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**Social Media Challenges and Opportunities for Human Rights: A Case of Blasphemy
Laws in Pakistan**

By

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Declaration form

The work I have submitted is my own effort. I certify that all the material in the Dissertation that is not my own work, has been identified and acknowledged. No materials are included for which a degree has been previously conferred upon me.

Signed

Date:10 June 2016

Sanam Noor

Dedication

*In loving memory of my father
who like his name enlightened many lives
with his support for female education*

*I dedicate this study to all the victims of religious hatred
and to the brave human rights activists in Pakistan
who cared for nothing but human lives and lost their own lives.*

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Abstract

The social media has revolutionized communication and politics at different levels around the globe. Many social media platforms have epitomized the exercise of the freedom of expression and opinions without relying on traditional mass media intermediaries. At the same time, it has posed serious challenges for users and raised many questions about free speech and governance of the internet. The countries which already enforced restrictive laws on the freedom of expression have seen new media as a new challenge in controlling the online content. In some countries, sensitivities surrounding religion and the discussion or criticism of religion online have led to increasing internet censorship, hate speech, violence and protests.

This study discusses the role of social media in reinforcing or challenging religious extremism and curtailing free speech and promoting hate speech in context of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. It explores the relationship between social media and religious intolerance in Pakistan with a focus recent online blasphemy cases. Through observation of social media platforms used by blasphemy law defenders, it analyses the extremist discourse to highlight their implications. It also looks into the role broadcast media and social media play in dual screening of blasphemy content mobilizing radical elements. Moreover, it discusses how free speech defenders have used the online space for human rights activism especially against blasphemy laws.

Key words: blasphemy, free speech, social media, Facebook, religious extremism

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it for religious conviction. (Blaise Pascal)

The public interest effect of the traditional media is being questioned and for many the new forms of citizen generated media appear to offer a more authentic form and a return to the Enlightenment ethos of the pamphleteer and the independent publisher.

(Daniel Joyce)

The social media has revolutionized communication and politics at different levels around the globe. Many social media platforms have epitomized the exercise of the freedom of expression and opinions without relying on traditional mass media intermediaries. At the same time, it has posed serious challenges for users and raised many questions about free speech and governance of the internet. The countries which already enforced restrictive laws on the freedom of expression are adding new restrictions on new media considering it as an emerging challenge. In some countries, sensitivities surrounding religion and the discussion or criticism of religion online have led to increasing internet censorship, hate speech, and violence.

Pakistan is among the leading countries with harsh laws banning any criticism of religion or religious personalities. A country which claims Islam to be the source of its legal system, Pakistan has a long history of limitations on freedom of speech and information rights. Article 19 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan grants the right to freedom of speech and expression, and press, but subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan. The blasphemy laws which were expanded under military rule of General Ziaul Haq have claimed many lives and have led to violence and riots especially targeting religious minorities.

With the advent of social media, blasphemy allegations which were a matter of personal interactions, quarrels and religious gatherings have expanded to cyberspace in Pakistan. During the last decade specifically significant amount of religious radicalization has occurred in the country and the use of internet or mobile phones has led to blasphemy accusations and violence. In some cases social media and broadcast media have assisted each other in highlighting cases of

blasphemy, attracting a reaction and finally resulting in court conviction or extra-judicial murder of the accused. Global events particularly the 2005 Danish cartoon controversy have stoked these trends. Pakistan has an estimated 25 million Internet users (aboardthedemocracytrain.com) while the country's broadcast media sector has also seen unprecedented expansion. There are about 90 television channels, 160 radio stations, and over 200 daily newspapers (Freedom House 2015). Particularly news channels have become a profitable business in Pakistan with different media houses competing each other and using one of the nerves of Pakistani audiences—religion.

1.1 Aim of research

This study aims to explore the role social media has been playing in reinforcing or challenging religious extremism and curtailing free speech in context of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. It will discuss the relationship between social media and blasphemy allegations in Pakistan with a focus on recent developments. Through observation of social media platforms (9 Facebook pages) used by blasphemy law defenders, it will analyse the extremist discourse to highlight its implications. It also analyses the role broadcast media and social media play in dual screening of blasphemy content mobilizing radical elements. Moreover, it will examine through online observation (9 Facebook pages) and survey research how free speech defenders have used the online space for human rights activism especially against blasphemy laws.

1.2 Motivation

This study explores a challenging area of research about freedom of expression and role of social media in a country where extremism and violent reprisals have discouraged unrestricted discussion on blasphemy laws to take place. The linkage of these issues with social media and resultant violation of fundamental human rights forms the basis of this study which in itself is a relatively new area to explore within human rights field. By showing the complexities and intra-religious rifts between Muslim communities, this study challenges the tendency to generalize religious extremism and place it within one fold. Religious extremism and violence have many layers which can also clash with each other, as the study indirectly shows. This study should also be seen an attempt by a Muslim believer to show that the belief in human rights and Islam can coexist. As a Muslim woman, this is also a form of protest against segregation and radical religious interpretations by fellow Muslims and by any others who exclude opinions and positions of the 800 million women of this world.

Research questions

1. In the context of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, what role the social media has been playing in reinforcing or challenging these laws?
2. How social media and broadcast media complement/assist each other in highlighting blasphemy cases?
3. How social media has been used in Pakistan for radicalization and human rights activism at the same time?

1.4 Delimitations

The study is limited by scope focusing on a particular timeline from 2011 onwards. Among various social media, it is centred on the use of Facebook which is the most popular and commonly used form in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study is limited to blasphemy laws and does not cover hate speech and anti-terrorism laws in Pakistan though they have a relevance to the topic.

1.5 Challenges and Ethical issues

Before collecting data especially survey material, permission was sought from UiT Norges arktiske universitet for approval of the project. It was agreed that the university's internal routines regarding data security will be followed throughout the research process. All the personal data was stored on a private computer, which was secured with a password. All data relating the survey respondents was anonymized for the purpose of confidentiality. Prior and free consent was also received from the respondents.

This project involved two challenging issues that made it subject to close scrutiny for approval. First, it was about blasphemy issue the criticism of which has led to violence in my country. Second, I wanted to use online images and posts by pro-blasphemy groups whose approval was difficult to obtain for a research project that was critical of blasphemy laws. As such I decided to use only Facebook pages which were public and open resource for everyone to view. I was, however, able to receive consent by admins of progressive Facebook pages and some personal accounts to use their posts but I decided to use only public pages in their case also.

CHAPTER II

BLASPHEMY LAWS: BRIEF BACKGROUND

Different cultures and societies customarily single out privileged aspects of social life for unique recognition and protection against sacrilege throughout the world (Grenda et al. 2014). For religion to be singled out and be declared as one of such privileged domains is obvious with a long history of people being accused and punished, for alleged desecration of religion.

Blasphemy laws may sound like relics of the past but remain intact in many countries. According to a 2012 study by the Pew Research Centre, as of 2011, almost half (47%) countries of the world have laws and policies that punish blasphemy, apostasy, or defamation. It found that 32 countries out of 198 have blasphemy laws, 20 have apostasy laws, and 87 have disparagement laws (Aswad et al. 2014). These laws are most common in the Middle East and North Africa, and while apostasy laws exist in only two other regions of the world (Asia-Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa) blasphemy laws can be found in all regions, including Europe and the Americas (Pew Research 2014).

In many countries, blasphemy laws were inherited from colonizing powers. It took the US 150 years to undo this law in 1952 (Pew Research 2012). In the UK itself, blasphemy laws were not abolished until 2008. Similarly, offences against religion in Pakistan are partly rooted in laws promulgated during British colonial rule with considerable sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, that became Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) after 1947 Partition. During colonial rule, four provisions were introduced in 1860 (Table 1). The justification for introducing these provisions was maintenance of law and order and avoiding communal violence between Hindus and Muslims (ICJ 2015; Centre for Peace and Development 2008).

Table 1.**Laws Penalizing Blasphemy, 2011**

Middle East-North Africa (13)	Asia-Pacific (9)	Europe (8)	Sub-Saharan Africa (2)
Algeria	Afghanistan	Denmark	Nigeria
Bahrain	India	Germany	Somalia
Egypt	Indonesia	Greece	
Jordan	Iran	Ireland	
Kuwait	Malaysia	Italy	
Lebanon	Maldives	Malta	
Morocco	Pakistan	Netherlands	
Oman	Singapore	Poland	
Qatar	Turkey		
Saudi Arabia			
Sudan			
United Arab Emirates			
Western Sahara			
Total number of countries: 32			

Countries with a law, rule or policy at some level of government forbidding blasphemy during calendar year 2011.
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life

Particularly in Punjab in 19th century, both Muslims and Hindus participated in activities that increased communal hostilities including provocative publications (Neeti Nair 2013, p. 317). Some of the court cases involving religious sentiment became *causes célèbres* for emerging religious movements with vernacular press giving them extensive coverage (Ahmed in Mazzarella & Kaur eds. 2009). In 1924, a pamphlet titled 'Rangila Rasool' (The Promiscuous Prophet) by an anonymous author caused angry responses. The publisher, Mahashe Rajpal, was arrested but acquitted by the Punjab High Court in 1927 which followed widespread agitation, and introduction of section 295-A in 1927 (ICJ Report 2015). In words of Ahmed (2009), this acquittal was an important moment in the emergence of a new ultra-Muslim community centred on the public display of emotion in the defence of the Prophet.

Despite this in 1929, a Muslim called Ilm Din killed Rajpal and was convicted for murder and hanged. Ilm Din is widely honoured in Pakistan as Ghazi¹ (winner of a war) and 'Shaheed' (martyr), having sacrificed his life for the honour of the Prophet especially through textbooks and official history narrative.

¹Ghazi is a title used for those Muslims who participate in a war against infidels and as opposed to a martyr emerges as the winner. This title is now widely used for those killing a person accused of blasphemy in Pakistan.

Table 2. Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Section 295 (1860). Injuring or defiling place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class: punishment with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both. ■ 295-A (1927). Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both. ■ 295-B (1982). Defiling, etc., of Holy Qur'an, life imprisonment for desecrating Quran ■ 295-C (1986). Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet. The punishment for “defiling Prophet Muhammad” is death sentence ■ 296 (1860). Disturbing religious assembly with up to one year imprisonment or fine or both. ■ 297 (1860). Trespassing the burial places with up to one year imprisonment, rigorous or simple, or fine or both ■ 298 (1860). Uttering words with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings, one year imprisonment rigorous or simple, or fine or both ■ 298-A (1980). Use of derogatory remarks in respect of holy personages, up to three years imprisonment, fine or both. ■ 289-B (1984). Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles etc reserved for certain holy personages or places, up to three years and fine. ■ 298-C (1984). Persons of Quadiani group (Ahmadis) who directly or indirectly pose as a Muslim, up to three years imprisonment, rigorous or simple and fine.

After Partition, Muslims turned into a majority from a minority but their obsession with blasphemy continued to grow. Military dictator General Ziaul Haq (1977-1988) expanded these laws to introduce death sentence, life imprisonment and ten year imprisonment under three clauses (Table 2). Among justifications of these laws were the sectarian tensions that claimed many lives during 1980s. While the British-introduced blasphemy provisions applied to all religions, Zia’s amendments were aimed at protecting only beliefs of Muslim majority. Data shows that Zia’s expansion of these laws actually resulted in a rise in blasphemy incidences. From 1851 to 1947 (British rule), there were only seven blasphemy-related incidents (CRSS, p. 3). In forty years from 1947 to 1986, the number of blasphemy cases filed in the courts was only eight (CRSS, p. 43). From 1986 to 2015, around 1464 cases have been registered many of them filed on petty charges. Of all the accused 729 belong to Muslim religion, a fact that highlights the deep rooted inter-sectarian conflict and tensions within Islamic communities (personal communication).

Most blasphemy-related allegations in Pakistan are motivated by personal feuds and political interests. According to SDPI (2014), these laws have frequently been abused due to weak safeguards and low threshold of evidence and lack of penalties for those making false

accusations. On many occasions, people accused of blasphemy, their families, neighbourhoods and defending lawyers or judges have been targeted by mobs or killed. According to Pakistan based NGO the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), 63 people accused of blasphemy have been murdered extra-judicially (personal communication).

Moreover, the range of paltry accusations include misspelling a name in exams, throwing a visiting card with an Arabic name, discussing matrimony, writing a children's poem, reciting a verse incorrectly, shouting slogans against someone named Umar (a companion of Prophet) and singing songs in praise for religious personalities. The discrimination these laws involve is worse for women and minorities as they are prohibited from initiating blasphemy cases. Under the law of evidence (called Qanoon-e-Shahadat) testimony by two women or two non-Muslims is equal to that of a single male Muslim, something that further puts women and minorities in a tough situation (CPD, p. 34).

