

ROLE OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY IN PROVOKING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Bushra Rehman¹, Ammara Sultan¹, Mashwish Zeeshan¹

Department of Anthropology, PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi

Corresponding Author:

Bushra Rehman

PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi

Bushi.aaur@gmail.com

Abstract: The present research is a qualitative analysis of the role of prevalent communication technologies in provoking and propagating religious extremism. ICT is a dynamic and extremely powerful source of information on public communication system. The emergence and widespread adoption of ICT has significantly influenced the lifestyles of religious people as well. It is affecting the religious practices and ethics in the form of hate speech, spread of misconceptions regarding religious notions, extremist views and brain washing through media. The study was conducted in Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University, and a sample of 60 respondents was drawn. The data was collected through a semi-structured questionnaire and interviews. The results showed that ICT is used as a tool for provoking religious extremism and conflicting views are channelized through it as it is used as a major channel for learning religious knowledge and information.

Keywords: ICT, Sects, Religious Extremism, Religious scholar, Followers

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is a complex term, which comprises of three major concepts. In order to recognize the role of ICT one must have knowledge of all these concepts. "Information" is processed data, "Communication" a way of transferring information, ideas, belief and messages while, "Technology" is the use of scientific knowledge or the things like the computer, telephone, cell phone, handsets, television, radio, etc. Information technology means a set of equipment's that assist us to work with information and complete tasks related to information processing. ICT is a wide term which covers all scientific ways for communication of information (Davenport 2013). In other words ICT refers to use of the digital knowledge which facilitate people in processing and communicating information. Religious extremist is a tag used for those individuals or groups, who usually resort to violence in order to enforce their ideas, beliefs or moral values on others. Extremist or fundamentalist religious groups are found in many religions such as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Baqai 2011). ICT supports information and communication activities. These activities comprise of gathering information,

presenting the data and get information through electronic devices in a digital shape by the people. In reality, the nineteenth and twentieth century social researchers unconfined religious fundamentals as a diminishing evidence of our primitive, pre scientific past. Seeing religious ways as a case of objective decision, as different to exclusion to it, economists have observed religious conduct at the individual, gathering, and national levels (Berman 2006). The typology of religion comprises of five distinct dimensions (Glock 1962). These dimensions are ideological or opinions about religion, ritualistic performances, religious way, noteworthy effects and reasonable knowledge about religion.

Modern learning theory stands on the concept that learning is an active procedure of creating knowledge rather than getting knowledge and that instruction is the method by which this knowledge construction is carrying rather than a process of knowledge transmission (Amami and Brimberg 2004). Incomplete and deficient knowledge regarding the beliefs of sects produce violence and thus they can be tagged as nonstandard cults. The teachings and the principles of these groups are considered unconventional. The lack of knowledge and severity of the situation clearly shows that their leader guides

the sect. Historically, extremism has been a great challenge towards the stability of a society. In fact struggle against extremism, particularly religious fanaticism, is a constant war between the good and the evil (Pratt 2010).

Pakistan religious extremism has appeared as the leading challenge to Pakistan's internal security and may be even to its survival. Pakistan has a chequered political history, where security has always been a misinterpreted and misrepresented concept. Those at the helm of affairs have always pursued short term policy objectives of survival and authenticity and not sustainable developments directed security models. Political governments always had problems of survival whereby military organization look for legitimacy (Liebman 1983).

Terrorism in the name of religion has become the chief model for political violence in the contemporary world. This is not to recommend that it is the only model because autonomy and ideology remain as strong catalysts for extremist behavior. However, religious extremism has become a vital problem for the global community (Alya and Striegherb 2012). Religious extremism is on its full cry in Pakistan. The phenomenon has considerably developed during the past few years and has created a severe threat to the liberal forces working in the country and to the regional peace (Buijs 2002).

The extremist conduction developed an agent-based model of social influence using the relative agreement model, and observed the type of opinion union that happened under different situations. Religious sects are symbolized as agents with opinions at the extreme ends of the opinion scale (Schreyer 2000). Throughout history, people have committed extreme cruel acts in the name of religion whether it is Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism or any other faith. A complex series of psychological, political, historical and theological reasons united to cause such behavior (Griffin 2005). It is important to remember that even the most juvenile religious extremism is well thought-out delusional because that regarded as a run away from the agreement of constitution (Weinberg and Pedahzur 2004).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The locale of the study was Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agricultural University, Rawalpindi. A sample of 60 students from different departments bearing various religious ideologies was gathered. The researcher

used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques i.e. semi structured questionnaires and interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed through percentage analysis. The qualitative data has been discussed in detail with anthropological context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table. 1: Desirability of the Role of ICT in Religious Information

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	30	50%
Disagree	18	30%
Strongly disagree	7	12%
Uncertain	5	8%
Total	60	100%

The table shows the role of ICT in religious spread of information. 50% respondents agreed that ICT plays a significant role in spread of religious information especially through social media, 30% disagreed, 12% strongly disagreed and the remaining 8% respondents were uncertain. The results showed that the majority of respondents want social media to play a positive role in spread of religious information however the situation is contrary to need.

