



RESEARCH PAPER

WhatsApp Statuses on Politico Religious Perspective: Party Followers Response

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ABSTRACT

Ideological affiliation not only has a crucial part in the social fabric of Pakistan but also is the guiding concept for the constitutional process and governmental system of the country. Drawing upon the theoretical perspective of cultivation, the study aimed at analyzing the influence/s of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses on religious association or inclination of the users and the effects of this association on the political decision making of the youth. Findings of the survey, that collected data from 1000 users of WhatsApp, showed a strong association between politico-religious association of content creator and political decision making scores of users. Beside determining the significance of SNS as a tool of attitude formation on sensitive issues like politico-religious perceptions, the findings also highlight the threats posed. It stresses the need of sensitizing the users and increase in their media literacy. Sensible role of the religious workers, while uploading their WhatsApp statuses is also recommended.

KEYWORDS

Pakistani Youth, Politico-Religious Content, Politico-Religious Sentiments, Religious Association, WhatsApp Statuses

Introduction

The world is changing due to the advancement of technology. The ongoing change has affected every area of human life and a shift from a conventional version of life can be seen as conversion to modernized lifestyle. Religion has been taken as a sensitive topic for any society. The fusion of technological advancement to religious practices has opened new venues of investigation (Kim, 2018).

In this technological advancement WhatsApp is popular platform for social contacting. WhatsApp is designated as an active and important social networking application used for instant messaging covering the lifestyles of netizens (Bouhnik & Dshen, 2014). As an instant messaging application used for sending and receiving text messages, pictures, videos, audio and documents from one user to another user, WhatsApp also has got the status of the first hand tool for passing, imparting and exchanging thoughts, behaviors and opinions (Kim, 2018) According to a web report of Forbes, WhatsApp was the most popular messaging app, with more than 600 million users worldwide in August 2014 (Olson, 2014). Under investigation by Statista (2022) now WhatsApp has reached monthly 2 billion active users all over the world (Statista, 2022).

On discussing religion, the technological advancement had also opened new doors, the motivating thoughts, convincing messages and influential directions have been transmitted whole using WhatsApp quite effectively at US (Scot, 2016).

Ambiguity in political, religious, and social issues origins extremism among individuals that are portrayed by their opinions on social media. Although, English is the most corporate language used to share opinions on social media, however, other locality based languages are also used by locals. It is also compulsory to incorporate the views in such languages along with usually used languages for illuminating better insights from data. The researcher emphasizes on the sentimental analysis of social media multilingual written data to determine the intensity of the sentiments of extremism. (Asif, Ishtiaq, 2020)

The study deals with the concept of "politico-religious contents", a term often used to connote certain features of totalitarianism. The aim here is twofold: at first, to study the interconnection of two diverse areas as politics and religion as how they affect the media messages. Second, to elaborate how religion can be seen through the lens of politics.

After reviewing the literature, researcher found that there is need of investigation to achieve the profound understanding of exposure to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses and posting of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses with respect of religious association and political decision making scores of Pakistani Youth.

The politico-religious statuses by the followers of TLP Pakistan are an example as they are used to instigate political involvement of Pakistani Youth by motivating their religious sentiments. Since, youth is the most vulnerable segment of Pakistani Society, it seems very important to investigate how such politico religious content is shaping the mindset of Pakistani Youth. The researcher will examine how do the creators develop content having a double-edged impact? and how such developed content effects the political decision making of the consumers exposed to those statuses.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review has been conducted keeping in mind the study objectives to ensure that the research is contextualized based on prior research work in the area.

In this research various aspects of the impact of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses have been studied in the context of their politico-religious content, status posting, political decision making, religious association, and message credibility.

It is important to mention that political trends in people's life are altering due to their exposure to politico-religious content on social media, WhatsApp being having a direct impact on the user's life. Approximately 19.4 hours (38 minutes per day) are spent per month on WhatsApp Messenger by Android users, based on App Annie data. WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app out there, according to Statista data published in October 2021. The app has approximately 2000 million active monthly users (Statista, 2022).