Some government leaders tried to bring reform in blasphemy laws to mitigate their adverse effects. Military dictator Pervaiz Musharraf (1999-2008) announced but soon backtracked from a plan to reform them in 2000. After restoration of democracy in 2008, the Pakistan People's Party-led government and its federal minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, a Catholic Christian, vowed to review blasphemy laws. The demands for review intensified after the 2009 Gojra incident when seven Christians were burnt alive in a Punjab village following a blasphemy allegation.

The Gojra event drew attention of liberal lawmakers like Nafisa Shah who in one of her emails to a progressive Yahoo Groups (Socialist Pakistan News) promised to reform the law and informed that a special parliamentary review committee had been formed (revealed in personal interaction). Another lawmaker Sherry Rahman submitted a bill for review of these laws. This plan was shattered when the Governor of Punjab Salman Taseer was murdered in 2011 for supporting Asiya Bibi, a Christian woman accused of blasphemy, and for suggesting to soften blasphemy provisions. Two months later, minister Bhatti was killed by militants for condemning the death of a blasphemer (Taseer) and demanding review of blasphemy laws. These high level murders came as a big shock for the new democratic set-up and progressive parliamentarians

who had been forced out of governance for ten long years since the 1999 military coup. The religious politics and militancy had intensified after 9/11 when a military dictator was at the helm. The new government now faced Sunni extremists as a new challenge that was in the open with widespread public support as opposed to clandestine Taliban or Al Qaeda militants. As a result the government decided to stop any talk of reforming blasphemy laws. These murders involved increased coverage on social and traditional media nationwide and radicalized many neutral people especially youth.

As can be seen these laws violate the fundamental rights to life, liberty, and often result in cruel and degrading punishment to the accused. Jurists claim these laws breach Pakistan's international obligations relating to the respect and protection for freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; freedom of opinion and expression; equality before the law; the prohibition of discrimination; and, a range of fair trial rights (ICJ 2015). Barring Articles 295 and 295-A the other articles do not include any language on intent (Freedom House 2010, p. 73).

Officially Pakistan states that blasphemy can be protected under religious freedom law and limitations on speech under Article 19. But the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment 34 on CCPR says prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion, including blasphemy laws are incompatible with the Covenant, except in the specific circumstances envisaged in article 20, paragraph 2 ('any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence'). It says prohibitions must also comply with strict requirements of Article 19, paragraph 3 (respect for rights of others or reputation or for national security or public order, public health, morals) as well as such articles as 2 (innocent until guilty), 5 (judicial review), 17 (privacy), 18 (freedom of religion) and 26 (equality before law). Thus, it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favor of or against one or certain religions or belief systems over another. Nor would it be permissible for such prohibitions to be used to prevent or punish criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith (<http://www2.ohchr.org/>).

Analysts, however, say preferring religion over other freedoms is to flatter religious sentiments of Muslims for a state's survival that has been destabilized by extremist groups (Reporters

Without Borders 2013). Additionally there are parliamentarians and government officials who either support blasphemy laws or provide patronage to clerics for political reasons (Jinnah Institute 2016). Pakistan has a majority Sunni population and there is a religious consensus (*ijma*) on blasphemy being unforgivable which makes it difficult to ignore their opinions.

The tensions between Muslim sects or denominations Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (Barelvi), Deobandis, Ahle Hadith, Ahmadis and Shias have also resulted in many blasphemy accusations. The Jamaat Ahle Sunnat believes in absolute respect for the Prophet who they claim to be not just a human being, but the reason for all the creation. For Ahle Hadith, to equate the Prophet as a super human is itself blasphemous as he was sent as a human prophet, to be humanly followed. All these groups that belong to wider Sunni tradition look at Shias as their opponents and sometimes even as kafir (non-Muslims) (Ahmed 2009; Lieven 2011). Shias claim the highest esteem for the Prophet's family but not for some of his companions and their progeny who were responsible for the massacre of the Prophet's grandchildren in Karbala. Shias condemn Yazeed and his father Muawiyya who usurped power from the Prophet's family, while Sunnis revere Muawiyya as one of the greatest caliphs of Islam. These fundamental and conflicting positions constitute blasphemy for the opponent groups. Ahmadis, on the other hand are not even considered Muslims under a 1974 constitutional amendment. Ironically, Sufi Barelvis have been seen as the biggest resistance to the spread of Saudi-Wahhabi funded jihad and militancy as Sufis promote spirituality and love for Prophet as their modus operandi rather than by force or warfare.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review is divided into two parts: the first part deals with debates about social media and human rights which also form the theoretical basis of this study. Part two is about relevant research on social media, religion and blasphemy.

3.1 Social media and human rights

Human rights organizations and activists globally are using social media to publicize and coordinate their campaigns, to increase membership, and to lobby for legislation and policies (Joyce 2013, p. 234). Almost all major human rights organizations now have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. The use of hashtags has become popular in calling attention to different human rights abuses. There are organizations which now offer courses in the use of social media for human rights work e.g. HREA's Use of ICTs and Social Media for Human Rights course (www.hrea.org). Amnesty International and other leading human rights organizations now consider social media as an important strategic tool for their work. According to Dunya Kamal, Amnesty International's Global Communication Officer, Social media is a great tool for bringing breaking news to the people you want to see it – namely press on Twitter. Kamal says Twitter is an extremely powerful instrument for those wishing to document abuses or to spread a story (social-media-for-development.org).



In Pakistan, a 2009 video showing a woman in Swat valley being flogged by the Taliban militants as a punishment drew worldwide attention pressurizing the army to start a military operation in the valley. Malala Yousufzai's blog for BBC World during this period proved detrimental in revealing the on-ground human rights situation when the valley had become almost inaccessible for the media. It however, also put Malala in danger as a result of the limelight she received leading to attempt on her life. In 2012, a cell phone video in Kohistan led to the killing of five girls and three boys as a tribal court considered viewing of their women on YouTube as a breach of honour (Express News 2016). In Pakistani politics also, social media became an integral part in 2009, when General Musharraf and politician Imran Khan created Facebook pages. During 2013 elections social media played a central role to the strategy of IK's political party PTI which used FB, Youtube and Twitter to reach out to the public (Harvey 2014). The most notable Twitter accounts include politicians, army's spokesperson organization ISPR, Bilawal Bhutto, sportsmen and journalists (<http://www.socialbakers.com>).

Increasingly, human rights organizations in Pakistan are utilizing social media as a central strategy for advocacy and campaigns. In words of I. A. Rehman, Director Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) social media and internet are important for any political or social activity as well as human rights defenders everywhere. 'But the use of these new technologies to assert old freedoms has been met with repression. On the other hand, mainstream media does not strive much to assist the public in developing a discourse'(www.sdpi.com).

3.2 Defining social media

Because of the rapidly changing nature of social media, its definition has also been subject to change. According to Daniel Joyce, social media are new forms of digital media including 'websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking' (Joyce 20013). In *Encyclopaedia of Social Media and Politics*, Harvey (2014) identifies common forums of social media as email, text messages, blogs, message boards, connecting sites, social networking sites, games and entertainment, and apps. Hill et al. (2013) insist that the term social media should be distinguished from other similar terms such as *the web* which contains sites that are not part of social media's interactive construct. Such resources

characterize *web 1.0* or resources that allow users to view information without interacting with the content. *Web 2.0* on the other hand allows users to produce content, and interact with other users. At the heart of web 2.0 are social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn (Hill 2013, 4-7).

3.3 Social media research

danah boyd² is considered to be the pioneer in social media research (Miller et al. 2016). Her most influential paper is considered to be the 2007 publication of 'Social Network Sites: Definition, History and Scholarship' co-authored with Nicole Ellison.' boyd has also created an online database of research papers on social networking sites which has 671 entries from 2002 to 2015 (<http://www.danah.org/researchBibs/sns.php>). The bibliography includes works from communications, information science, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, cultural studies, and computer science. These papers, however, are reflective of scholarship in one specific language. Another list was prepared by Robert Wilson specifically focusing on social science work on Facebook (<http://psych.wustl.edu/robertwilson/index.html>). In this literature review however I will only focus on those areas in political or social science research that have relevance to human rights and blasphemy.

3.4 Social media and human rights scholarship

Scholarship is divided on the effectiveness of social media as a tool for bringing about social change and promotion of democracy and human rights. The initial euphoria about social media was marked by optimism around e-governance and e-government (Miller et al. 2016). More recently role of social media in organising political action has been the focus especially following the Arab Spring. Voices have emerged pointing out to the other side of the story which is the negative effects of social media usage.

3.4.1 Social media as low risk activism

In his 2010 analysis of social media in *The New Yorker*, Gladwell argued that social media connections promote weak ties (with unknown people) and low-risk activism, or '**slacktivism**'

²dana boyd writes her name with small initials.

(which is “the act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem”). He argues that “liking” something on Facebook, or retweeting a story, requires little effort, yet those actions might make users into thinking they are doing something meaningful. Such slacktivism, he says, is not what can bring real social change which actually requires high risk activism (Joseph 2012).

Gladwell says that apart from slacktivism, the second crucial distinction between traditional activism and its online variant is that social media are not about hierarchical organization that was a crucial feature of civil rights movements traditionally. Facebook and the like are tools for building *networks*, which are the opposite, in structure and character, of hierarchies. He cites the example of civil-rights movement in the U.S. which he terms as high-risk activism (Gladwell 2010).

Another critic, Morozov (2011) argues that social media are ‘simply tools’ and social change continues to involve many painstaking, longer-term efforts to engage with political institutions and reform movements. He criticizes the 2010 policy announced by Hillary Clinton on Internet Freedom aimed at promoting online communications as a core foreign policy concern for opening up closed societies. Morozov rejects such ambitions saying they represent extreme optimism and empty promises and argues that the west's inconsiderate promotion of ICTs as pro-democratic agents has led to crack down on online activity and tracking down protesters (Morozov, Net Delusion 2011; Morozov 2011 in The Guardian).

Another sceptic, Olga Onuch maintains that journalists and scholars alike have been inspired by the so-called ‘hashtag revolutions’ with some reports even saying that “social media fueled” the EuroMaidan protesters. He maintains that while social media play an important role in dispersing protest information, they are not in themselves mobilizing as other factors also play an important role like being accompanied by a friend or family member and having received information from a reliable source (Onuch 2015).

Apart from scholars, policymakers such as Alec Ross say that new media can be important tool for civil society, but can easily have damaging and perverse costs. ‘New media, like the

traditional media before them, are not hardwired for either dictatorship or democracy. They can be used by anyone' (Aday et al. 2010).

3.4.2 Social media as spreaders of tolerance and democracy

Shirky is one of vocal defenders of social media and its promises for human rights and democracy. In a 2011 article in *Foreign Policy* Shirky argued that social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements (Shirky 2011). Responding to Gladwell's criticism of social media campaigns like 'Save Darfur' as only slacktivism, Shirky says that 'the fact that barely committed actors cannot click their way to a better world does not mean that committed actors cannot use social media effectively. He argues that recent protest movements have used social media not as a replacement for real-world action but as a way to coordinate it (Shirky, p. 38).

Shirky maintains that 'political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public' (Joseph 2012). Citing sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld who consider the formation of well-considered political opinions as a two-step process, Shirky says: 'The first step requires access to information; the second, use of that information in conversation and debate.' Keeping this in mind, Shirky argues that social media has transformed the way people 'form political opinions and has made information so widely accessible that more people than ever are able to develop considered points of view' (Joseph, p. 152).

Sarah Joseph (2012) endorses Shirky's emphasis on **step one** (access to information) saying that wider availability of on the ground witnessing on social media has expanded access to information as reporting is no longer confined to traditional media sources. Similarly, Sarah Lange (2014) claims that the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine was the first large-scale, non-violent conflict that employed the Internet and cellphones to organize and assemble supporters to protest election results. During the Revolution, when television was heavily censored, 'the Internet was the only medium through which one could find up-to-date information on protests' (Lange 2014).

Joyce (2013) defines step one as a trend towards 'convergence, where various forms of media are accessible in concentrated form through one platform, such as Internet or cellphone networks.' He maintains that communication as a process of transmission, is not 'entirely monological' and this two-way characteristic is also recognized in protections for free speech, in Article 19 of ICCPR which includes 'freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice' (Joyce 2013). Media convergence is also referred to as 'dual screening'—the complex bundle of practices that involve integrating, and switching across, live broadcast media and social media (Vaccari et al. 2015).

