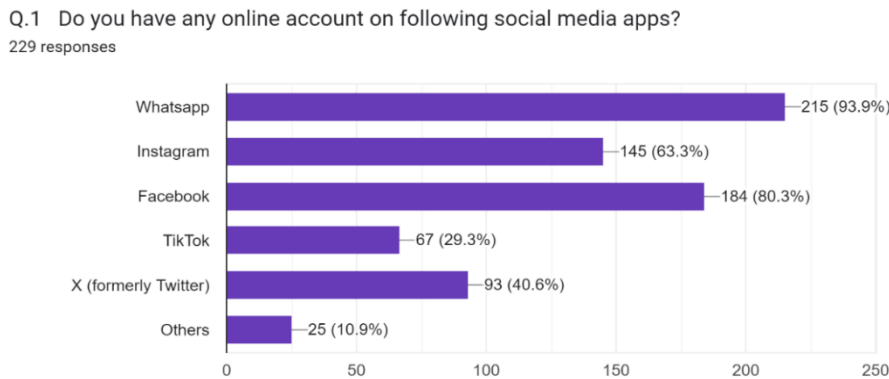


Figure 3

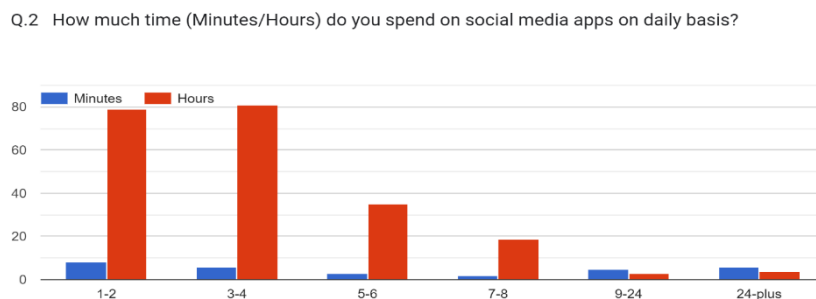
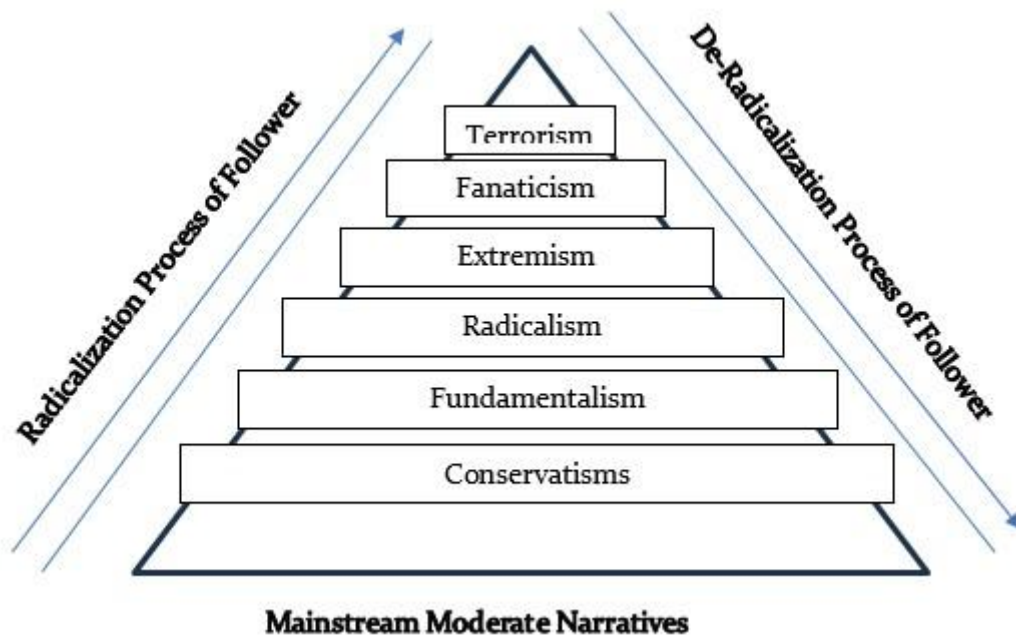


Figure 4

The Hierarchy of Radicalization Narratives

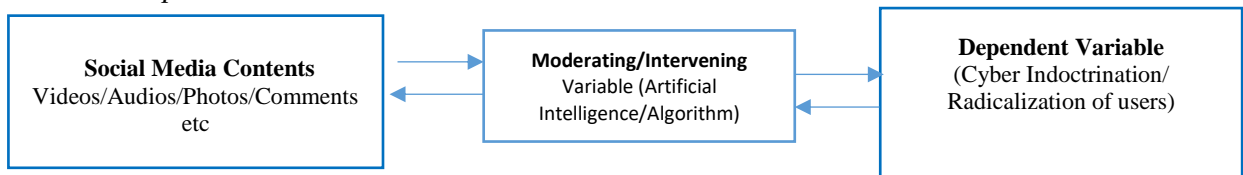


This hierarchy of narratives depicts the stepping stones of the radicalization ladder revealing a seamless gradual ascend from one level to another. The intersection points (common salient) form a vortex that absorbs the follower upwards by systematically captivating them to extreme narratives.

Hypothesis (Null): There is no relationship between twisted online religious content (independent variable) and digital applications using (AI) algorithms (moderating /intervening variable) and radicalization of users in virtual world (dependent variable).

Figure 5

Variables Relationship



The Construction of Islamic Thoughts and Belief System:

Islam provides a complete code of conduct and a pathway of life called 'Shariah'. It comprises of beliefs, practices, and manners. Shariah enjoins rulings of belief systems; obligations (Fardh), permissible (Halal), and prohibited (Haram) (Kamali, 1989). Scriptures are a fundamental source of deriving commandments of the divine belief system. In Islam traditions (Naqal) and rationality (Aqal) have emerged as interpretation methods

(Bannan, 1988). This methodical choice led to the establishment of different schools of thought. Historically, prominent scholars had developed consensus over the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (Usul) in explaining sources of rulings and deriving any obligation from sources. Therefore, the issuance of edicts (FATWA) requires specialized knowledge and a high degree of command over respective subjects. In the subcontinent, an established curriculum called Dars-e-Nizami remained mandatory for scholars and conferring the

title of Mufti as a pre-requisite for the issuance of Fatwa/edicts.