Table.2: ICT as a Tool in Provoking Religious Extremism

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	32	53%
Disagree	8	14%
Strongly disagree	17	28%
Uncertain	3	5%
Total	60	100%

The frequency table explored public opinion on the involvement of ICT in religious extremism. According to the percentage distribution, data shows that 53% respondents agreed that ICT is used a tool that provokes a religious extremism. While 14% disagreed, 28% strongly disagreed and the rest of 5% respondents did not give their view. ICT is used by the practitioners of religion to find out the religious materials and spiritual knowledge, e.g. Muslims use their mobile phones and other electronic devices to make them punctual to perform their religious practices. With the advent of ICT and role of religious scholar various changes through the process of enculturation and diffusionism has increased religious extremism.

Table. 3: Religious Scholars Channelize Conflicting views through ICT

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	29	48%
Disagree	18	30%
Strongly disagree	9	15%

Uncertain	4	7%
Total	60	100%

Table 3 reveals the role of religious scholars and ICT in religious activities or extremism. The tabulated data shows that 48% respondents agreed that our religious scholars spread conflicting views and those values which are in contrast to other sects intentionally. Social media is not used randomly; rather it is a source of channelizing differing opinions on religions through a planned agenda. Religious scholars are well aware of ICT knowledge and the use of social media for the religious activities and use this modern technology to stay a part of global village. The easy access and less control system in some places used for anti-social activities or elements they can use it to get their evil purposes (ul Haq 2010). While 30% respondents disagreed, 15% strongly disagreed and the remaining 7% respondents did not answer.

Table. 4: Role of ICT in Spreading Religious Knowledge of different Sects

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	24	40%
Disagree	19	32%
Strongly disagree	10	16%
Uncertain	7	12%
Total	60	100%

Results acknowledge that the different religious sects are now introduced to public discussions due to the current social media. The tabulated data showed that 40% respondents agreed to it. However, 32% disagreed, 16% strongly disagreed, while rest of 12% did not respond by saying that they avoid giving opinions on such topics and feel fearful due to the present situation of religious extremism in Pakistan. Any religion or sect provides an encompassing view worldwide to its followers and rationale activities.

Table. 5: Use of ICT to Lower the Level of Religious Extremism

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	23	38%
Disagree	17	28%
Strongly disagree	19	32%
Uncertain	1	2%
Total	60	100%

Table indicates the response rate of the sampled population on ICT as a mode to lower the level of religious extremism. According to the tabulated data, 38% respondents agreed that the level of religious extremism is growing all over the world especially in Pakistan. While 28% respondents disagreed, 32% strongly disagreed and the rest of 2% uncertain

because they were not sure and confident on role of ICT in spreading religious extremism. According to religious scholar, the religious extremism is a label of any individuals or religious group, sects who order to impose their ideology, beliefs and moral values on others (Baqai 2011). The results from that mentioned table shows that people have a mix view on whether communication technology can be used in reducing religious extremism or not, though a wide majority of people are not confident of the view.

CONCLUSION

The study highlights public opinions on whether ICT is the modern era is used for propagating religious knowledge or provoking extremism. The data gives a clear reflection on people's perception of the negative use of ICT in spreading hatred arguments. Various sects and the religious clerics intentionally raise and float conflicting views amongst their followers that become a verdict for them due to their limited knowledge. Though, it's positive use can promote intersect harmony and help portray a soft and better image of Islam that has been vitally spoiled due to violence based activities that have been conducted by militant in the name of Islam.

REFERENCE

- Buijs, Joseph A.
2002 Religion and Philosophy in Maimonides, Averroes, and Aquinas. *Medieval Encounters* 8(2):160-183.
- Alya, Anne, and Jason-Leigh Striegherb
2012 Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35(12):849-862.
- Amami, Mokhtar, and Jack Brimberg
2002 Computer Based learning: Insights from Learning Theories and Information Technology. *Journal of Management Sciences and Regional Development* (4):99-131.
- Baqai, Huma
2011 Extremism and Fundamentalism: Linkages to Terrorism Pakistan Perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1(6):242-248.
- Davenport, Thomas H.
2013 Process Innovation: Reengineering

Work Through Information Technology.
Boston: Harvard Business Press.

Glock, Charles Y.

1962 On The Study of Religious Commitment. *Religious Education: The Official Journal of the Religious Education Association* 57(4):98-110.

Griffin, Roger

2005 Cloister or Cluster? The Implications of Emilio Gentile's Ecumenical Theory of Political Religion for the Study of Extremism *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 6(1):33-52.

ul Haq, Izaz

2010 Information and Communication Technologies, Globalization and Terrorism Department of Computer and Information Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Iannaccone, Laurence R., and Eli Berman

2006 Religious Extremism: the Good, the Bad, and the Deadly. *Public Choice* 128(1-2):109-129.

Pratt, Douglas

2010 Religion and Terrorism: Christian Fundamentalism and Extremism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 22(3): 438-456.

Liebman, Charles S.

1983 Extremism as Religious Norm. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22(1):75-86.

Schreyer, Paul

2000 The Contribution of Information and Communication Technology to Output Growth. Directorate for Sciences, Technology and Industry.

Weinberg, Leonard, and Ami Pedahzur

2004 Religious Fundamentalism and Political Extremism. Psychology Press.