Dual screening is further examined by Maximillian Hänska Ahy in light of Arab Spring events looking at the interface between social and broadcast media. In the context of Middle East protest he asks: could these events have occurred in the sequence they did had there been no video (about Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia), had it not been uploaded, and picked up by broadcasters like Al'Jazeera? (Ahy 2014).

Joyce (2012) also examines the impact of social media use by activists and international organizations. 'To witness is to gather facts and information to be used subsequently to inform wider audiences of events, crises or violations, usually with either a preventative or restorative purpose. In this sense, the human rights witness acts much like the traditional journalist or investigator.' He discusses instances like Abu Ghraib and Wikileaks where citizens or insiders used new media to unearth human rights violations and the misuse of authority by democratic and authoritarian regimes. Joyce also warns that the excitement about 'democratic' potential of collective knowledge is not without the danger of the amateur that can eclipse professional and trusted sources of information, and that the lure of the instant could replace the space and time needed for critical reflection and advocacy (Joyce 2015, p. 236).

Interestingly Shirky gives more importance to **step two** about conversations emphasizing that "access to information is less important, politically, than **access to conversation** and facilitation of mass conversation is social media's primary purpose (Joseph 2011). Access to conversation can also be seen when we look at the linkages between power and discourse. As Harvey (2014)

notes: ‘There is a prevailing belief that all conflicts are fought on two fronts: the battlefield and the minds of populace. The result has been increasingly organized use of propaganda not just during times of war but whenever there is a cause that needs to be advanced.’ He goes on to say that the ways of controlling media by dominant groups have differed greatly over time ranging from implanted journalists, propaganda stories, controlled briefings and media bans. I would add here that the controlling the kind of conversation and discourse that reaches the main target has been a crucial part of many government policies in countries like Pakistan where the fundamental conversation about any aspect of life has deliberately been geared towards religion. In such controlled environments, Shirky’s emphasis on conversation being more important is quite relevant.

Here I would add that apart from right to information, and freedom of expression another crucial right in using social media is that of the freedom of assembly and association. Charley Lewis addresses the use of social media for mass mobilization in connection to the freedom of assembly and association under UDHR 20, CCPR 21, 22. He opines that the new media spread has also transformed both spaces and channels through which individuals and organizations interact, mobilize and assemble in face of perceived repression (Lewis in Jørgensen, 2006).

In essence these three rights (expression, access, assembly) are ‘enabling’ rights both in the fulfilment of many other human rights and in exposing human rights violations. These rights are also not absolute under international law and under national law of Pakistan and may therefore be subject to restrictions through a seemingly ‘legal process’ but well may be disproportionate or unjustified such as blocking (IHRB& Shift 2012).

3.4.3 Balancing the debate: A plural approach to social media and human rights

In my opinion, any scholarly debate on human rights requires a plural and balanced approach which looks at all the sides of the picture as espoused by Messer in 1997. This plural approach was adopted by a 2015 report on ‘ICTs and Human Rights Practice’ prepared for the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions. The report by Ella McPherson offers a profound analysis on Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and trends across the three crucial human rights practices: prevention, fact-finding, and advocacy.

Identifying both risks and opportunities in these areas, the report notes a gap between the rapid growth of ICTs and the understanding of their impact on human rights. The chart below summarises its main findings:

Table 3.

Action	Opportunities	Risks
Prevention	To protect human rights defenders, to prevent violations in police-civilian interactions, and in data-driven early warning systems and communication-based conflict prevention.	Can create new security risks for human rights defenders and can violate the right to privacy.
Fact-finding	Can afford the spontaneous and solicited participation of civilian witnesses in the production of human rights evidence	A greater volume and variety of information from unknown and untrained sources also creates problems of misinformation and verification.
Advocacy	provide new channels for quickly and visibly mobilizing publics, for directly engaging with advocacy targets, and for spreading awareness of human rights	The effects of these new advocacy channels are unclear, and they may imperil categories of human rights and the reputations of human rights organizations.

Like Shirky, McPherson says that ICTs support the human rights practice of the prevention of violations in a variety of ways, such as by physical and digital protection of human rights defenders (HRDs). She looks at the risks for HRDs that are exacerbated by their use of ICTs to communicate, organize, investigate, and advocate which has facilitated a backlash harming the HRDs. To mitigate this, alert systems are being developed such as Amnesty International’s Panic Button or Civil Rights Defenders’ Natalia Project which help HRDs to alert from remote areas (Miller et al., p.4).

For HRDs an important debate is about the right to encryption and anonymity. The UN Special Rapporteur on promotion and protection of right to freedom of opinion and expression said in his 2015 report that encryption and anonymity create a zone of privacy to protect opinion and belief. For instance, they can shield an opinion from outside scrutiny, and may empower individuals to circumvent barriers and access information and ideas without the intrusion of authorities. (A/HRC/29/32, 2015)

3.4.4. Internet governance: All these relevant issues lead to a logical question about who governs Internet and how. A relevant UN initiative about internet governance and corporate responsibility has been the World Summit on Information Society 2013. WSIS Forum 2013 adopted an Outcome Document which recognized the need to respect human diversity in all its forms, and reaffirmed the right of freedom of expression, as described in Article 19 UDHR and ICCPR, as essential for media's role in information and knowledge societies (WSIS 2013). An emphasis is on ICT companies and governments to ensure that information society does not result in discrimination or deprivation of existing rights. 'Rather it should be used to advance the effective implementation of human rights at local levels' (Samasiku in Jørgense 2006 p. viii).

3.5 Religion, social media and blasphemy

Cheong (2014) points out that initial studies of internet research tended to reflect 'a logic of disjuncture', in which digital media was understood to mainly disrupt religious authority by posing a threat to the power of traditional institutions. This viewpoint was reflective of the 19th century vision shared by Auguste Comte and Karl Marx who thought the process of modernisation would inevitably lead to the end of religion (Poveda 2014). However, a number of recent studies subscribe to the logic of continuity and complementarity, or digital media connections as being supportive of religious authority, rather than disrupting it (Cheong 2014). Cheong and Ess characterize faith based social change as 'Religion 2.0' or 'the manifold interaction between, on one hand, diverse expressions and institutionally affiliated religious traditions and practices around the globe, and on the other, the equally varied and swiftly changing affordances of Web 2.0 (Harvey 2014).

According to Aday et al. (2010), an important and understudied aspect is political polarization or what is referred to as 'ghettoization of social media'. Citing evidence from the US they suggest that new media can lead to greater divisions in two ways. First, it can make individuals belonging to certain social groups identify each other to the segregation of others, a process known as homophily. Second, it can cause individuals within particular groups to harden their identities and form negative opinions about others. 'These negative opinions may be stickier because opportunities for cross-group social interaction in which negative stereotypes can be

broken down are fewer.’ They further warn that ‘the consequences of polarization within other countries—especially non-democracies and frail democracies—may be considerably more dramatic’ (Aday et al. 2010).

On linkages between incendiary speech and social media an important study was conducted by Lidsky (2012) analysing two media related incidents one of which was the announcement on Twitter by Terry Jones to celebrate ‘Burn the Quran Day’ in 2010. Comparing Terry’s case with Hal Turner, a blogger who instigated murder of federal judges, she says the first case led to 30 killings after violence erupted in Muslim countries which highlight the fact that social media amplify the potential for speech to cause violence by magnifying the opportunities for contextual dislocation. Further, she points out that the unmediated character of social media speech increased potential for violence as individuals engage in unmediated communication.

Social media increase the number of individuals who can engage in unmediated communication, which inherently increases the probability of incendiary speech. Moreover, the sheer size of prospective audiences also increases the potential for violent audience reactions. Audience size matters: the bigger the audience, the greater the chance at least one audience member will respond with violence to speech that is offensive or advocates violence.

She points out another important aspect which may increase prospect for violence by the technology of search; for example, the individual who conducts an Internet search for ‘white supremacy’ will often be searching for confirmation of his own prejudices and may be seeking support for his own violent plans or projects. By the same token, the individual who believes Quran burning justifies a violent response may conduct a search for instances of Quran burning as an excuse to engage in riot or murder (p. 149). In her opinion, Jones's speech does not constitute an incitement, nor even advocacy of violence but it was incendiary because of its foreseeable effect on a hostile audience separated from the speaker by both time and distance (Lydsky 2012, p. 153).

3.5.1 Pakistan and social media research: The linkage between social media and blasphemy law in Pakistan is a new area of inquiry and I could find only one relevant study on the subject done so far. The 2015 report by the Digital Rights Foundation Pakistan on ‘Blasphemy in the

Digital Age' claims that blasphemy related vigilante violence against those accused of blasphemy has become severe in the digital age since false accusations of blasphemy can be spread within seconds leaving the accused deeply vulnerable. The report reiterates the warnings quoted above that digital technology has also facilitated the power available to those who believe in perpetrating violence and harbour deeply repulsive views about treatment of an accused committed of blasphemy. Nonetheless it suggests that social media and digital activism can be used to reform abusive state practices using the 'inner perspective' and can also aid inter-faith harmony. 'If our long term aim is reform of the law to ensure that human rights standards are upheld, and innocents are not victims of mindless violence, the digital age offers us yet another opportunity, the report concludes (Digital Rights Foundation 2015). The report, however, fails to show how many actual digital blasphemy cases have occurred in Pakistan as well as in presenting a thorough analysis of social media dynamics and activists' experiences.

CHAPTER IV:

RESEARCH METHODS

Using the right methods of research is the key to successful completion of a research project. For my dissertation I have chosen discourse analysis, online participant observation and survey interviews as the main research methods. These I believe were most appropriate and helped me effectively conduct the project as well as apply the theoretical framework to the project. Apart from these I used data collection and review of available literature on social media and human rights as well as blasphemy and online blasphemy cases. All these methods were combined to write the findings section.

4.1 Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and restricted by text and talk in the social and political context (Dijk 2001, p. 352).

My research topic involves expressions and texts that are deemed blasphemous on one hand and how religious extremists have used language and their narrative as a powerful means in retaining and strengthening blasphemy laws in Pakistan on the other. As such I consider discourse analysis as the most relevant method of analysis for conducting my research. Discourse analysis is a tool to capture the linkage between power, language and ideology and to describe practices and conventions in and behind texts that reveal political and ideological investment (Machin & Mayr 2012, p. 4).

Moreover, the question of power remains a core feature of discourse analysis with the aim of revealing social relations of power present in texts both implicitly and explicitly. The persuasive influence of social media in conception of power and hegemony by dominant groups remain relevant to discursive field. 'Discourse constructs hegemonic attitudes, opinions and beliefs in such a way as to make them appear 'natural' and 'common sense' while in fact they may be

ideological.’ (Machin & Mayr p. 24) In Pakistan’s context also, the general acceptance of blasphemy laws driven by the religious extremist groups points to hegemonic attitudes which now have come to dominate social media space also.

Another reason why discourse analysis is suitable for my project is the inclusiveness and significance of **visual expression** in this approach. As social media involves a number of visual features, I would like to use those for my analysis of meanings and effects of such mediums and tools in forming opinions both extreme and liberal ones. I endeavoured to show the online discourse and its main features and their potential influence on the audiences.

4.2 Participant Observation

I consider passive participant observation as a method which has been very interesting tool for obtaining useful data for my research project. I used this method as an observer in the cyberspace collecting the comments, contents and reactions on relevant social media pages where blasphemy and religious beliefs are the main topic. In this situation, cyberspace became the *place*, social media users as *actors* and discourse on blasphemy as well as my observation as the *activity* as per Spradley’s method of participant observation (Spradley 1980).

Some of these public Facebook pages are run by right wing pro-blasphemy laws groups where information about events and debates on the topic of sanctity and importance of blasphemy laws are discussed. By being part of such a group, I was able to collect data presenting viewpoint of an entity that I consider as ‘the other’ given my opposition to blasphemy laws. To record observations in such groups required being mindful of the changing nature of online content and that some data might be available for a limited period of time. Some Facebook pages that I saw in the past supporting blasphemy laws have been changed or removed. Apart from extremists’ Facebook pages, I also observed nine pages run by progressive groups and individuals who are critical of blasphemy laws. This method of observing online language is closely connected to discourse analysis which I am already applying to the project. In total I observed nine Facebook pages each belonging to pro-blasphemy groups and anti-blasphemy progressive groups respectively. I am, however, not using all of them in findings section.

Understandably, this method could put me in a risk of being identified and attracting negative reactions or attention from members of these groups and as such it was prudent to limit participation to only passive observation without directly commenting or reacting to comments. One ethical issue in using this method was ‘liking’ the Facebook pages so I could follow them on a regular basis which implied I was in a way strengthening the following of the extremist groups. Moreover, I collected some 500 relevant posts between January-May 2016 through screenshots on my laptop as well as my cell phone (both password protected) and selected some to use for this project. I also scrolled through older timeline to look at relevant posts.