Radical Islamic Narratives: A Future Perspective

Identity crisis and internal and external socio-economic insecurities harness extremism. These broader issues trigger repulsive and violent versions of non-state-sanctioned Jihad. The displaced diaspora, refugees, and militants from conflict zones project narratives. The perception regarding oppression by foreign powers, colonization, and imperial expansion during the Cold War, and the War on Terror, provide justification for violent radical versions as solutions. The chaotic situation in the Middle East, particularly Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen provides rationale and lends credibility to the actions of the jihadist group on the pretext of brutality perpetrated against their population. However, these grievances are further used by terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Daesh, and TTP in developing their violent narrative against Muslim States and their population. They are blamed for being complicit to Western imperialism. Some puritanical dogmas even permit rebellion against these states and their subjects for being apostates and obstacles in the establishment of genuine Islamic states (Phillips, 2015).

Pakistan's diverse population is composed of; Sunni Hannafis (80-85%) with two sub-sects of Brailvis, Deaobandis, and Shias (10-15 %) (Athna Ashari, Isamailis,) and Ahl-e-Hadith (Salafis) (Bhattacharjee, 2015). These major sects are the prominent religious factions (Masalik) that follow different doctrines. Their internal rivalries are rife. There are seminaries issuing edicts against each other for 'takfer'. There are a number of incidents leading to serious sectarian clashes in Hangu, Parachinar, Gilgit Baltistan, Quetta, etc. The Barelvis associated with the teaching of Sufism (esoteric dimension of Islam), a tolerant and inclusive faction has also become assertive. There are sub-radical

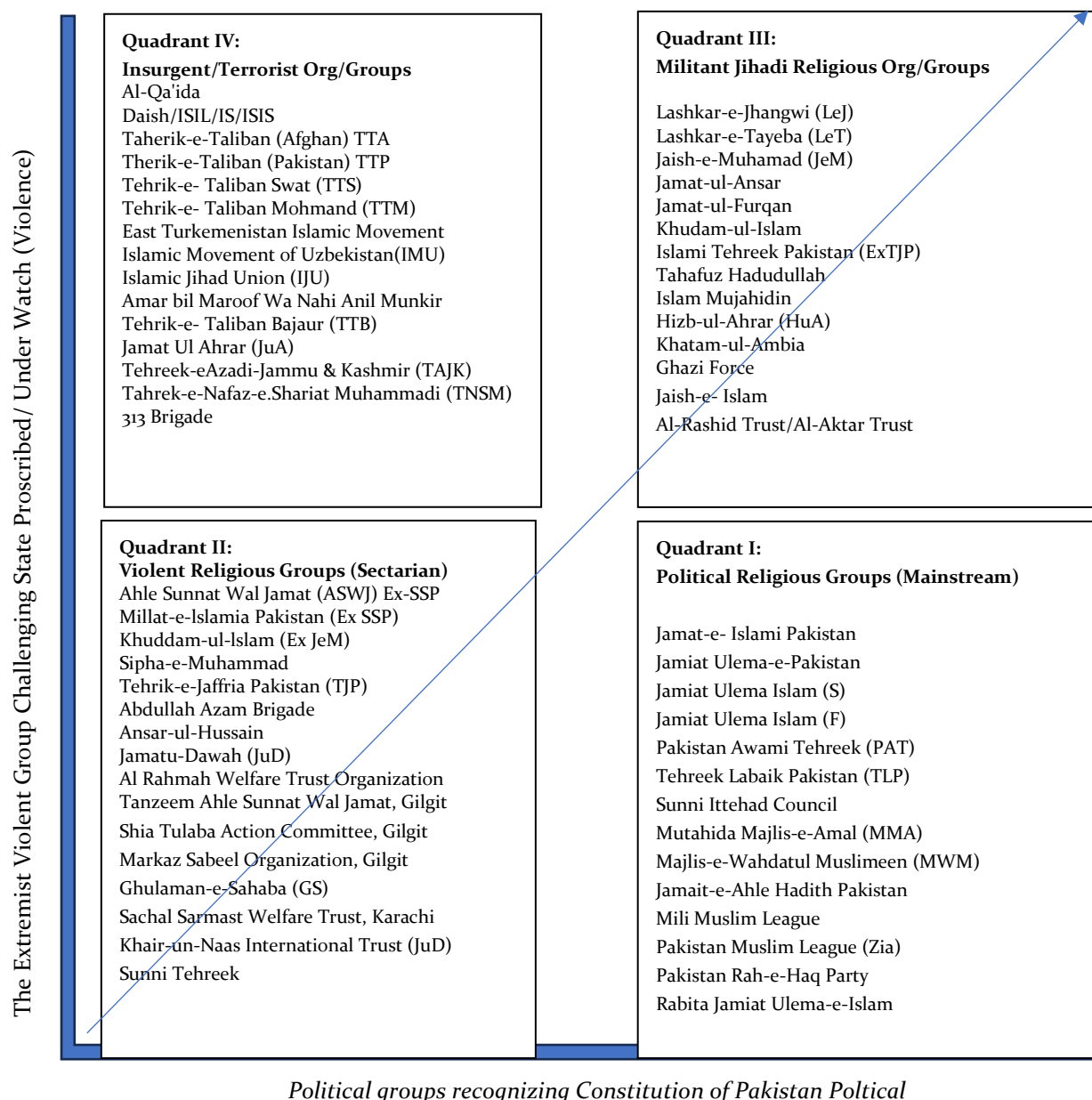
groups and organizations linked to sectarian roots, safeguarding every faction's exclusive identity from being overshadowed or defiled. However, there is consensus upon the sanctity of the honor of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W), Ahl-e-Bait (family), and his companions. The opinion splits on the issue of companions in reference to caliphate. To ensure religious harmony the state has promulgated laws honoring all religious personalities and declared blasphemy as a cognizable and non-bailable offense u/s 297-C of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) (Gautam, 2022). However, the issue of potential misuse of this law remains a highly debated and sensitive matter.

Analysis of Extremist Narratives in Post-Conflict Zones

The discourse analysis of Pakistani organizations reveals that they have their own worldview inspired by international, regional, and local conflicts. This provides impetus to extremist narratives based on the group's understanding of the international systems, their own positioning, and their response to the issues faced by them. These conflict and post-conflict zones ravaged by violence remain prone to similar reactions. The defensive strategy against aggressors in Gaza, Baghdad, Yemen, Syria, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan forms various narratives. The aggression by opponents provides legitimacy to their actions. However, the sensitivity regarding sacrosanct and strategically important conflict zones being nerve centers remains phenomenal in comparison with peripheral locations. Pakistani religious factions take pride in their anti-colonial legacy and resistance against imperialist powers. Since independence Islamist groups have attempted to implement the Islamization project. They aspire for an Islamic state that is focused on fighting for the rights of Muslims locally, regionally, and internationally (Dunning, 2016). The following four quadrants reveal their narratives;

Figure 5

Model: Politico-Religious Narratives of Organization from Political to Violent Perspectives