In today's society, social media tools have been heavily relying on to facilitate communication and shape communication patterns. No doubt, various communication advancements have changed the landscape of human life at all levels. It has become

obvious that social media has become one of the most popular tools for communication in recent years, especially as an effective method of exchanging information. As one of the most widely used social media applications, WhatsApp was originally developed by Brian Acton in 2009, and later expanded by Jan Koum (Shehabat & Rababah, 2021).

WhatsApp is an instant messaging social applications that operates across most of the smartphones and tablets through internet connection. The speed with which message gets transmitted through WhatsApp has largely facilitated how its users communicate with each other (Sutling, Mansor, Widyarto, Lecthmunan, & Arshad, 2015). The social media messaging tool WhatsApp, which enables users to connect in a multi-modal way mainly through their smartphones, has impressively become a core form of communication in many societies according to a recent academic study (Sultan, 2014). Due to a wide range of factors including cost, privacy, community, reliability, and simplicity, WhatsApp is the preferred app for sending text, audio, video and GIF messages (Church and Oliveira, 2013).

With WhatsApp's new Status feature, users can upload photos, GIFs, and videos that are over-layered with drawings, emojis, and captions that remain visible to selected friends for 24 hours before disappearing. Since Snapchat has this feature as well, users weren't unaware of it (Olson, 2017).

Status on WhatsApp lets you send and receive text, photo, video, and GIF updates that disappear after 24 hours, and this feature is also encrypted end-to-end. It is necessary for you and your contacts to have each other's contact numbers saved in your phones' address books in order to send and receive status updates (Facebook - Meld je aan of registreer je, 2017)

This research study deals with the concept of "politico-religious WhatsApp statuses", politico-religious is a term often used for connoting certain features of totalitarianism. The aim is twofold: first is to study the interconnection of these two diverse areas as religion and politics and how they affect the formation and impact of media messages. Second aim is to elaborate how to observe religion through the lens of politics.

"Social media users post their statuses and whatever is on their mind on the social networking sites"

There can be no doubt that Religious parties in Pakistan have been a powerful force to be reckoned with and have played a key role in shaping Pakistan's political movements and decision-making processes. While Pakistan's elections have not done well in terms of votes for these parties over the years, they still have a marvelous amount of street power. In Pakistan, they have gained an established place among the various elite groups that determine political processes and decision-making, including the military, bureaucracy, Punjabis, and businessmen (Kumar, 2001).

It is difficult to make progress on democratic reform in Pakistan, particularly since Pakistan's radical Islamic parties are capable of mounting limited but potentially violent opposition to the government. By extension, there is no hope of reducing religious extremism or developing a more peaceful and stable society due to this opposition. In other words, this reflects the well-organized activist base of those parties, which is committed to a narrow partisan agenda and willing to resort to violence in order to defend it. While they have a limited electoral presence, early Islamization programs

have given them a strong legal and political apparatus through which they can influence policy in a way that is far beyond their numbers (ICG Report, 2011).

Although the Islamic parties in Pakistan follow diverse theological beliefs, they are grouped together by their belief that religious law (sharia) should be enforced by the state. There are many of these parties that have armed wings, are affiliated with extremist Islamist outfits, or are involved in violent politics on university campuses through student associations they support (Siddiqui, 2019).

Since 2015, Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), an arm of the Tehreek Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY), a Barelvi group, has steadily gained prominence for its call for Sharia to be implemented. This time, the TLP has fielded 187 candidates who have promised to create an Islamic welfare state – with some support from the Pakistani Army – following successful sit-in protests held in November 2017 in Islamabad, forcing the resignation of the Federal Law Minister. In addition, the MML and TLP are attempting to usurp the voters of the U.S.-based Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an ultra-conservative political party formed in 2001-02 (Patil, 2018).

Using recent research, we can define politico-religious person as someone whose religious beliefs are influenced by politics, or who takes political action based on religious convictions (Religion and Politics/Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021).

Younger youth and young adults report being less likely to participate in institution forms of religion (e.g., congregations) than older youth and young adults. The number of youth leaving religious institutions is on the rise, while the number of youth returning is on the decline. Youth could participate in studies investigating the factors that lead them to leave the faith they were raised in and, for those who do, the factors that lead them back (Dollahite & Mark, 2019).