4.3 Survey research

Surveys are the most widely used social science data collection technique that has many forms including phone interviews, opinion polls and questionnaires (Neuman 2014, p. 317). Survey interviews are a way of accumulating solid facts with which subsequent scientific arguments can be crafted (Moses & Knutsen 2012, p. 131). Given the sensitivity of my topic, I consider survey through questionnaires as a viable means of gathering data. The survey method helped me overcome the limitation of having little written analyses or critical writings on social media and blasphemy issue in Pakistan. Interestingly, the topic of my research is considered a ‘pariah or difficult’ arena where special care is required in introducing, framing and expressing questions (Pierce 2008 p. 130). To deal with this challenge I framed open ended questions and chose respondents who were either online activists working on blasphemy issues directly or indirectly or were professionals in the fields of politics, religious freedom or online freedom. To access these individuals, I utilized the contacts I already had, most of whom are connected to me through social media. Others I was able to access through snowball approach where my existing contacts helped me find relevant contacts. Using the same survey method, I also received data and factual information from human rights organizations working on blasphemy and online freedom issues like Bytes for All, NCJP, Bolo Bhi and Centre for Social Justice.

To receive feedback on my questions from online activists fit into my theoretical framework about challenges and opportunities that social media offer for human rights. For the purpose of protecting the identity and safety of respondents, I decided to use online communication and an online questionnaire rather than face to face meetings at public locations. Because of increased telephone surveillance in Pakistan, I refrained from using telephone interviews. The safety and

confidentiality of respondents remained my foremost concern and therefore I aim to protect their identity. Other issues I kept in mind were express prior consent, invasion of privacy, freedom to hold opinions because of religion or ideology, and voluntary participation. Another ethical issue was advocacy or intervention in cases where certain individuals were facing threats due to their views. When I reached out to a potential respondent s/he reported his/her concerns on speaking on such a sensitive issue in Pakistan and also related how recently s/he was asked to use separate utensils in office because of her/his religion. After hearing this I did not to push for interview.

The survey method helped me maintain a balance in imposing my views on my respondents as a face to face conversation was avoided which is imminent to take place in Pakistani context where one is supposed to express religious views on different issues. With the questionnaire in their hands, the respondents had the freedom to express their opinion more openly without interruption of an interview. Further I gave between three days to three weeks' time in filling the questionnaire which gave them enough time to frame their answers. One drawback of this method was that respondents had ample time which made them sometime forget about my request so I had to remind them several times.

The questions I used were similar but not the same for all respondents as I changed, deleted or added some questions depending on who the interviewee was, changing questions accordingly. For the purpose of clarification, I asked follow up questions. I believe, all the data coming from the survey was of tremendous help in shaping my analysis. I am also mindful of limitations involving survey as a research method. The information I collected from conducting interviews represents the viewpoints of only specific individuals and may lead to generalizations in my conclusions which I would try to avoid.

Another drawback of my sample is that it does not include viewpoint of the blasphemy law supporters. Because of security concerns and university regulations I had to refrain from maintaining any contact with them although sometimes I had an urge to receive their feedback to make my study inclusive and balanced. Nonetheless, as I also belong to a Sunni Muslim family, I had an understanding of the position these groups have and why they feel so strongly about it.

I also considered a warning by Aday et al. (2010) who say that policymakers and activists interested in changing societies, sometimes do not pay attention to unintended consequences of their actions. They said that an article published in the U.S. identifying bloggers belonging to a dissident group in a nondemocratic country led to the arrest and harsh interrogation of the bloggers (Aday et al. 2010). In order to avoid such consequences and to protect identity of respondents I decided to make them anonymous by assigning them an identity code. Although some of my respondents gave me consent to be cited, I used for all of them unique identity codes with a main characteristic to define them, though their work may not be confined to that characteristic only. I had 17 total respondents from Pakistan including three Christians, three Hindus, and Muslims from different sects including two Ahmadis.

Table 4.

Respondent Id	Main characteristic
Resp. 1	Works on religious freedom
Resp. 2	Works on online freedom
Resp. 3	Works on religious freedom
Resp. 4	Human rights/online activist
Resp. 5	Blogger/online activist
Resp. 6	Human rights, interfaith harmony activist
Resp. 7	Works on religious freedom
Resp. 8	Human/minority rights activist
Resp. 9	Lawyer/activist
Resp. 10	Online activist
Resp. 11	Human/minority rights activist
Resp. 12	Political commentator
Resp. 13	Political commentator
Resp. 14	Has worked on online freedom
Resp. 15	Blogger/online activist
Resp. 16	Works on online freedom
Resp. 17	Works on religious freedom

CHAPTER V:

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS I

BLASPHEMY AND EXTREMISM ONLINE

The findings in this chapter are divided into two parts. Part one looks at major online blasphemy cases and the reaction by the Government of Pakistan to the overall issue of digital blasphemy. Part two looks at linkages between TV and social media, a phenomenon called dual screening as discussed above. Part three will use online observations to see how pro-blasphemy law groups are using social media.

5.1 Online Blasphemy cases

Since 2011, a new trend started in Pakistan when blasphemy allegations have been levelled against the accused for using different social media. In one of latest events a Christian man was arrested in Mandi Bahauddin in Punjab province on May 25 on a complaint lodged by his Muslim neighbours for allegedly posting blasphemous messages on his Facebook account. His wife claimed the case was false and was filed because of a personal grudge. The police said alleged messages were posted on Facebook account of Usman a year ago but Usman claimed he did not post them and someone else had tagged him (on his account) (Dawn, 26 May 2016; Deccan Chronicle 26 May 2016).

According to Nighat Dad of Lahore based Digital Rights Foundation, the mob behaviour surrounding blasphemy laws has been strengthened by the increasing adoption of technology in the country like mobile phones and the internet. This not only serves as **evidence** that blasphemy has occurred but also to **mass-share** details of the accused (with calls to find the culprit). ‘From Facebook walls to text messages sent through mobile phones, accused have suffered nothing less but death without ever being proven guilty. This recent influx of mob behavior is capable within only a few hours of identifying victims online, getting their personal information, mass-sharing it with text messages, and then killing the accused,’ Nighat laments (Dad 2014). This analysis is

accurate if we look at the details of some online blasphemy cases and later at the usage of social media by pro-blasphemy laws groups in this chapter.

NCJP considers that blasphemy accusation vulnerability is more geared towards 24-hour use of mobile phone rather than the Internet (personal communication). As the chart shared by NCJP below shows, most of blasphemy cases involving social media since 2011 contain allegations of sending blasphemous texts via cell phones. Apparently, the first case relating to text message allegation occurred in Bhakkar, Punjab in January 2011 when a man Shahnawaz accused Muhammad Javed of sending him blasphemous text messages (Dawn 25 February 2011). The same year Sajjad Masih, a Christian man received life sentence for a similar charge in Pakpattan, Punjab. In Toba Tek Singh another blasphemy case was filed where a Christian couple was accused of texting blasphemous messages to local Muslims. The accused, Shafqat Emmanuel and Shaghuftha Kausar, were awarded death sentences by a trial court reportedly under great pressure from the public (Digital Rights Foundation 2016). As can be seen most of these cases were registered in the province of Punjab and the accused were either Muslims or Christians.

Table 5. Blasphemy accusations involving text messages 2011-15

Sr .	Name	Gender	District	Section	Date	Allegation	Status
1	Muhammad Javed (Muslim)	Male	Bhakkar	Allegation	17/01/11	Sent a blasphemous message	Not arrested
2	Basharat (Muslim)	Male	Sargodha	295-A/298-A TA	19/05/11	Sent text messages that contained blasphemous content about the companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)	Arrested
3	Irfan Rafique (Muslim)	Male	Lahore	295-C PPC	27/05/11	Sent blasphemous text messages	Arrested
4	Muhammad Zafar Zaidi (Muslim)	Male	Karachi	295-C/296/298A PPC	11/12/11	Sent blasphemous text messages	Arrested
5	SajjadMasih (Christian)	Male	Pakpattan	295-C PPC	23/12/11	Sent blasphemous mobile messages	Arrested/ life imprisonment and fined Rs. 200,000/- Appealed in LHC
6	Irfan Rafiq (a mentally	Male	Lahore	Allegation	17/03/12	Sent sacrilegious SMS against the Holy Prophet	Supreme Court

	challenged) (Muslim)					(PBUH)	directed police to shift him to Mental Hospital, Lahore
7	Zafar Bhatti (Christian)	Male	Rawalpindi	295-C PPC	27/07/12	Allegation of sending blasphemous SMS to a Muslim cleric	Arrested
8	Ryan Brian (Christian)	Male	Karachi	295-C PPC	12/10/12	Blasphemous message	In hiding
9	Shahadit Ali (Muslim)	Male	Sargodha	--	2012	Sent derogatory message	Imprisonment for 3 years
10	Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kasur (Christian)	Male and Female	Gojra/Faisalabad	295-B & C	21/07/13	Sent blasphemous text messages	Sentenced to death
11	Asif Pervaiz (Christian)	Male	Lahore	295-A,B & C 25-D Telegraph Act	02/10/13	Sent blasphemous text messages	Under trial/Applied for bail

Source: NCJP shared data on blasphemy

Seemingly the first case where **social networking sites** was used as an evidence for blasphemy was filed in November 2013 against Raza Kharal who was arrested in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab. The complaint was filed by prayer leader of a mosque who accused the man for having shared objectionable material on his Facebook wall (Dawn 2013).

The most gruesome online blasphemy case occurred in July 2014 when a blasphemous picture of holy shrine of Makkah (with a nude girl sitting over it) was allegedly posted on Facebook by an Ahmadi Aqib Saleem in Gujranwala. The alleged desecration led to mob violence against Ahmadiyya community resulting in killing of three Ahmadi females, including two children. The police registered a case under Anti-terrorism clause ATA 8/11 and PPC 295-A against Saleem who remained in prison for over a year and was finally acquitted by a court (personal communication).

Another prominent case involves the allegation of blasphemy on a university teacher, Junaid Hafeez who returned to Pakistan after graduating from the US to teach at Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan, Punjab. He was arrested on 13 March 2013 on allegation of operating two

groups on Facebook: ‘So-Called Liberals of Pakistan’ and ‘Mullah Munafiq’ (hypocrite cleric) where he posted blasphemous material. When Junaid’s father failed to find a lawyer willing to defend his case, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan member Rashid Rehman agreed to defend his case. After receiving many death threats for defending a blasphemer, Rashid was finally gunned down inside his office in May 2014 (Dawn May 18, 2016; Dawn 18 May 2014).

Table 6. Blasphemy accusations involving Cyberspace

Sr.	Name	Gender	District	Section	Date	Allegation	Status
12	Raza Kharal (Muslim)	Male	Toba Tek Singh	295-A & 298-A	19/11/13	Sharing objectionable material and offensive language on his Facebook wall	Arrested
13	Junaid Hafeez	Male	Multan	PPC 295-C	March 2013	Posted blasphemous remarks on Facebook group	Arrested
14	Aqib Saleem Ahmadi	Male	Gujranwala	ATA 8/11 and PPC 295	July 2014	Shared blasphemous post online	Arrested, acquitted
15	Qaiser Ayub Christian	Male	Talagang	295-C	Nov. 2014	Blasphemous remarks on a Christian website	Arrested
16	All Pakistan Girls	Unknown	Lahore	Petition to register case	May 2014	Blasphemous remarks on Facebook page	pending
17	Imran Masih Christian	Male	Mandi Bahauddin	295-C	May 2016	Watching blasphemous YouTube video	Arrested
18	Usman Masih Christian	Male	Sheikhupura	295	25 May 2016	Blasphemous posts on Facebook	Arrested

Source: different newspapers including Dawn, Deccan Chronicle and Express Tribune.

In addition, I found at least two cases where use of social media led to punishment under Anti-Terrorism Act for provoking sectarian violence. In November 2015, an anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Lahore, Punjab sentenced a Shia man Saqlain Haider to 13 years imprisonment after he allegedly posted sectarian hate speech on Facebook (Dawn 24 November 2015). In March 2016, another Shia man Rizwan Haider was convicted by an ATC for promoting sectarian hatred, publishing a post that was found objectionable by Sunni Muslims (Express Tribune 3 March 2016). The convictions were criticized by Bytes for All which pointed out that banned militant groups including the Pakistani Taliban and sectarian groups such Lashkar-i-Jhangvi have a significant social media presence in Pakistan and ‘appear to be operating freely under the eyes of

authorities but no action had been taken against them.’ It expressed concern that an anti-terrorism court had been used to hear a case related to online speech rather than to any violent activities (Dawn 2015).