Prominent Religious Narratives in Pakistan and Proximity to Extremism

Pakistan's multicolored religious canvas is dyed with all hues such as; Brailvis (Sunni-Hannafi), Deobandi (Hannafi), Shia (Ithna-Ashari), and Salafi (Ahl-e-Hadith). All these sects have remained active in various conflict zones and had their proxy jihadi outfits. Brailvis. Socio-political dynamics have led to this shift in the formation of hawkish and intolerant

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Unapologetic in their criticism spree they have shown hypersensitivity to the issues of blasphemy, confronting minorities, international communities, mainstream political parties, and government officials. In view of their manifesto 'to secure the honor/sanctity of the Prophet (PBUH), TLP leadership stressed upon the government to recall its envoy from countries involved in the publication of derogatory caricatures published in Charlie

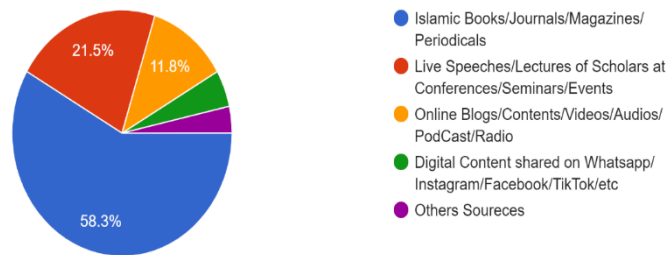
Hebdo and demanded the boycott of their products (Basit, 2020).

The recent rise of some pseudo-intellectuals without any religious certification and credentials has triggered hate speeches on digital media, fomenting religious differences, and threatening peace and harmony in Pakistan's tolerant society. This issue involves the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression. Hence, it is imminent to conduct a discourse analysis of the online narratives to find a correlation between this content and radicalization (Hanfi, 2022). Therefore, the following table in

conjunction with the table above analyzes the orientation, rhetoric, worldview, institutional patronage, political perspective, methodology, and physical presence and digital presence, to assess the narrative, motivations, and consequences of a particular religious narrative, political perspective, and methodology of their organizations. Nevertheless, with the advent of social media, it has been observed that mainstream and tolerant narratives of Islam are challenged by more radical and extremist narratives. Survey respondents were asked the following questions to assess their views.

Figure 6

Q.3 What do you prefer as best and authentic source of religious knowledge?
228 responses



Although majority preference as authentic source was still books and journals but a sizeable number (11.8%) and (5%) considered online and digital sources as authentic. There is an unprecedented raise in popularity of the un-authentic scholars,

openly debating controversial issues of faith, challenging established issues of Ijma (consensus) sharpening sectarian differences and cleavages through hate speech against the belief of other sects.

Table 1

Comparative Religious Narratives of Prominent Scholars

Orientation & population	Prominent Scholars/Allama Maulana/Doctor	Rhetoric and Perspective	World View	Institutional Patronage/Affiliations	Pol. Active faces	FATAWA/JAT from Madaris/Seminaries	Sensitivity Areas and Sacriligious Values	Methodology & Digital Penetration
1-Hanafi- Brailvi (Ahl-u-Sunnah) (Majority)	1. Elyas Qadri, 2. Khadim Rizwi 3. Wasif Ali Wasif 4. Tahir-ul-Qadri 5. Jamil Qalandar	Conventional Sufi and inclusive (National Activism)	Non-Assertive, tolerant except TLP	Jamiyatul Azhar, Egypt, Bareilly India, Jamia Ghusia Behra,	Sunni Tehreek, TLP	Fatawa Rizwiaya, Fatawa Aziz, Alamgiri etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honor of Prophet (SAWW) Caliphs (RA) Family of Prophet Finality of Prophet-hood HolyQuran Sunah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preaching National/international tours Lectures Religious festivities Sufi Circles Seminaries network Stipends Authorship Digital campaigns IPTV/TV
2-Hanafi-Deobaandi (Ahl-u-Sunnah) (Majority)	1. Tariq Jamil 2. Dr.Israr Ahmed 3. Tariq Massod 4. Haq Nawaz Jhangvi	Conventional - conservative (Regional Activism)	Assertive, Less-tolerant	Jamiy Deoband, India, Haqqani, Jamia Banori	Tablighi Jamat, JUI/TTA/TTP,	Fatawa-e-Rashidiya, imdad-ul-Fatawa,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honor of Prophet (SAWW) Caliphs (RA) Family of Prophet Finality of Prophet-hood HolyQuran Sunah 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preaching National/international tours Lectures Religious festivities Sufi Circles Seminaries network Stipends Authorship Digital campaigns IPTV/TV

Orientation & population	Prominent Scholars/Allama Mulana/Doctor	Rhetoric and Perspective	World View	Institutional Patronage/ Affiliations	Pol. Active faces	FATAWAJAT from Madaris/Seminaries	Sensitivity Areas and Sacriligious Values	Methodology & Digital Penetration
3-Salafi /Wahabbi (Ahl-e-Hadith) (Minority)	1. Ishaq Madani 2. Masood Azhar 3. Hafiz Saeed	Conservative-Puritanical (Global Activism)	Assertive and intolerant of other views	Jamia-Omul Qura,, Madina University	Jl/Shabab mili,	Fatawa Darul Uloom Deoband etc Multiple/Random Sources without binding of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse opinions on the status and ranking of caliphs Highly critical of other sects/schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Icons/ emblems/flags Uniforms Turbans/Rob Radio Podcast Utube channels Instagram Reels Guest Speakers Educational Institutions Welfare NGOs Resource generation; Alms/charity Investments Rentals/investments
4-GhairMuqalid and Modernists not affiliating with sects (Rarity)	1. Eng. M.Ali Mirza 2. Javaid Ghamdi 3. Sahil Adeem Hashmi 4. Syed Zahid Hamid	Non-Conventional Modernist (Global Reformist)	Rationalist, critical of all others	No Traditional Degree of Islamic Institute		Multiple Random Sources pose as Mujtahid/thinkers on rationality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hyper-sensitive about Ahle-Bait) finality of Prophethood, and continuity of Imam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zakat, Skins of sacrificial animals International aid/funds from followers Partnership/Muzarbat/Musharkat
5-Shai (Ithna Ashri) (Minority)	1. Shahensha Naqvi 2. Nasir Abbass 3. Arif Raza Alvi 4. Hassan Allah Yari	Conventional - Conservative exclusive (Global Activism)	Assertive and critical of other views	Qum University, Mustansaria		Multiple Sources: Al-Kafi, Man La Yahduruhu al Faqih, Tahdib - al-Ahkam and Al-Istisbar		

Artificial Intelligence and Social Media Indoctrination

Extremist organizations explore the digital footprints of users and take advantage by accessing personal IDs, flooding inboxes with invitations, collecting information, and presenting testimonials of real or fake/ impersonating sympathizers/supporters to lure in users. Onsite live chat options can shift them to more secure, encrypted, private, and trusted groups. Applications such as Telegram, Botim, WhatsApp Viber, Snapchat, TikTok, etc. provide end-to-end encryption. Numerous anonymous and illegal sites provide unbridled access to various unwanted and objectionable data/contents, tracking behavioral patterns and tendencies of the follower. Every click from search history, remote notifications, cookies, cache, and interest in a particular video/stream/story is monitored by an algorithm that suggests similar streams (Burton, 2023).