According to Tucker, Theocharis, Roberts & Barbera, 2017, social media was also hailed as "liberation technology" in the wake of the Arab Spring, the Iranian Green Wave movement of 2009, and other examples in which it mobilized citizens against dictatorial governments. As a result of a study of protest activities in the US, Turkey, Spain, and Ukraine, social media platforms are used mainly to distribute information regarding conveyance, turnout, police existence, violence and so on, serving as important tools for management of collective action (John, Baarbera, Bonneau, Langer, Metzger, Nagler, Sterling, Tucker, 2018). In addition, social media were shown to communicate sensitive and motivational messages related to protests (John et al., 2018).

In order for a democracy to function properly, its citizens need to be able to make knowledgeable conclusions. While open debate built on various opinions is important, the digital information world, whose control is concentrated in a few hands without much misunderstanding, is creating new information challenges that silently form and limit discussion. The three key vectors of actors, content, and behaviors need to be considered by policymakers in order to understand the online environment. Moreover, there is systematic indication that social media influences people's political behavior in the offline world; this includes inciting harmful behaviors like hate crimes (Lewandowsky, Smillie, Garcia, Hertwig, Weatherall, Egidy, & Leiser, 2020).

However, social media platforms are commonly used for political debate and purposes that are not explicitly designed for democratic discourse.

The effects are dire as this threatens to manipulate the opinion formation necessary for democracy to function, as well as exerting undue influence on democratic decision-making. In pursuit of their own interests, biased forces have tried to influence political decision-making for centuries, but online communication and its lack of transparency, along with the scope and gravity of influence, have become substantially more sophisticated. Specifically, the digital arena provides tools that make mass manipulation very easy on a global gauge, with no transparency, no meaningful regulation of agents in the advertising ecosystem, and no glimpse into their proprietary processes.

The use of WhatsApp messenger extensively has been the topic of several studies. Some of these studies seek to find out the impact of extensive WhatsApp usage on youth. There are many foreign researchers that seek to understand the impact of WhatsApp statuses on its audience. However, when it comes to understanding the content of WhatsApp statuses, their usage and impact on Pakistani Youth, there is limited literature available in Pakistani context. Moreover, politico-religious is an under-researched concept, especially, when it comes to understand the impact of politico-religious content through social media. Hence this study seeks to figure out that how the posting of politico-religious content on WhatsApp statuses impact the political participation of WhatsApp users.

Hypotheses

- H1. More is the exposure to politico-religious statuses on WhatsApp, more will be the religious association of WhatsApp consumers with Islam.
- H2. There is a significant relation between the religious association (Islam) and political decision making scores of WhatsApp users exposed to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation theory was proposed by George Gerbner (1974) that suggests coverage of media, above time, slightly "cultivates" spectators' observations of reality. It also states that "Television is a standard of the socialization of most people into constant characters and behaviors. Its function is in a word, enculturation". As the theory of cultivation suggests that more exposure to television watching causes long term effects on viewers, the study asserts that extensive exposure to the politico religious status by the followers of different political parties molds the opinions of receivers in the favor of the respective political parties. The study tends to investigate the association and effect of watching of particular statuses on the thoughts, opinions and finally actions of common receivers of WhatsApp statuses. The social fabric of Pakistan has a strong influence from ideological forces and the blend of religion (Islam) with the political messages provides a powerful form of expression to political parties. Through this expression the political parties may incite the religious sentiments of the audience and provoke them towards certain actions. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of cultivation theory and through the angle of mainstreaming, the study tends to investigate how the Pakistani youth exposed to such contents gets effected in terms of their thoughts, opinions and actions in political and religious context.

Material and Methods

Quantitative approach was adopted to find numerical data on the effects of politico-religious WhatsApp Status on Pakistani Youth. A correlational research design was used to find out the relationship between posting of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses and

religious association of WhatsApp content creators, and the religious association (Islam) and political decision making scores of WhatsApp users.

As a tool of data collection, survey method was selected. In place of field survey, Google surveys have been used in research to gather data from a demonstrative population. For this study, the universe of this study is Pakistani youth that included people from 15 years to 30 years living in Lahore. The age bracket was decided on the basis of the definition of youth by UN (United Nations). Unit of analysis in survey is taken as one respondent.