At the national level, no specific law governs control of online content in Pakistan but recourse has been taken for censorship and monitoring including blasphemy and anti-terrorism laws. In 2003, the Pakistan government began blocking blasphemous sites, along with proxy sites being used to access blocked content. The government’s first implementation of a widespread ban came after the Danish cartoon controversy in 2006, and since then has seen an upward trend (Bytes for All 2013). In May 2014, Twitter blocked access to dozens of accounts and specific in Pakistan after receiving complaints from the country's telecom authority that the material was ‘blasphemous’ and ‘unethical.’ After facing severe criticism Twitter unblocked the accounts.

The Facebook ‘Government Requests Report’ shows that during the period July-December 2015, the Pakistan government sent 471 requests to Facebook to restrict content as compared to 162 and over thousand such requests during the July-Dec period in 2013 and 2014 respectively (Dawn). It added that ‘based on legal requests from the Pakistan Telecom Authority, we restricted access to items that were alleged to violate local laws prohibiting blasphemy (Facebook 2015).’ YouTube remained banned in Pakistan from 2012 to 2016 as a reaction to ‘Innocence of Prophet’ video that led to violent protests in the country killing 20 people.

In private conversations, Pakistan officials decry the fact that handling of religious issues has become very sensitive topic for officials who opt to keep quiet compromising fundamental freedoms. Conversely Pakistan tried to play a leading role in seeking a global blasphemy law at the UN level in reactions to cartoon controversy of 2006 and YouTube video protests of 2012 (www.rferl.org). Interestingly, Pakistan’s demands to introduce a global blasphemy law clashed with demands from western countries to amend the country’s blasphemy laws.

The following timeline shows the reaction by the government of Pakistan to online blasphemy allegations:

Table 7. Brief Timeline: Pakistan, Social Media and Government

Blocking and Seeking Access:

2003: The government began blocking blasphemous sites, along with proxy sites being used to access blocked content.

2006: Government's first implementation of a widespread ban that came directly after the Danish cartoon controversy in 2006. Pakistan Telecommunications Authority blocks more than a 1000 websites

March 2006: Supreme Court ordered a ban on blasphemous websites.

2010: The blocking of Facebook, YouTube, and some Flickr and Wikipedia pages following the creation of a Facebook page titled 'Post Drawings of the Prophet Mohammad Day.'

2011. PTA ordered all ISPs in Pakistan to block encrypted internet traffic.

2012: Twitter was blocked for less than a day for hosting posts promoting a competition for blasphemous drawings

2012: 'Innocence of Muslims' was released on YouTube, leading to violent street protests that left 20 dead in Pakistan, YouTube was banned across Pakistan by the govt.

2013: Fair Trial Act was passed by Parliament giving the State power to intercept private conversations.

2013: Peshawar High Court discussed immediate steps with authorities to block 'blasphemous material' on Facebook and demand response in 20 days.

2013: Minister of IT, tweeted about filtration and unlocking YouTube after filtration is done to eliminate the presence of blasphemous and pornographic material in Pakistan.

May 2014: Twitter blocked access to dozens of accounts and specific in Pakistan after receiving complaints from the country's telecoms authority that the material was 'blasphemous' and 'unethical.'

January 2015: Following a devastating attack on a school in Peshawar that killed 145 people, Pakistan adopted National Action Plan under which a moratorium on executions was lifted and mobile communication came under strict surveillance.

2015: Cybercrime Bill is tabled in National Assembly with several clauses curbing freedom of expression among other things for the glory of Islam.

2016: YouTube ban is rescinded by Pakistan after three years.

2016: Blackberry announces not to withdraw service from Pakistan after the latter agrees to give up demand for data access.

5. 2 Social and broadcast media: dual screening

In 2006, the Peshawar High Court highlighted the negative role that media plays in highlighting blasphemy cases and the danger of publicizing a person accused of blasphemy. It said 'whenever a person is charged for such an offence (blasphemy), the print media give extensive coverage to such incident and the accused person is cursed and abused by the society/people-at-large. So

much so that even his life becomes at risk at the hands of certain segments of the society' (ICJ 2015). This observation is, however, not limited to the print media and the person accused only. The convergence of media, including print, television and internet has made publicity of blasphemy cases as one of the prime concerns of Pakistani audience due to their religiosity. The television channels particularly have played a negative role in this regard which has been prompted by their rivalry with other TV channels. Below I would discuss three prominent cases which highlight the role of dual screening in fanning blasphemy accusations.

5.2.1 2014 Geo TV Case: The blasphemy accusation on four people involved in a TV show on Geo TV which was deemed offensive is an example of how social and broadcast media together created massive pressure on authorities to punish the accused and had the license of the TV revoked temporarily.

On 17 May 2014, protests and rallies were taken out against Geo TV after the most popular and influential channel allegedly broadcast a religious song in a morning show hosted by Shaista Lodhi (Daily Times 2014). A transgression was taken at the performance of the Sufi devotional song about the marriage of Prophet's daughter and that a comparison was being drawn with Veena Malik, an actress (The Guardian 2014). The accusation that blasphemy has occurred was levelled by another rival TV channel ARY (followers of Tableeghi or Deobandi Jammāt) which repeatedly broadcast it on TV and social media particularly Facebook. Media frenzy ensued resulting in registration of blasphemy cases against the actress, her husband, TV host and owner of Geo in multiple cities of Pakistan. For Geo, the incident happened after it had invited the wrath of the country's intelligence agency ISI for accusing it to be behind an attack on one of Geo TV prominent news anchors Hamid Mir (Newsweek 2014).



The Geo TV logo above with a boycott message became ubiquitous on Facebook in Pakistan with many conservative users calling it 'Jew TV.'

In November a court in Gilgit-Baltistan convicted the four accused to 26 years imprisonment, although the case did not belong to this court's jurisdiction (Newsweek 2014). The cases at the level of Islamabad High Court and other cities continued for some time and the TV actress ended up joining an Islamic cleric as her teacher. However, the calls to bring the accused to justice have not ended particularly against owner of the Geo network Mir Shakilur Rehman (<http://arynews.tv/en/tag/mir-shakeel>).

5.2.2 Junaid Jamshed case: A blasphemy case was registered against singer-turned-preacher televangelist Junaid Jamshed in December 2014 after his sermon went viral on social media allegedly containing blasphemous remarks about a wife of Prophet Muhammad. The case had been registered on a complaint of a leader of the Sunni Tehreek under Sections 295-C and 298-A. Jamshed had to release a video message in which he apologized for his remarks and asked for forgiveness (Dawn 3 Dec 2014). The blasphemous video was particularly picked up by another rival televangelist Amir Liaquat of rival Geo TV who said on air that the crime Jamshed had committed could not be forgiven. Many members of Sunni Tehreek have called for killing Jamshed (a Deobandi) for his alleged blasphemy and recently attacked him at Islamabad airport where police intervened to save him.



Junaid Jamshed rendering an online video apology for his alleged offensive remarks against the Prophet's wife.

5.2.3 Salman Taseer case: In the case of Salman Taseer the role and interface of social and broadcast media was seen in a similar manner. Salman Taseer, Governor of Punjab province was accused of committing blasphemy in 2011 when he expressed solidarity with Asiya Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for committing blasphemy. Taseer publicly called blasphemy laws as ‘black laws’ and asked for their review. Taseer’s act was seen as committing blasphemy in itself and an outcry was witnessed both on social and broadcast media. One of interviews in which the TV host accused Taseer of blasphemy went viral on social media and led to spread of information about his alleged act and street protests. Taseer was murdered in Islamabad in January 2011 by Mumtaz Qadri, one of policemen on duty to protect him. After the murder hundreds of educated young Pakistanis welcomed Taseer's killing on social networking websites, including Facebook and Twitter. Ironically Taseer was one of the first prolific Twitter users of Pakistan. One of his last tweets said: ‘I was under huge pressure sure to cow down before rightest pressure on blasphemy. Refused. Even if I'm the last man standing’(Guardian 2011). Nearly two months later the only Christian member of then federal cabinet Shahbaz Bhatti received 25 bullets in Islamabad for condemning Taseer murder and for advocating review of blasphemy laws (Guardian 2011).



In this interview host Meher Bukhari repeatedly accused Taseer of committing blasphemy and Taseer repeatedly denied the charge saying he was a Muslim believer.

As is visible, the country's blasphemy laws have posed the most challenging threat to freedom of speech on the cyberspace. As opposed to Arab Spring events where a video on social media became litmus for widespread protests and demands for democratization (Ahy 2014), in case of Geo TV and Taseer case a reverse trend was witnessed. Taseer's interview on Samaa TV and Geo's morning programs were widely viewed because they were put on Facebook pages in Pakistan. In both cases media groups that were opposed to the incumbent governments further pushed the drive for blasphemy convictions as a way of criticizing the government for not being able to contain blasphemy. Such media campaign and mass involvement through social media put to compromise the rights to life, religious freedom and freedom of speech.

In all these cases, the role of broadcast media was largely criticized by the civil society for spreading and mainstreaming extremist views in order to gain rating benefits. While Geo TV suffered huge losses as a result of country wide boycott of the TV channel, its rival channels particularly ARY thrived with higher ratings and viewership. 'Pakistan's once most-watched television channel, has lost more than 80% of its viewers in less than a month' (BBC 2014). This signified deep polarization among media houses in a country considered to be the most dangerous place for journalists. Notably, the Geo Group launched its online internet live transmission and initiated a publicity campaign to mitigate some of the negative effects due to a religious driven social boycott. In this scenario, the Junaid Jamshed case came as a respite for Geo TV which played an important role in spreading the blasphemous video. The Junaid Jamshed case was also criticised by some activists for proving that if the accused was a well-known Muslim preacher and allegedly committed blasphemy, there were less chances of putting him behind bar. However, the civil society shunned such dangerous comparison and called for discouraging punishment calls for blasphemy laws by anyone involved.



Celebrating Ghazis: This FB post shows a popular TV host inviting on her program parents of Amir Cheema, who wanted to assassinate Roger Köppe editor of German newspaper Die Welt for reprinting JyllandsPosten cartoons of the Prophet in 2006 and later died in jail. During the program the TV host regarded the parents with utmost regard calling them 'lucky' for having such a brave son who gave up life for sanctity of the Prophet.



This post on the same FB page shows Amir Cheema's picture, revelling the day he died as a martyr in a German jail.

5.3 Extremism 2.0: Qadri, the hero

Violent support for blasphemy laws provides some religious groups with widespread public support and legitimacy in national affairs. Many Islamic groups, including Khatame Nabuwwat (End of Prophethood), Tahaffuze Namoose Risalat (Defense of Sanctity of Prophet), or Sunni Tehreek (Sunni Movement), claim protecting the sanctity of Islam, the Prophet, his Companions and its book as their foremost cause. In the past they have successfully lobbied for anti-Ahmadi and anti-blasphemy laws. One of recent groups is Dawate Islami founded in 1981 by Maulana Ilyas Qadri which has members in 187 countries and runs its 24 hour TV channel Madani Channel. Qadri's group has grown rapidly in recent years and Mumtaz Qadri also claimed to be one of Ilyas Qadri followers and hence the suffix Qadri.

Many pages on Facebook have been created since the assassination of Salman Taseer and arrest of his assassin Mumtaz Qadri supporting the latter's action on blasphemy as religiously sanctioned. These pages are an example of gheottoization or homophily of social media as pointed out by Aday et al (2010). Moreover, as pointed out by Lydsky (2012) these Facebook pages are reinforcing the already held prejudices of users with a certain viewpoint. The activities of these pages intensified after Qadri was executed on 29 February 2016, to protest against the hanging. In order to avoid any backlash disrupting government activities, the Pakistan Electronic Medeia Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) banned coverage of Qadri's funeral by TV channels. This ban further antagonized Qadri supporters who then used social media updates and live streaming for giving minute to minute updates on the event. Only one conservative news channel Neo TV covered the event and accused the government of an unjustified ban violating freedom of expression.

One of the livestreaming channels on Facebook run by Qadri supporters is XPose with a following of 230,744 people (as of May 2016). The channel streamed online videos asking more people to join in the funeral and later protests taken out against the execution. It also uploaded short documentaries giving answers to criticism of Mumtaz Qadri by progressive Pakistanis giving details of his case and why he was justified in murdering a 'blasphemer.' Another Facebook page Pyare Nabi Ki Baatein with 1,361,282 followers (as of May 2016) shared similar

posts eulogizing Qadri as a martyr and hero of Islam. Other Facebook pages quoted below also had a large following both within and outside Pakistan.