These software are programmed to revolve around user choices based on probability. They shape the users' experience in a way that the mind becomes a passive receiver instead of an initiator. The followers framed in these boundaries become addicted and attach sentimental values to these

notions. At a point, the user loses control over radical content, which leads to an inconspicuous cross-over to an advanced stage of self-radicalization and brainwashing (Kadivar, 2017). The comments, the trolling, and the cyber harassment, further generate multiple responses/stimuli from the supporters and contenders leading to cyber violence and ultimate self-radicalization. These auto-generated contents capitalize upon viewers' time vis-à-vis ubiquitous advertisements provide more sensational content and cause psychological reinforcement through repetition, sound beats, and visual frames.

The AI-enabled servers preying on subscribers' preferences attempt to read and lead the minds to more similar content. Such patterns divert the internet surfer to questionable, prohibited, and illegal material via links to uncensored content. Eventually, this leads the targeted viewers to a wider option to connect with extremist organizations, criminal rackets, online scammers and predators, and the other way around. In case of no external intervention, this process leads to an exploration of rather more radical, sadistic, and violent content. Mostly, isolated (radical) users in pursuit of their journey of fanaticism are likely to use illegal software, VPNs, etc. to access the "dark web"

(Rashid, 2023). Hence the users are dropped into an oblivion of extremist notions, designed to manipulate their emotions to indoctrinate them

with narratives that can gradually lead to violence and terrorism.

Table 3

Leadership, Discourse, and Online Narratives:

Scholar/Fiqh/School/Sect, Org and Region	Discourse Analysis of Rhetorics and Views				Narrative-Analysis
Frame-Analysis	Digital Foot Print and tools	Ideology and Context	Methods	Style-Contents	
<p>Scholar-1(HD-I) (Hanfi-Deobandi) Preacher/Orator/Leader/Influencer Tablighi Jamat, center at Raiwand Lahore, Pakistan</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 1st (70.01 %)</p> <p>Focus: Commonalities Perspective: Tolerance</p> <p>Official Websites, Accounts-10.8 Million Subscribers Edited Videos Online sources</p>	<p>Substantial presence and following in millions across the sectarian divide.</p> <p>Language-Arabic Phrases, metaphors, Urdu, Punjabi</p>	<p>Conservative, respects all established Schools</p>	<p>Recitation of Ayat-e-Quran, translation, of traditions (Hadith) soft and persuasive, Story teller (Qasas-ul-Quran), Serat-ul-Nabi. Poetry.</p>	<p>Motivational, persuasive self-purification, etiquettes. focused on reward and punishment, life after death; heaven and hell. Moderate outlook and opinions about other sects' e.g Sunni (Brailvis) and Shais also have respect for all sects.</p>	<p>Emphasizes apolitical preaching (Tabligh) character improvement of as Jihad-e-Akbar (self-actualization).</p> <p>Ijtima (Congregation) at Raiwind is main platform for message of Islam and promoting peace and harmony.</p> <p>Openly disassociate themselves with hyper sensitive political and radical versions and famous among moderate Muslims, considered controversial by extremist.</p>
<p>Scholar-2 (HD-II) Hanafi-Deobandi Author/Orator, member of Jamaat-e-Islami. Founder of Tehreek Khilfat Pakistan</p> <p>Focus: Muslim</p> <p>Popularity Survey: 2nd (64.01 %)</p> <p>Official sites-2.77M followers, Accounts Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	<p>Conservative and Respectful to all established interpretations but addition of new thoughts provoking ideas. Hold literal approach in translation of Quran and Sunnah and focus on rationality.</p>	-do-	<p>In addition to above: analytical, logical, thinking on counter factual analysis basis, refers to legacy of Muslim, renaissance through Khilafat Movement, Purpose of life. Centrality of political power of Islam and worldly life being a test for Muslims.</p>	<p>As Pan-Islamist consider political power as an integral and central part of Islamic mission.</p> <p>Emphasis on renaissance of Islamic Ummah beyond any border and limitation of nation states.</p> <p>A staunch believer of revival of Khilafat. Openly criticize imperialism, unjust world order and the hegemony of west.</p> <p>Comments about illegitimacy of Israel and Jihad. Present an anti-thesis of Tablighi Jamat and consider Jihad as an essential element of revival of Muslim civilization.</p> <p>Emphasize upon aspect of <i>Amar-bil-marooif</i> (persuasion for doing good deeds) and <i>Nahi-un-nil Munkir</i> (Prohibiting from doing wrong deeds. and realist perspective about the downfall of Muslims in contemporary world.</p> <p>Social attributes, lost power of Ummah with aggressive defensive approach.</p>
<p>Scholar-3-MGM-I Modern Researcher/Orator, do not identify affiliation to any sect. Founder of Quran & Sunnah Research Academy Jhelum.</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 3rd (46.81 %)</p> <p>Perspective:</p> <p>Reformative-Aggressive, as an agent of change, debunking sectarian myths.</p> <p>Focus: criticism debates about sensitive issues of faith, highly toxic and intolerant</p> <p>Official Websites, Accounts-2M followers Edited Videos Online source</p>	<p>Significant presence. uses enhancement tools of audio-video editing/mixing to glamorize his lectures with special effects-backgrounds slogans etc.</p>	<p>Inclined to random Ghair-Muqalid Version, target all primary schools of thoughts but selectively.</p>	<p>Apparent logic, deductive approach and analogy in explaining, Oversimplification novel views. Prefer literal interpretation. Highlights and sharpens differences between all sects Provocatively on social and mainstream media.</p>	<p>Persuasive, Question-Answer session, mockery, provocative-instigative and challenging. Derogatory towards others. Use words, clues, metaphors, gestures even issue implied Fatwa against others. Chooses controversial issues of Islamic history, write research papers to highlights differences among various schools of thoughts/sects. Discuss international and domestic political crisis and their reasons.</p>	<p>Portrays as reformer, criticize all sects and point out the flaws in their interpretation, edicts, and doctrines. Use offensive language about the pioneers of Ahl-e-Sunnah. Use logical reasoning and historical support to prove his point. Remain cynical, sarcastic and insulting in his discourse about Sufism, Brailvis, Deobandis, Salafis. Use provoking words, challenge others, at times appease Ahle-Tashiyi sect.</p> <p>Commonly utter verbal-nonverbal mocking and purgatory remarks against other sects.</p>
<p>Scholar-4 HD-III Mufti/Orator/Author Popularity on Survey: 4th (40%)</p> <p>Focus: Preaching good deeds, social issues Perspective: Sectarian and defensive</p> <p>Official Websites, Accounts-3.7M followers</p>	-do-	<p>Traditional-Fundamentalist /Orthodox</p>	<p>Logical, deductive approach, metaphors and analogy in explaining views. Prefer literal interpretations based on authenticity confirmed by pioneers. Un-apologetically defend his doctrine.</p>	<p>Speeches, Oratory, live Q&A, Soft but cynical towards others. Islamic History, Fiqh, Politics, Family Laws, Social Issues, Crisis of Muslim Ummah. Takes pride in belonging to anti-imperialist faction that has always defended Islamic</p>	<p>Conservative in approach, criticizes Bareilvis festivities/ rituals and radical views of Salafis. FATWAS on queries of audience based on Deobandis' thought.</p> <p>Refer to political crisis faced by Muslims in Kashmir, Palestine, Afghanistan etc.</p> <p>Eulogize Jihad against the colonial powers. challenges others for</p>

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<p>Edited Videos Online sources</p> <p>Scholar-5-(HB)-IV Author/Orator/Former Parliamentarian, inclined towards Sunni-Brailvi/Sufism-(Qadria). Founded Minhaj-ul-Quran Int. and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT).</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 5th (37.8%)</p> <p>Focus: Responding to Islamophobia, Puritanical Schools, Unity of Muslim Ummah.</p> <p>Perspective: Tolerant and Inclusive</p> <p>Official Websites, Accounts-3.7M followers Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	Reformist, Non-Traditional Modernist, Non-Sectarian outlook, Preaches about comprehensive understanding of Islam and its injunctions.	Logical, Metaphorical, Analogies, traditionalist based on established principles. Uses more broader and meaningful interpretation that broadens the horizon.	Oratory, persuasive lectures, dialogues, debates, poetic, suffi, thought provoking, logical reasoning, metaphorical and spiritual interpretations. Emphasize upon constitutional supremacy and democratic reforms on model of Medina.	Munazra (debate) online or in person. Hold inclusive interfaith views, emphasis on harmony among Sunni and Shias, bridges the differences at religious seminars, mosques, Imam Barghs. Regarded as Shaikh-ul-Islam by followers, considered controversial, delusional by the extremists and political opponents. Denounces terrorism and sectarianism and define Jihad as purely state sanctioned subject. Politically active in agitation against elected government in various alliances. Preach counter radicalization/terrorism narrative. Has issued detailed FATWA on illegitimacy of Terrorism.during WOT Revival of Islam in state through revolution termed (Mustafavi-Inqilab).
<p>Scholar 6- MGM-II Scholar/author/Patron Al-Mawrid, Principal Research (Ghamidi Center of Islamic Learning). Member of the <u>Council of Islamic Ideology</u>.</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 6th (35.6%)</p> <p>Perspective: Deradicalization through logical-historical interpretation. Remain inclusive and tolerant towards others but criticizes Sufism for their unauthentic version.</p> <p>Focus: Harmony</p> <p>Official Sites-1.1M Followers Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	-do- Additionally, as Reformist, differentiate between cultural norms and Islamic rituals (such as dressing to be Arab culture)	Logical Reasoning, Primacy of logic to interpret traditions with emphasis of contextual realities.	-do- Rationalist Approach	Similar as above but reject Sufism and revolution instead believe in evolution of society in Islamic State, subjects responsibilities towards global community. Re-define the concept of Jihad as defensive. Consider strife between companions of Prophet (S.A.W.W) as political struggle. Novel views about world political order, application of veil and permissibility of music in Islam.
<p>Scholar-7 SIA-I</p> <p>A scholar/orator and author from Shia sect, Karachi/Pakistan</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 7th (22.6%)</p> <p>Focus: Peace and harmony</p> <p>Official Sites-1M Followers Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	Inclusive and non-sectarian approach with Ahl-e-Tashi farmwork.	Oratory, metaphors, analogies, debates. Verbal-nonverbal cues, gestures. Avoidance of expressive criticism of others. Uses tone gestures to convey implied meanings to followers. Preaches Shai understanding of Islam	Oration, religious authority, narration of events, logical reasoning in specific context of grievances against Sunnis.	Hardline political perspective about world order and downfall of Muslims, activism regarding international politics to resolve the longstanding crisis. Preach Shai School as the sole savior of Muslim Ummah. Promoting peace and harmony among Shia- Sunni. Forging unity among Muslims will defeat the imperial agendas.
<p>Scholar-8- HB-II Orator from Bareilvi Sect, Political Party Tareek e Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 8th (21.9%)</p> <p>Preacher at Jamia Nizamia Rizvia Lahore/Pakistan</p> <p>Focus: Blasphemy</p> <p>Perspective: Religious and political power</p> <p>Official Websites, Accounts-1M followers Edited Videos Online sources Facebook/Utube/Instagram/ X/Followers</p>	-do-	Orthodox/Ultra-conservative	-do-	Oration, religious authority, narration of events, logical reasoning in specific context, Criticized Shias and Ahl-e-Hadith sects and their practices, Seek implementation of Sharia laws. Zero tolerance over basic matters of faith such as finality of Prophethood upon Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). Calls for the liberation of Kashmir and Palestine and removal of evil from society,	Derogatory remarks about Salafis-Wahhabis and Shias. Offensive-hate speeches against Ahmadis for being the traitors of Islam and Muslims. As hardliners advocates legal provisions of capital punishment/execution for any person of any sect/religion committing blasphemy justifying even extra-judicial killings in this respect.
<p>Scholar 9- MGM-III Public speaker, Consultant, U-tuber, Psychologist, Anchor/orator Pakistan</p> <p>Focus: Modernism</p> <p>Official Websites, Accounts-1M Followers Edited-Lectures/Videos Online source Facebook/Utube/Instagram/ X/Followers</p> <p>Populaity Ranking based on Survey: 9th (22.6%)</p>	-do-	Modernist but aggressive focused on revival of Islam	Audio/Video Lectures/ V-logs, Pod-Cast, Public Lectures, Social and mainstream Media appearances.	Promotes scientific revival of Islamic glory, resilience and resistance through modern Jihad. Controversial remarks on different aspects of Islam. Explanation of different issues has sparked new debate over modernism and some critical Islamic topics.	Criticizes traditional system of madrasa and Ulemas, provocative statements about the concept of Jihad. Explain the incident 'Ashab ul Kahaf' in scientific terms. Blames scholars for their lack of knowledge about new trends and coping with the modern-day problems.
<p>Scholar-10 SAH-II</p> <p>Scholar/orator and author from Ahl-e- Hadis School from Faisalabad Pakistan</p>	Less Significant	Moderate Salafi traditionalist	-do-	Promoting Peace among all sects through academic preaching using scholarly language.	Same as Scholar-6 and 7