Some of the characteristics of these pages were similar apart from their support for blasphemy laws which include their opposition and hate messages for progressive religious leaders like Javaid Ghamidi; use of foul language against media, politicians, judiciary and government officials; misogynistic posts about women ; anti-Ahmadi and anti-Shia posts; and hate speech against opposite sects.



These are all social media networks run by the same pro-Qadri group.



Mumtaz Qadri clearly had many supporters inside the jail who helped his followers make his videos and put them online, conveying his messages and devotional songs.

Xpose
Mar 27, 2016 at 9:40am • 🌐

#Update
اسٹیج سے لیاقت باغ کے تازہ ترین مناظر -
دیکھ لے حکومت وقت یہ ملک ممتاز قادری کے چاہنے والوں
کا ہے -
لیک یا رسول اللہ

[Fb.com/Xpose.com.pk](https://fb.com/Xpose.com.pk)



👍❤️👎 1.7K 53 Comments 1K Shares

👍 Like 🗨 Comment ➔ Share

In face of a complete ban on coverage of Mumtaz Qadri's funeral, his supporters utilized social media for minute to minute updates, calling more people to join in.

Ulma e Deoband Videos & Pictures
Tube added 3 new photos.
Mar 1, 2016 at 9:30am • 🌐

جامعہ دارالعلوم حقانیہ اکوڑہ خٹک کے ہزاروں طلبہ کرام
اپنے شیوخ اور اساتذہ کرام کی سرپرستی میں ممتاز قادری
شہید کی حمایت اور موجودہ حکومت کے خلاف احتجاج...
Continue Reading



👍 113 29 Shares

👍 Like 🗨 Comment ➔ Share

Announcing solidarity. This Deobandi group joined Mumtaz Qadri's funeral as a mark of solidarity and support to fellow Sunnis.



Xpose

Mar 1, 2016 at 9:57am •

مولانا الیاس قادری کے بیٹے کی آمد
واقعی ممتاز قادری جیت گیا
واہ واہ سبحان اللہ

Fb.com/Xpose.com.pk



2.1K

52 Comments 1.2K Shares 34K Views

Like

Comment

Share

The arrival of Maulana Ilyas Qadri on Mumtaz Qadri's funeral is being announced on Facebook.



Pyare Nabi Ki Baatain

Mar 15, 2016 at 5:32am •

Beautiful Naat sharif By Allama Jami Saab in USA!

مل گیا تاج شہادت ممتاز کو
ہے سلام تا قیامت ممتاز کو

نوری چہرے سے ہوا ہے خود عیاں
پنجتن کی ہے حمایت ممتاز... Continue Reading



170

40 Shares 2.3K Views

Like

Comment

Share

Not confined to Pakistan, these Qadri supporters are singing his praise in the US.



Hazoor KI Tazeem

Feb 13, 2016 at 1:40pm · 🌐

ممتازقادی کے چرچے اٹلی کے پارلیمنٹ کے سامنے۔
بغیر کسی مصلحت اور خوف کے اٹلی کی پارلیمنٹ کے باہر
ایسا ناموس رسالت کا مظاہرہ شاید ہی آپ نے دیکھا ہو ..
اٹلی کی غیور سنی عوام تمہارے جذبہ عشق و محبت کو
ہماری جانب سے صد سلام
کائنات میں سب سے افضل حضور کی تعظیم

Hazoor KI Tazeem



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

👍 755

Celebrating Mumtaz Qadri outside Italian Parliament.



Hazoor KI Tazeem

May 1, 2016 at 8:23am · 🌐

https://mobile.facebook.com/hazrat.muhammad.gando?fref=ts&_rdr

آپ سب سے گزارش ہے کہ اس آئی کو دیکھ کر اپنا ایمان
خراب نہ کریں اسے صرف رپورٹ کریں اور اپنے دوستوں کو
میسج کر کے رپورٹ بھی کروائیں۔



Identifying blasphemers online: This FB account holder is known for his posts against blasphemy laws and hence Qadri supporters have tried to block his ID many times. Through this post they are showing followers how to block his ID.



This post announces a reward of 9,600 dollars for giving any information for this alleged Pakistan based blasphemer Mufti Zia who committed blasphemy in an online video message. Social media posts helped extremists trace him but he went into hiding.



Blasphemer with Facebook id Mufti Zia and youtube id Iqbal Rahim was traced in Malaysia but escaped the premises when Muslims reached his place. No one will be forgiven for blasphemy and if you want peace do not abuse our Prophets.



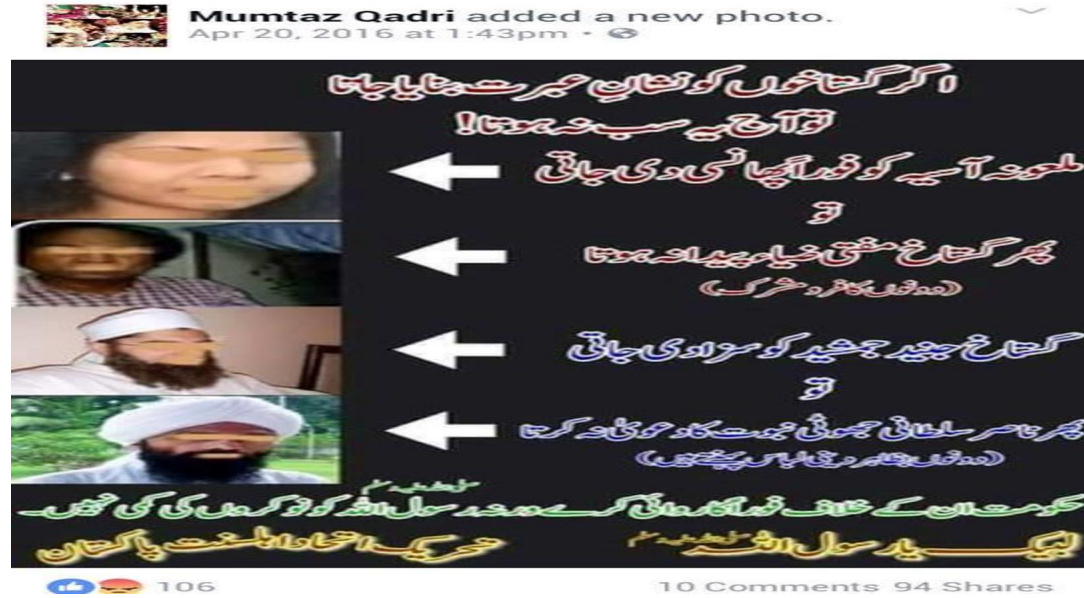
Mufti Zia's house was later traced in Malaysia through Facebook posts but the accused managed to escape and his family was harassed.



This person, Nasir Sultani, from Ahmadiyya community allegedly declared himself a prophet and hence committed blasphemy. The post says it is now his turn to be murdered by another Ghazi.



This post shows Asad Shah, an Ahmadi shopkeeper in Scotland who was killed in March 2016 by Tanveer Ahmed, after Asad claimed in an online video that he was a prophet. Tanveer confessed the ‘blasphemy’ killing and is now revered as a Ghazi in home country Pakistan.



This post showing Asiya Bibi, Junaid Jamshed, Mufi Zia and Nasir Sultani calls for strict implementation of blasphemy laws. It says if the government had executed Asiya, Mufi Zia would no blaspheme, and if Junaid Jamshed was punished then Nasir would not dare blaspheme.



A man who killed a person accused of blasphemy in February 2016 is celebrated as a new Ghazi.



Hazrat Ghazi Ilm ud din Shaheed Museum- Pakistan shared **Lahore Lahore Hai Yaar's** photo.

Mar 4, 2016 at 8:07pm •



Lahore Lahore Hai Yaar

Mar 3, 2016 at 11:42am •

12 مئی 2014 کو تھانہ شرقیہ شریف کے نواحی گاؤں بھونیوال میں خلیل نامی قادیانی نے نبی پاک ﷺ کی شان میں چپاں پوسٹر پھاڑ کر بے حرمتی کی، کچھ دن بعد 16 سال اس نوجوان نے تھانہ میں داخل ہو کر اس گستاخ کا کام تمام کر دیا۔ غازی صاحب تاحال پابند سلاسل ہیں اور ثابت قدمی کے ساتھ ناموس رسالت ﷺ کی داستان بے ہونے ہیں۔



5

Ghazi Ilm Din is back. Another Ghazi who killed an Ahmadi for tearing a poster on 12 May 2014.



Pyaare Nabi Ki Baatain with Tayyab Malik.

Mar 14, 2016 at 1:17pm •

چار عظیم غازی و شہداء رحمہم اللہ تعالیٰ



1.2K

8 Comments 311 Shares

Like

Comment

Share

Ghazis on billboards: This FB posts shows four great Ghazis on a billboard in an unspecified Pakistani city, including Amir Cheema and Mumtaz Qadri.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS II: ONLINE ACTIVISM

6.1 Activism 2.0: Challenging the narrative

For human rights defenders, Pakistan has been an extremely difficult country. On one hand there are extremist elements trying to impose their version of Islam and on the other hand are constitutional or policy related state sanctioned curbs on human rights activism and freedom of expression. In addition, intelligence agencies are reported to be behind harassment of some activists on account of anti-state activities. For those working on blasphemy issues, the risks are even greater. Despite all practical odds and murder of many HRDs, the civil society activists in Pakistan have continued their struggle and have extended this front on social media space.

In my survey I asked questions regarding the current state of online advocacy in Pakistan against blasphemy laws. The survey asked respondents qualitative and open end questions to provide in-depth and explanatory comments. As a result I received invaluable inputs and perspectives which were not found otherwise in available literature. Following are some of the main points emerging from responses from the 17 respondents most of whom are human rights or online activists. As mentioned in Chapter IV, under university ethical research framework, identities of the respondents have been coded for the purpose of the sample and certain sensitive comments will be mentioned without coded attributes.

6.1.1. Social media for human rights advocacy

Most respondents regarded social media as a great tool for human rights advocacy in Pakistan in view of the existing limitations on freedom of expression and censorship. There was an overall consensus that social media has created an additional space for fundamental rights such as freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and access to information as people are expressing their opinions on sensitive religious issues or tabooed topics. Twitter, Facebook, and blogs were named as the most popular forums providing space for such activism.

It was shared that some civil society organizations are using social media as a tool to shape a

tolerant society such as by producing video clips to highlight religious tolerance. Some human rights activists have effectively combined on-ground activism with their social media presence. ‘It is been a useful strategy because social media presence means that there will be more mobilization from quarters which would otherwise remain silent. This exerts pressure on the state as well, since people do not forget about the issue due to social media’ (Resp. 14).

6.1.2 Social media and blasphemy

Two major opinions emerged from the responses: one that social media has actually helped highlight the negative sides of blasphemy laws, and second that not much has been done to counter negative effects of blasphemy laws.

According to one respondent, social media has provided a space to bring negative impact of blasphemy laws on surface that government purposely wanted to hush up. The case of Asiya Bibi was brought in limelight through social media after which change in the opinions of the judiciary has been observed and the general public has openly started to question the divinity of the law. The Supreme Court of Pakistan’s historical verdict on Mumtaz Qadri case declaring that blasphemy laws are negotiable assisted social media activists. By using social media, activists can help build a database of human stories about the way blasphemy law is abused (Resp 1).

Another respondent thought that individually rights activists keep highlighting blasphemy issues on social media but for civil society as a whole it is too dangerous to criticize blasphemy laws which could further shrink space for them (Resp. 2). Similarly Resp. 10 opined that efforts on part of civil society have been unorganized and disjointed. Social media, therefore, has not been employed effectively. However, it did play a role in bringing out the alternative view to the general audience.

One respondent identified some Facebook groups like Pakistani Freethinkers, Citizens for Secular Democracy, Angra, Bhensa, Roshni as promoting free thought, rationality and scientific thinking. ‘They all are doing a tremendous job in enlightening people on issues like blasphemy and persecution of religious minorities. Their outreach is massive and people are being sensitized on several sensitive issues. The rate of conversion to atheism is unbelievable.’

At least four respondents (Resps. 4, 9, 10, 13), however, thought that online activism has not been that productive, sufficient and effective in terms of religious debates and developing counter narratives on blasphemy. ‘Social media has only benefited religious right and conservatives,’ one added. Significantly most respondents said that it is only people familiar with or working on blasphemy issues who have become cautious about commenting online while common people are not aware of the consequences of their language use online.