<p>Focus: Unity by acknowledging the facts Perspective: International Ummat, motivational</p> <p>Official sites, Accounts-584K followers Edited Videos Online sources</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 10th (16.6%)</p>				<p>Moderate stances on controversial issues. Historical stance regarding various differences. Openly criticizes the injustices committed by various Muslim rulers with the family of Prophet (PBUH).</p>	
<p>Scholar-11 (SIA-II)</p> <p>Orator and author from Shia School, Punjab, Pakistan</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 11th (12.9%)</p> <p>Perspective: Sectarian</p> <p>Focus: Rivalry</p> <p>Official Accounts-246.9K members Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	Radical Shia	-do-	<p>Stresses the primacy of caliphate of Hazrat Ali (A.S). Prolific in narrating the grievances of family of Prophet committed to them by initial rulers of Islam;e.g Nationalizing Bagh e Fidak etc Use provocative, confronting and derogatory/ pejorative expression, verbal cues towards other sects and their beliefs.</p>	<p>Majority of speeches are against the ruling of Sahaba/Caliphs. Criticizes those who do not consider Ehl-e-Bait more imminent than Sahaba. Criticize Sunni sects mainly salafis. Verbal and on verbal cues, hints, cynicism, tone and tenure hinting towards falsehood of others.</p>
<p>Scholar-12-HB-III</p> <p>An author from Barelvi school, promoter of Sufism/spiritualism.</p> <p>Founder of Lahore college of English, Pakistan</p> <p>Popularity Ranking based on Survey: 12th (12.6%).</p> <p>Perspective: Humanity Focus: Harmony and self-actualization</p> <p>Official sites, Accounts-266K followers Online Sources</p>	-do-	Humanism Islamic (Sufiism)	Promotes Sufism through lectures/Sermon/Poetry/Quotes writings etc	<p>A university professor with strong believe in interfaith harmony, Islam as the religion of peace. Promotes inner peace and serenity. Use aphorism, able to capture a rainbow of meaning in a few dewdrops of well-chosen words.</p>	<p>Respect for all sects and religions. Preaches Sufism. Stresses that people should respect and tolerate each other belief. His philosophical and spiritual writings are guidance for all those who seek tranquility through spiritualism. He stresses upon thinking of religion as inclusive system instead of exclusive. No religion/sect should be criticized by any individual.</p>
<p>Scholar-20 HB-IV (Sufi)</p> <p>Mystic, Poet and author of Sunni Barelvi-School with Sufism of Qalandria Pakistan</p> <p>Popularity Survey: 20th (2.6%) Focus: Peace Official sites, Accounts Edited Videos</p>	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
<p>Scholar-13-HB-I</p> <p>Author/Orator from Barelvi Faction founded Dawat e Islami and Madni TV Channel, Karachi. Sufi Qadri faction</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 13th (8.6%)</p> <p>Perspective: Self Actualization through religion Focus: Sufism Official sites-5.5M followers Edited Videos</p>	Highly Significant	Ultra-Conservative and orthodox	-do-	<p>Uses soft/mild words, promotes Sufism through Quran and Sunnah. Stress on the interfaith harmony. His writings and speeches are exclusively focused on life of Prophet (PBUH) practices and focus on revival of sunna in letter and spirit.</p>	<p>Reflect fundamentalist views. Considered controversial for his unauthentic innovations and version of spiritual practices. His followers are strict in adorning turban and adopting strict code of conduct. In his initial version he even gave FATWA against getting photographed. However now using a TV channel for preaching. Harsh views and animosity particularly towards Shia, Salafi Muslims. Tolerant of punishment of blasphemers. Considered innovative by opponents.</p>
<p>Scholar-14 (SIA-III) Orator from Shia sect/school Pakistan</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 14th (6.6%) Focus: Sectarian</p> <p>Official sites-800K Followers Edited Lectures/Videos Online sources</p>	Significant	Ultra conservative Shia with sectarian outlook.	Pejoratives and cynical uses logical reasoning, historical interpretation and qu'anic explanations to confront other sects. Known for debating/ fiery speeches and challenges others for debate (munazra)	Same as Scholar-11 (SIA-II)	<p>Criticized the rule of companions for their injustices. Provocative statements against non-followers of Hazrat Ali (R.A). Narrates the atrocities of Ummayed rulers particularly the martyrdom of Hazrat Imma Hussain (RA) and his family in Karbala.</p>
<p>Scholar-15 (SIA)-IV</p> <p>Orator/Debator from Shia School.</p> <p>Perspective: Sectarian</p> <p>Focus: Controversial issues Popularity on Survey: 15th</p> <p>Official sites-500K Followers Edited Videos</p>	-do-	Non-Traditional Radical Shia	His ideas challenge all other sects and invite non-shia faction to debate with him. Mock other sects and use slurs against other for being false and malicious in their claims and acts.	<p>Uses logic, traditions, cast aspersions, challenge authenticity of edicts. Use slurs, verbal and non verbal hints to be-little others. Criticism Against Caliphs, Criticizes Sunni sect Practices also Criticise Iran.</p>	<p>Controversial statements about Iran and Iranian Supreme Leader and Waliayat e Faqieh. Use hate speech against Salafi and Barelvis. Even criticizes moderate Shias for not standing up to expectations.</p>