Another respondent insisted that progressive Facebook pages such as Taliban Are Zaliman (oppressors) or Roshni (light) offer a space where discourse is taking place on blasphemy laws, and that is what is essential for any change at all (as Shirky also emphasized). The people who bully or harass people for difference in opinions or religion are not (necessarily) militant Taliban or Al-Qaeda members; they are normal, everyday citizens. ‘It is too simplistic to say religious militancy has created intolerance. The problem is more complex. That is why social media activism is essential, because it allows people to connect and converse with a larger number of people’ (Resp. 14).

6.1.3 Social media and religious minorities

Most of respondents considered social media as an effective medium to highlight the issues related to minorities and for engaging general public in communal harmony. At least three respondents referred to a recent online campaign to pass a law to register Hindu marriages that mounted pressure on legislators to pass the bill as a successful online activity (Resps. 4,6,5). A respondent belonging to Ahmadiyya community said that Ahmadis are using social media to express their religious and political views, ‘which they can neither do openly in society nor do they get a chance or opportunity in print media or broadcast media.’ This contrasted with the opinion of another Ahmadi activist who said that it is difficult to express political and religious opinions on social media due to the biased attitudes of majority groups, having stereotyped approaches, as they try to impose their believes on minority groups.

6.1.4 Importance of anonymity and encryption

Most respondents regarded encryption as a necessary tool for online safety of human rights activists but also added that in Pakistan knowledge about such tools is very limited. One

respondent said as social media allows creating false identities (profiles) activists can discuss taboo issues, and express their views without compromising their personal safety. ‘It is no more a singular or one sided discourse as it used to be. The alternative views/arguments are also reaching to the younger generation because of anonymity.’

Another respondent said encryption is not a common practice in Pakistan, while anonymity of human rights defenders is also not exercised by the HRDs leading towards threats, harm and eventually assassination by opposite forces (Resp. 1). One activist informed that only technology oriented organizations are using encryption and anonymity as such the biggest barrier is lack of awareness. ‘Alarmingly, the government has also proposed in the pending cybercrime bill 2016 to ban encryption technology in Pakistan’ (Resp 2). Another respondent complained that encryption or accessing the net through a proxy server has helped activists but ICT companies especially Facebook are discouraging anonymity creating barriers and life threats for HRDs in countries like Pakistan’ (Resp. 10).

6.1.5 Broadcast vs social media on religious freedom issues

Majority of the responses showed that broadcast and print media are considered to be conservative and heavily censored. One opined that since the state of Pakistan has a religion (Islam) many institutions including the media (private and public) are religiously influenced. ‘The broadcasting media houses are biased in their approaches particularly with regards to content on freedom of religion or belief plus they have their personal/profit (rating) based motivation’ (Resp. 1).

Respondent 10 thought that social media has greatly facilitated those whose ideas could not be flashed on mainstream media as broadcast media is excessively edited and remains under heavy scrutiny. ‘On the other hand the “watchers” lack the capacity and technical prowess to monitor and control social media,’ Resp. 10 said while referring to state institutions concerned with censorship.

Another view was that social media is playing a significant role in educating traditional media by highlighting print or broadcast media's insensitivity towards code of conduct issues. One example was given of a TV host Maya Khan who had to go off screen for few months after she was criticised on social media for harassing couples in a public park in the name of morality (Resp. 5).

A minority rights activist complained that broadcast media does not give space to minorities or minority issues to the extent given by social media. English and regional language newspapers to some extent give space to minority issues, whereas Urdu newspapers rarely give coverage to minority issues (Resp 6). A similar view was shared by Resp. 8 who said that the spaces afforded by social media for the micro-political actors, small groups, communities, subaltern people, and the marginalized sections, is something that mainstream broadcast media did not afford.

6.1.6 Limitations of social media advocacy

Respondents listed a number of factors that limit social media's role in Pakistan. One respondent said that progressive citizens are more active on social media but not on streets while street protests and politics is dominated by conservative religious parties. 'Although religious parties do not have substantial vote bank in Pakistan, their influence on policy and their use of force and protests plays an important role as pressure groups' (Resp. 6). Three respondents (13, 14, 9) pointed out another important limiting factor which is low literacy rate and limited knowledge of English language in Pakistan restricting social media activism to literate, mostly urban strata of society.

Respondent 5 highlighted at least three restraining factors: that i) online activism can generate a debate, but cannot lead to any tangible change in the on-ground situation; ii) because of online harassment and vigilantism many people have stopped posting comments on such issues; and it is the younger generation that is mostly using social media which is usually not in decision making positions (Resp 5).

According to another view, online activism is not as effective as it ought to be because those who wish to cause online harassment and vigilantism have used social media more effectively to

spread hate material (Resp 9). One more note of caution (like Gladwell) came from Resp. 14 who said that ‘one must be cautious of engaging too much in clicktivism or keyboard jihad, as activism does not begin or end online, the Internet is merely a part of a larger struggle. With limited reach and limited function of social media, it must remain just one tool, rather than becoming the form of activism (Resp. 14).’

6.1.7 Social media’s negative sides

A number of drawbacks of social media usage were pointed out. According to one view, social media has created an environment of hostility through increase in hate speech. Because of its wild fire effect, material produced in the other corners of the world can be disseminated within seconds to incite violence. For example violence erupted on the streets of Pakistan after publication of cartoons in Denmark and France depicting the Holy Prophet. Moreover, if someone said something concerning religion on social media or TV even mistakenly or due to lack of religious knowledge, the person cannot escape but must be punished under blasphemy laws or Terrorist Act (1 Resp.). Similarly, Resp. 2 was of the opinion that the increase in blasphemy cases, especially in context of religious expression online, is pushing people towards self-censorship, ‘which is worst form of censorship’. As a result religious and sexual minorities are becoming more vulnerable.

Another respondent said that people using social media are sometimes shy and do not prefer to attend social gatherings which may hamper true activism (Resp. 7). One activist said that people massively pouring in religious material on social media has become a trend in Pakistan which needs to be discouraged. ‘I don’t like the way I am asked to “like” any religious post or the way people seek God’s forgiveness / blessings on social media (Resp 13). This invasion of religious material sometimes pushes non-religious people to share religious texts even when they would otherwise not do so.

6.1.8 Use of social media by religious extremists

The use of social media by extremist groups or those groups supporting blasphemy laws was identified as a disturbing development in Pakistan. There was, however, a clear difference of opinion whether these are having a substantial effect on public opinion or serve only for venting

out frustration. Resp. 2 agreed that they are impacting the discourse with wider outreach such as in Mumtaz Qadri's case. 'Despite an absolute blackout on broadcast media at the time of his funeral a huge number of people from different politico-religious parties not only turned up but also provoked people to take law in their hands against the alleged blasphemers. Mumtaz Qadri himself did the same while being inspired from the speeches of a religious cleric Mufti Hanif Qureshi. So supporters of these parties in Pakistan at that time were leading the discourse around Qadri's sentence on social media' (Resp. 2).

Similarly, respondent 4 said social media usage by extremist groups is badly affecting people's mind as a lot of negative propaganda surrounding Qadri case has been used and as a result he is considered as a hero. Resp. 1 noted that 'the extremist school of thought has somehow been able to succeed in portraying blasphemy as a divine law which can neither be repealed nor amended and that is what is creating problems for people in Pakistan who are deeply religious' (Resp. 1).

Expressing a different viewpoint, Resp. 8 said that those people who can be affected by extremists are already attuned to them as such they are not affecting public opinion. 'Instead their jingoism is being exposed to all those who differ, and also to those who were indifferent to such fanaticism previously. It will prove counterproductive for the supporters of blasphemy (Resp 8).' Likewise Resp. 10 opined that extremist groups' social media usage to defend and promote blasphemy laws was only reinforcing the views of those who were already in their favour (Resp 10).

On the other side, Resp. 14 asserted that extremist groups in the first place should not be allowed to operate such social media platforms to propagate their harmful views online that incite violence. 'Such practice does not fall under freedom of expression but is illegal by local standards and by the terms of social media platforms and international law. There is no logical way for extremists to defend their use of social media' (Resp. 14).

6.1.9 Government's role has been arbitrary

Responses showed that the role of government has been questionable in blocking only a certain type of material online while allowing free access to hate material. Most respondents called

government role arbitrary or complicit regarding online blasphemy accusations and in controlling only secular groups. One activist said there is no legal cover for the government for blocking or censoring online content. ‘Declaring any specific content as blasphemous is the role of higher judiciary but is being decided by the government or its departments including in case of YouTube ban. It remained blocked even after the courts ordered unblocking it. Additionally, in the proposed cybercrime bill, the government intends to replace the judicial oversight on restrictions on freedom of expression with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority which would empower an officer, junior or senior, to decide which content is to be blocked or censored’ (Resp 2).

Activists opined that the government is siding with the extremist groups by restricting only content deemed blasphemous, but has continued to block access to secular pages/forums that discuss religious issues in dispassionate manner and are against misuse of blasphemy laws. For example a progressive Facebook page Roshni has been blocked three times by the government and currently it is fourth page being run by the group. PTA can ban liberal pages like Roshni, Laal, or pages of Baloch, but it cannot ban extremist pages. Government has not banned/blocked any page or website (or even printed material, CDc) run by extremist groups like Mashal, Taliban and others which are spreading hatred, intolerance, provoking violence against religious minorities, Shias and Ahmadis and others. This includes those extremist groups which are declared banned outfits by this very government. (Resp 4,5)

Another view that emerged from responses was that the State’s policing of virtual spaces would lead to reduction of space for secular voices, and further promote religious and nationalist fundamentalism (Resp 8). Resp. 3 lamented that the government makes a convenient choice when an effort to blackmail them to submission to the dictates of religious groups is made. ‘It is continuation of negative client-agency relationship created through country’s choice to include religious parties/ groups in the political power of the country, though the price has to be paid by the marginalized and even high-profile victims like Taseer’ (Res 3).

Resp. 1 added that the newly enacted laws such as Foreign Contributions Act aimed at regulating INGOs has also limited the space for civil society under which critical view or opposition or sharing of information regarding human rights violations will result into surveillance (Resp. 1).

6.1.10 Activists' Experiences

One of the respondents, who runs a blog and a Facebook page (having following of 14000) promoting moderate and secular views through a fake ID, shared that s/he received many threats in the beginning, but recently the threats had gone down. 'Though as a policy I do not criticize religion for the sake of it I do propagate that religion should not be imposed through any coercive methods. Anyhow, these threats did create some fear in my mind, and I had depression, and remained tense for weeks.' This response highlights that even anonymity cannot save HRDs from being harassed.

Another blogger and activist said: 'I have set a threshold for me and I religiously do not transgress into areas which fall under the generic definition of blasphemy. However, there have been instances where some religious fanatics have tried to pull me into category of blasphemers.' On any positive change in opinions of online readers the Resp. said: 'Change does not happen overnight. However, feedback from my readers does indicate that a wide range of people are getting influenced by my writings and there is a significant attitude change.'

One of respondents said that after watching a clip on social media wherein a comedian in a talk-show used derogatory and hateful language against a religious community, s/he took the matter to PEMRA and lodged an online complaint and put the petition on his Facebook page for further signatures. Following this, the PEMRA issued a notice to the TV channel and subsequently the channel apologized to the said community. This emerged as a case of successful activism online.

Another successful activism story was shared by Resp. 11 who said that when the May 25 alleged online blasphemy case occurred in Mandi Bahauddin, some fanatics announced in mosque loudspeakers to attack Christian community of the area. However, a local person posted an alert on Facebook which was widely shared and reached the district police officer who timely intervened to avoid any mob violence. The following Facebook page post also talks about the same incident:



Pakistan For All

May 15 at 2:36am · 🌐

PFA activists on the ground in #MandiBahauddin tell us that the citizens social media campaign has had a tremendous effect. The local authorities are under pressure, their phones have been ringing off the hook. The IG Punjab Mushtaq Sukhera has also taken notice. Yesterday a force of 300 armed police were deployed outside a mosque in the town to prevent any violent incident after Friday prayers. But the situation is not "under control" as the Police would like us to believe. The ring leaders of the mob Riaz Ahmed Dadra, Inayat Mohair and Siddiquie Arain are still trying to incite violence and have openly stated that they will not stop until all the Christians are driven out of their homes. But the Police is not willing to touch these ring leaders opting instead to broker a 'truce' between the two parties. As if it is some kind of equal dispute. The mob ring leaders have been given further respectability by Police by appointing them to head a 'committee' to negotiate a truce with representatives from the Christian population. A truce was reportedly agreed and the DPO Raja Basharat announced that he would levy a fine of Rs 5 lakhs on whoever broke it. Today members of the two committees were called in to the DPO's office where one of the chief investigators Riaz Ahmed Dadra physically assaulted a member of the Christian committee. Dadra slapped and spit at 70 year old Yaqoob Masih and called him "Chooraa" promising that he would erase his "zaat" from the earth. This all happened reportedly in the presence of the DPO Raja Basharat who didn't get up from his chair. However those present in the room told us that later Police officials privately admitted to them that they too now believe that they [the christians] are being deliberately targeted.