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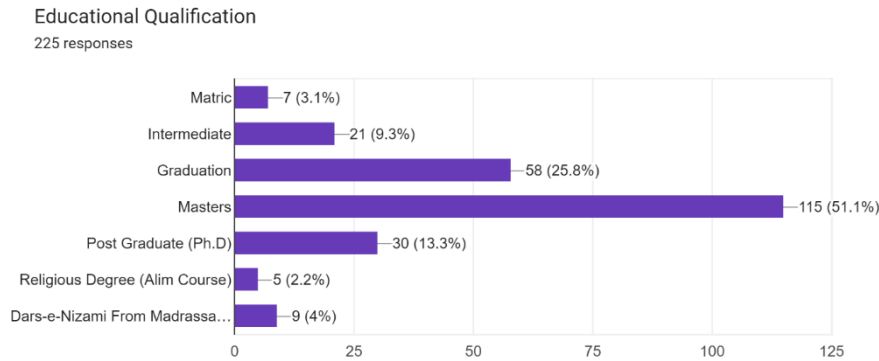
Online sources					
<p>Scholar-16-HD-IV Orator and public preacher from deobandi/Wahhabi Popularity on Survey: 16th (6%)</p> <p>Perspective: Hardliner Focus: Sectarian Official sites, Accounts-500K Followers Edited Videos Online sources</p>	Insignificant	Radical Deobandi, criticized Shias and their practices.	Oratory/Speeches./cynical and derogatory towards others mostly against Shia. Selective narrative of history and traditions.	Advocates the protection of honor of Sahaba particularly Khulafa and family of Prophet PBUH. He demanded constitutional amendment to apply FATWA against Shias for out-casting.	Antagonistic and controversial remarks against Shia sects. As a zealots advocated for harsh punishment for those who defile Sahaba. He consider shias sect as threat to mainstream religion and advocate violence against them in his narrative.
<p>Scholar 17- HD-V Leader of Sipah-e-Sahaba Organization Founders of Sipah-e-Sahaba organization Popularity on Survey: 17th (4.6%) Punjab, Pakistan Perspective: Hardliner Focus: Sectarian Official sites Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-
<p>Scholar 18-MGM-IV Journalist/Analyst/Anchor from Sunni school of thought. (Brass Tacks Pakistani TV Program) Popularity on Survey: 18th (4.3%)</p> <p>Perspective: International Revival of Islam Focus: Military Analysis of conflict zones Official sites-300K Followers Edited Videos Online sources</p>	Significant	Far Rightist Political Analyst with conservative approach	A religious motivational speaker and advocate of Ghazwa e Hind. supports liberation of Kashmir and Palestine	Lecture in English/Urdu. He support the concept of building the nation on the footprint of Caliphate. Scholarly/Influencer/ Security Analyst/military attire.	A fervor supporter of strong military and jihad, supports the liberation of Palestine, radical Islamist political commentator and conspiracy theorist. Criticizes imperialists and world order for their global injustices.
<p>Scholar-19-SAH-II A founding member of Jaish-e-Mohammed. Pakistan/Kashmir</p> <p>Popularity on Survey: 19th (3.9%)</p> <p>Focus: Jihad</p> <p>Official sites Edited Videos</p>	Less Significant	Salafi Ideology with Radical jihadi approach	-do-	Mastered Jihad. Issue sermons such as inviting women to Jihad, Declaration of war, invitation for spreading faith and Jihad. Staunch supporter of Kashmiri Jihad. Supports all jihadi organizations.	-do-
<p>Scholar 22- SAH-III Orator/speaker/preacher. Founding member of Lashkar-e-Taiba//<i>amaat-ud-Dawa</i> and Milli Muslim League Pakistan/Kashmir Popularity on Survey: 22th (2%) Perspective: Regional Focus; Peace</p> <p>Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	Far right Militant Leader	Speeches/Jihadi lectures/Sermons/slogans	Blames India/USA for the sufferings of Kashmiri Muslims. Supports the liberation of Kashmir through war. Supports Palestinian struggle movement and glorify the sacrifices of Jihadi group across the world.	-do-
<p>Scholar-21- HD-V Orator/Imam/preacher at Lal Masjid. A Chancellor of <i>Jamia Faridia</i> and <i>Jamia Hafsa, Islamabad</i> Popularity Ranking based on Survey: 21th (2.6%) Perspective: Extremist-International and Regional Official sites Edited Videos Online sources</p>	-do-	Radical Hanafi Deobandi Ideology	Uses supplications and sermon to infuriate people regarding the injustices of state and democracy	Advocate of Jihad and implementation of Sharia for revival of Caliphate in Muslim world. Held violent disruptive, chaotic campaign to enforce a hardline version. Staunch supporter of Taliban/Jihadi. Criticized Liberal women	Criticizes liberal and secular elements of society. Dislike modernity and secularism. Jihad is the only solution to all the evil of society. He is staunch supporter of Taliban and critic of Pakistani democracy. His seminars have 'Dar-ul-Ifta' issuing edicts. Criticizes Democracy as vice between Muslims and eulogizes the simplicity and bravery of Mujahideen and martyrs in particular reference to martyrs of Lal Masjid.

Findings of Survey on Online Religious Contents and Role of Social Media in Radicalization

The survey has been conducted using random

probability sampling employing snowball sampling asking questions from 231 respondents covering the following categories and educational levels;

Figure 7



The respondents from all walks of life, Academia (students) Teachers, lawyers, Scientists, Bureaucrats, Engineers, Bankers, Entrepreneurs, Financial Experts, Researchers, etc voluntarily

categorized their Fiqh as Ahl-u-Sunnah, Sunni, Hanafi, Shia, Ithna Ashari, Salafi, Shafi, etc and some of them preferred not to mention or mentioned 'Muslim'.

Figure 8

Q.4 Do you agree that Social Media Apps/pages are authentic source of religious Knowledge?
230 responses

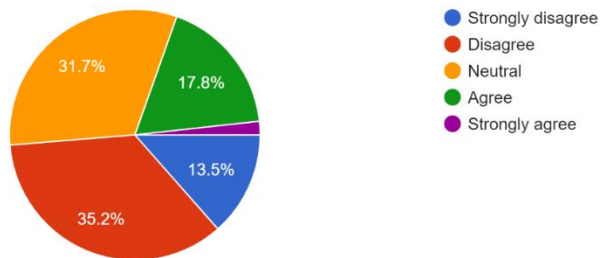


Figure 9

Q.5 Do you agree that famous online influencers should be allowed to issue FATAWA (decree) regarding religious affairs?
229 responses

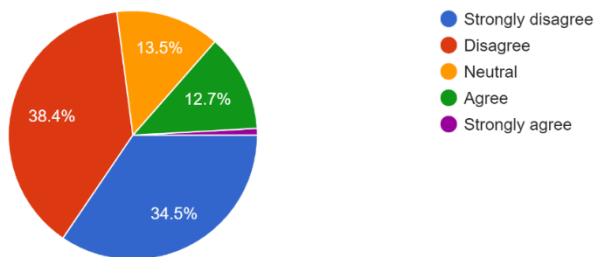


Figure 10

Q.6 Do you agree that the social media is playing crucial role in spreading religious extremism/radicalism in Pakistan?
231 responses

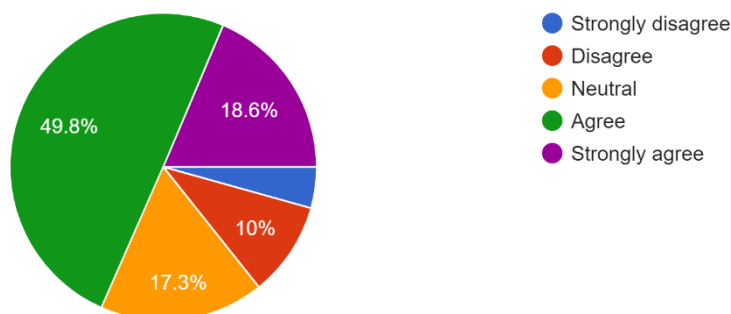


Figure 11

Q.7 Do you agree that emotionally charged hate speeches, mockeries and parodies, when edited with audio/video effects attract more viewers/online traffic?
228 responses

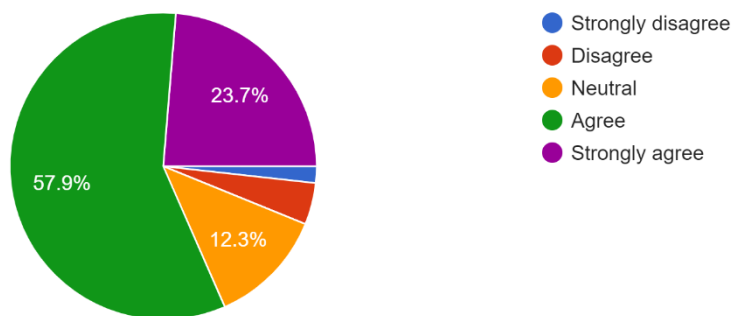


Figure 12

Q.8 Do you agree that youngsters/teens should be given open/un-guided access to online religious content?

231 responses

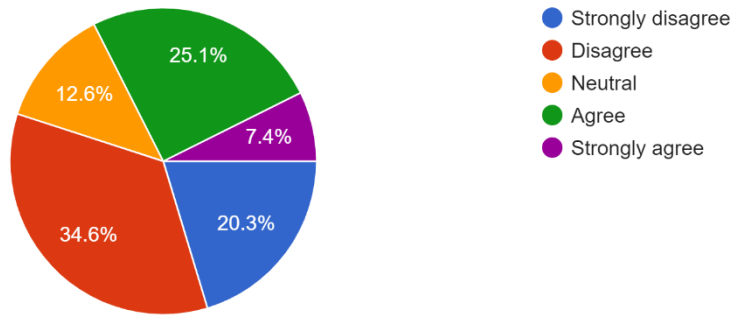


Figure 13

Q.9 Do you agree that issues of faith involve emotional and sentimental value and should not be publicly criticised?

229 responses

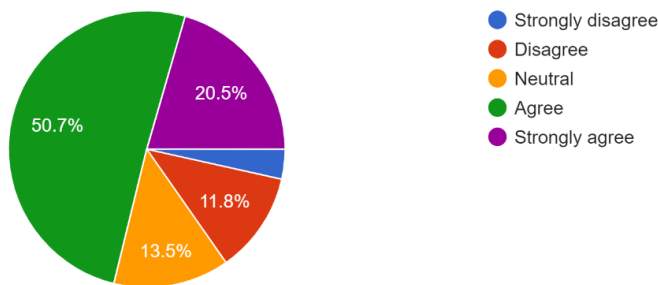


Figure 14

Q.10 Do you see any harm in access/ permission to ordinary muslims/non-scholars in preaching their views through social media apps/sites?

229 responses

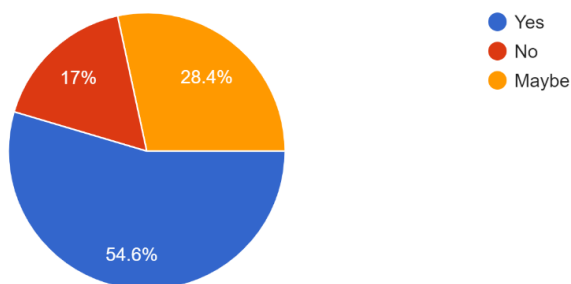
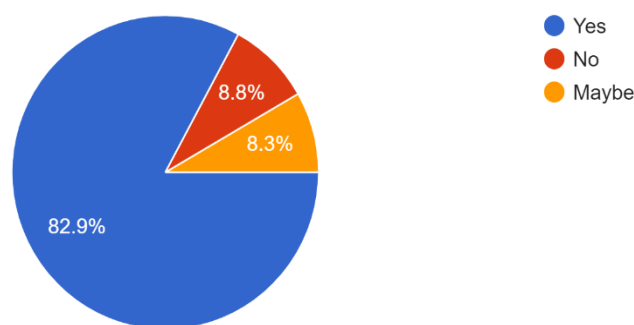


Figure 15

Q.11 Do you agree that provocative online religious content (insulting any sects/religion/minority) should be banned and removed from social media apps/sites?

228 responses



Conclusion

The qualitative as well as quantitative analyses have rejected the null hypothesis and proved the alternative hypothesis confirming the strong correlation between manipulated online religious content and artificial intelligence-based social media applications proving to have a multiplier impact of radicalization of Pakistani users, mostly youth spending long hours in the cyber world. The majority of respondents have agreed that Islamic preaching by unauthentic scholars is harmful to our youth, with unbridled internet access. Since the religious issue of faith involves sentimental and emotional values, no one can be allowed to publicly criticize other sects and spread derogatory contents. These medias spreading venom should be banned. Similarly, the respondents strongly agree that the social media influencers being unsolicited scholars cannot be allowed to issue edicts on digital platforms as the social media edited contents result in polarizing society and enhancing radicalization and extremism in society.

Recommendations

The situation warrants the re-calibration of NAP by all stakeholders. There is an emergent need to conduct the risk analysis of digital threats from internal (sectarian) and external (violent extremist/terrorist) elements to preempt their intersections with proscribed organizations, facilitators, and sympathizers by activating cyber firewalls. The regulation of religious ferry speeches infuriating the general public and inciting sectarian

violence should be brought under the legal regime of maintenance of public order and where needed brought under the judicial scrutiny of the federal Shariah court for derogation and sacrilegious comments. Islamic Ideology Council should be mandated to provide a periodical assessment of the qualification of speakers recognized as authentic sources for seeking edicts (Fatawas) from every sect and sub-sect. The defamatory and slanderous material should be removed from social media sites after seeking recommendations from imminent scholars and members of the Islamic Ideology Council or Ministry of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, the tortious liability mechanism in line with cyber security laws be activated to prevent the spread of hate speeches. Similarly, the unregistered seminaries be given a timeline to get registered with the concerned Madaris boards and departments to avail opportunity assimilation through jobs as Imams at mosques and teachers at schools.

The uprisings and instances of Middle East anarchies, Arab spring, riots and rebellion in Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh and Syria unveil the socio-economic and socio-political dynamics of our vulnerability to foreign-sponsored interventions and civil war. Eventually, the situation dictates robust regulation of internet, and social media applications through fire-wall and legal interception of encrypted communications between vulnerable users and reliance on counter-narrative of mainstream scholars

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