This post reports how social media played a role in timely intervention to avoid blasphemy violence as citizens were alerted to call concerned police officers whose contact numbers were shared on social media.



Taliban are Oppressors - Zalimaan

Jan 22, 2016 at 11:34pm · 🌐

#HangMumtazQadri

All Pakistan Mumtaz Qadri te Lanat Pao Challenge

Mumtaz Qadri	Salman Taseer
<p>I betrayed my duty and fired over 30 rounds of bullets on an unarmed man, A person i was supposed to protect. I did this because i considered him a blasphemer, I believe death is the only solution for Blasphmers and one should do it himself without waiting for court's desicion. In Pakistan, I am considered as "Hero of the Muslim Ummah" and was greeted with rose petals by laywers.</p>	<p>I was shot by one of my bodyguards because i talked about making some amendments in Blasphemy Law, A law which is often misuse for personal grudges, I stood up for the rights of a Christian women who was being targeted due to her beliefs. I am considered a blasphemer, hence, majority of religious clerics issued a fatwa against giving funeral prayers to my body.</p>

👍 158

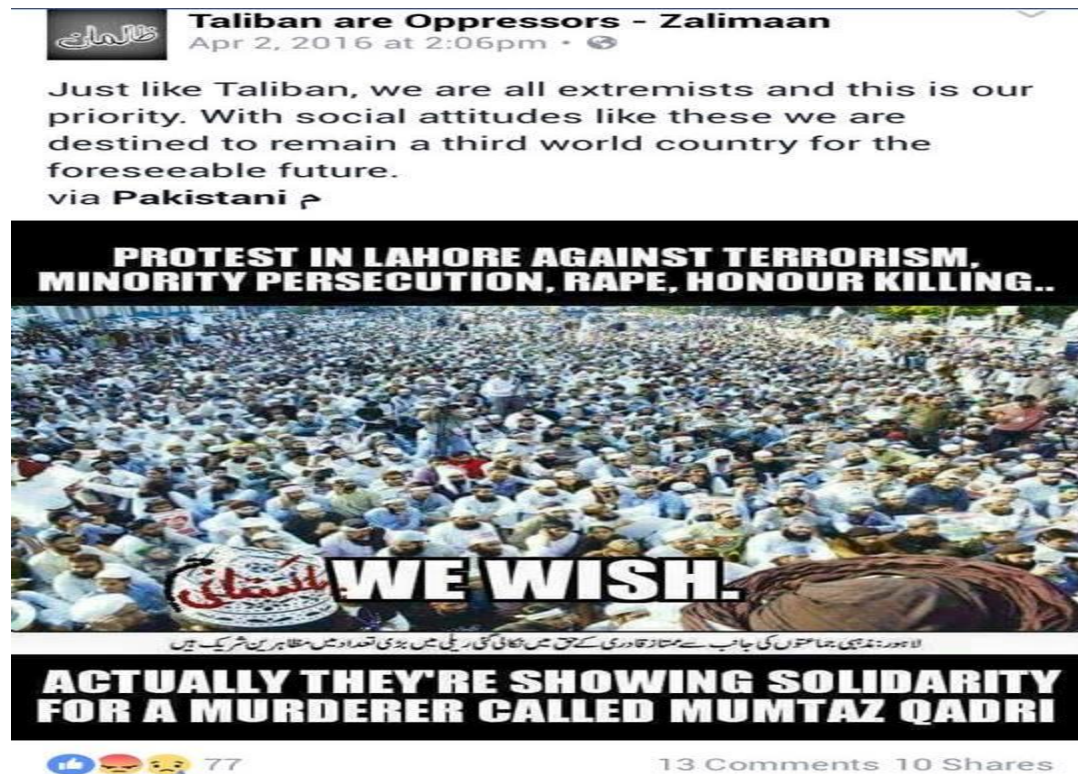
43 Comments 91 Shares

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

Changing the narrative: Defending Salman Taseer



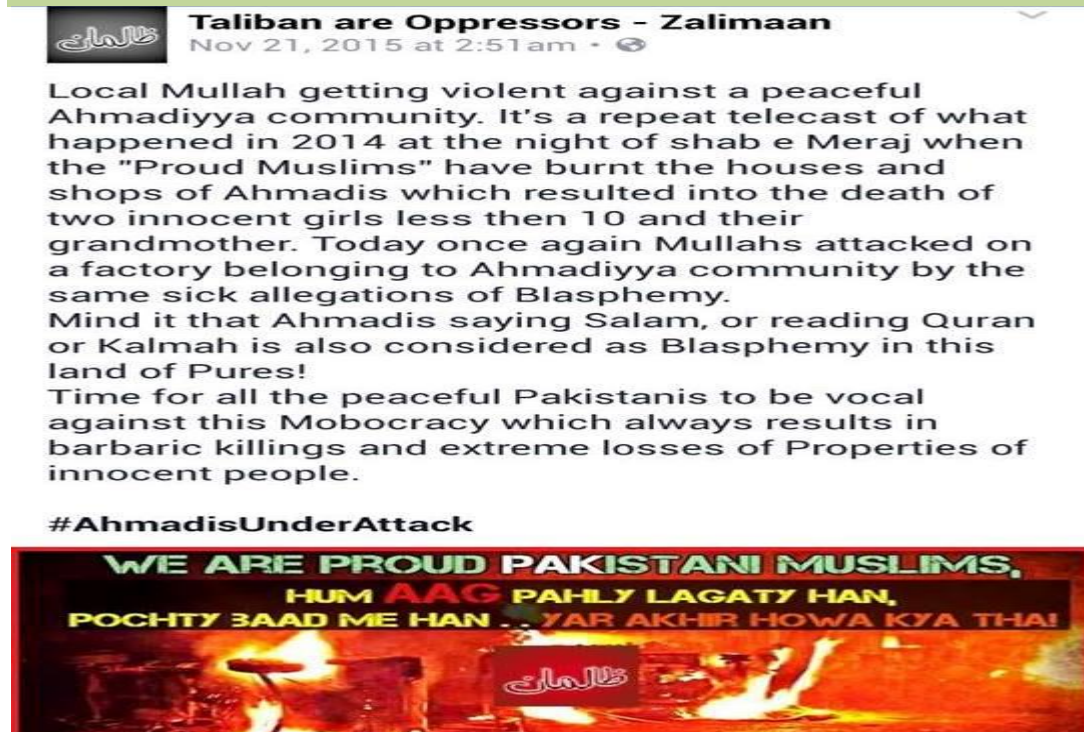
Religious groups have been criticised by progressive secular groups for not highlighting real problems of Pakistan and wasting their energies on non-issues.



Khurram Zaki, a blogger and administrator of Let Us Build Pakistan was killed on 7 May 2016 apparently for his writings against those killing Shias. His page LUBP has 269,783 followers.



Identifying the instigator: This post shows Maulvi Hanif Qureshi whose hate filled speech to a religious gathering inspired Mumtaz Qadri to kill Salman Taseer.



Protesting against attacks on Ahmadiyya community.

CONCLUSION

Increased internet and social media usage in Pakistan has assisted free speech but has also facilitated a process of religiosity and polarization around blasphemy laws in recent years. The social media has become a tool for conservative segments to push for their hardline agendas and shun any perceived criticism of religion. They have also opposed any differing voices or human rights defenders speaking in favor of the blasphemy accused or calling for a review of the blasphemy laws. In achieving these goals, the extremists have made full use of social media affordances.

This study confirms the warnings of scholars like Aday et al. and Lydsky who believe the social media has the potential of ghettoization and reinforced prejudices that may lead to violence and human rights violations. Although the study also shows a positive side of social media use for human rights activism, the way social media has been used in Pakistan to underpin blasphemy support and violence far exceeds its positive sides. Nonetheless, human rights activism in Pakistan has been waging a courageous and challenging war with online harassment that needs to be acknowledged.

The study found that the use of social media especially Facebook and cell phone texters by citizens have caused many blasphemy accusations some leading to killings, harassment and violence in Pakistan. It identified at least eighteen instances in Pakistan (excluding hate speech cases) where cell phone and internet usage led to registration of blasphemy cases. Apart from comments posted on social media, speech deemed blasphemous on television has been picked up by social media spreading news of blasphemy accusations endangering many lives. The role of broadcast media has been crucial in providing fodder to the conservative sections for keeping the broadcast content alive on social media. Another aspect this study discussed was the active employment of social media to defend blasphemy laws and those taking the law in their hands and killing alleged blasphemers. Lastly, human rights and religious freedom activists have been trying to counter the pro-blasphemy narrative from the platform of progressive Facebook pages, some showing positive results. In view of these, the study was able to identify the following four trends:

1. Expression on social media deemed blasphemous leads to registration of blasphemy cases.
2. An alleged blasphemy case happens, broadcast media reports it and is spread through social media across the country leading to extreme reactions.
3. Social media is utilized by extremist groups to incite or to spread information about their beliefs, activities and in trying to identify and trace alleged blasphemers.
4. The civil society has used social media to present a counter-narrative against extremist interpretations of Islam on blasphemy issue.

The study also showed that the response from the government of Pakistan has compromised the rights to freedom of expression and access to information through blocking of access, censorship, and restrictions on online content and regularization. At the same time there has been no proactive approach to stop imminent violence as a result of online provocations. The rights to privacy, anonymity, encryption which are necessary tools for physical and online safety for online users and HRDs have also been denied. On the other hand, Pakistan has allowed online hate speech and incitement to violence in cases of alleged blasphemy and also where rival sects or religious communities are condemned online.

This entire scenario highlights the need for proper legislation at national and international level against religion inspired hate speech and incitement to violence in a way not to compromise freedom of speech and expression. Furthermore, the interlinkages and interdependence of the three enabling rights (expression, access and assembly) and their interface or clash with freedom of religion highlight the need for working for a global interfaith harmony project and mutual understanding. At the local level in Pakistan, these challenges entail a long multilevel struggle towards sectarian and interfaith harmony, religious tolerance as well as protection for the rights of minorities. To borrow from the last tweet by Taseer, it is important not to cow down to pressures from religious extremists and continue efforts for making tolerance, hate-free speech and better use of social media as new signs of the interconnected world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For GoP: The government of Pakistan needs to take notice of the use of social media by banned terrorist outfits as well as religious extremist groups inciting violence. The government should create a taskforce within its cybercrime department to monitor the online activities of extremist groups so that violence against citizens is avoided.

On blasphemy laws, the government needs to streamline and standardise the procedures to make evidence and intent as an integral criteria for blasphemy allegations. It should remain the prerogative of judiciary to interpret blasphemy accusations with a strict criteria for intent and evidence as well as constitution of blasphemy. The criteria for registration of a blasphemy case by the police should also be standardized and put under a high level police officials (district police officer).

More importantly, the Government of Pakistan should define what actually constitutes ‘blasphemy’ as under the vague legal language, its interpretation is open for exploitation and given sectarian and denominational divides, can easily be framed against opposite groups and minorities. In the long run, efforts should be made to educate people about these laws especially through progressive interpretations of Muslim scholars who consider these laws as anti-Islamic and counterproductive so they can be done away with.

For Facebook: The Facebook needs to adopt a criteria that distinguishes between human rights activists and those propagating violence on social media. It should employ country or regional experts that can help identify and define inappropriate content in view of on ground realities and local laws. On anonymity, it needs to revise its policy to help HRDs and citizens in countries with barriers on free speech.

For Pakistan civil society/HRDs: HRDs specifically those working on sensitive issues should adopt anonymity and encryption to ensure their digital as well as physical security. Human rights organizations need to train their staff about online safety procedures and provide them with required technological tools. The common online users also need to be educated about them.

For further research: A number of research studies can be taken relevant to the theme of this research. I would recommend a research into the linkages between social media, human rights and Galtung's theory on cultural violence with a focus on blasphemy laws. Such a study should be informed by factors that make violence culturally acceptable and how these are manifested in cyberspace. Another study can deeply look into dual screening to compare perceived anti-religious speech with perceived anti-state speech in Pakistan. Moreover, a study on women victims of blasphemy laws in Pakistan or elsewhere enlightened by feminist discourse would be a valuable contribution. Lastly, a study carried outside of Pakistan can involve blasphemy law supporters in an online survey research to engage them in free speech debate and analyse the results.

(16990 words)

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