For survey, a sample of one thousand (1000) respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique. Both genders (male, female) were selected from political and religious backgrounds. Only those respondents were selected, who were using WhatsApp Messenger or reported to have Inclination towards statuses posting. Screening questions were used to collect data from targeted sample. The sample was collected from different university students, political parties' followers, and political and religious activists on WhatsApp. Respondents were selected from different politico-religious parties of Lahore to keep an element of diversity. The sample was divided in the followers of different politico-religious parties of Pakistan. Like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat e Ulema-e-Islam F (JUI F) and some other political parties (such as Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf (PTI)). Survey questionnaire was used as research instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was constructed in English language. Questionnaire statements were ranked on five point Likert scale comprises on 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Neutral', 'Disagree', and 'Strongly Disagree'.

In this study the independent variable was exposure to politico religious statuses and the dependent variables were religious association and political decision making.

Inclusion Criteria

Following inclusion criteria was used.

Respondents,

- a) of more than 15 years of age and less than 30 years of age
- b) with smart phone and who were regular users of WhatsApp
- c) who were follower of any politico-religious or political party. And,
- d) who were regular users of WhatsApp statuses feature.

Results and Discussion

The data collected through survey questionnaire. The findings of the survey are presented in tables and graphs form and detail description is also given.

Table 1
Gender of Participants

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	726	72.6%
	Female	274	27.4%
	Total	1000	100%

In this study total sample of 1000 participants were taken from different educational institutes and locals of Punjab, from which 274(27.4%) were female and 726(72.6%) were male. The result shows that male participants were 72.6% more than female participants.

Table 2
Politico-Religious Inclination of Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)	646 64.6%
	Jamaat-e-Islami (JI)	134 13.4%
	Jamiat e Ulema-e-Islam F (JUI F)	6 .6%
	Other	214 21.4%
	Total	1000 100%

On expressing their the politico-religious inclination , 646(64.6%) participants showed inclination towards TLP, 134(13.4%) participants had inclination towards JI, , 6(0.6%) show inclination towards JUI F whereas 214(21.4%) participants were inclined towards other political and religious parties . Majority of the respondents showed their inclination towards TLP.

Table 3
Frequency of WhatsApp statuses on politics and religion

	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1-5 statuses a day	215 21.5%
	5-10 statuses a day	382 38.2%
	10-15 statuses a day	25 2.5%
	15-20 statuses a day	108 10.8%
	More than 20 statuses a day	270 27.0%
Total	1000 100%	

When asked ,“How frequently you found WhatsApp statuses on politics and religion?”, from 1000participants 215(21.5%) participants responded they read 1-5 statuses a day on WhatsApp, 382(38.2%) participants responded they read 5-10 statuses a day on WhatsApp, 25(2.5%) participants responded they read 10-15 statuses a day on WhatsApp, 108(10.8%) participants responded they read 15-20 statuses a day on WhatsApp, 270(27%) participants responded they read more than 20 statuses a day on WhatsApp. This shows that more respondents (38.2%) read5-10 statuses a day.

Table 4
Regularity of Political statuses posted by religious party workers

	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Daily	726 72.6%
	Weekly	140 14.0%
	Fortnightly	105 10.5%
	Monthly	17 1.7%
	Annually	12 1.2%
	Total	1000 100%

This table presents the percentage of the responses on exposure to political statuses posted by religious party’s followers. From 1000 participants 726(72.6%) participants responded daily, 140(14%) participants responded weekly, 105(10.5%) participants responded fortnightly, 17(1.7%) participants responded monthly, 12(1.2%) participants responded annually as shown in table . This shows that more respondents (72.6%) find WhatsApp statuses on daily basis.

Table 5
Influence of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses on religious association

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	126	12.6%
	Agree	541	54.1%
	Neutral	73	7.3%
	Disagree	136	13.6%
	Strongly Disagree	124	12.4%
	Total	1000	100%

When asked to report the degree to which the political information on the WhatsApp statuses of followers of religious parties motivates the users to get more close to religion, from 1000 participants 126(12.6%) responded strongly agree, 541(54.1%) responded agree, 73(7.3%) responded neutral, 136(13.6%) responded disagree and 124(12.4%) responded strongly disagree . This shows that 54.1% participants agree with the given statement and 7.3% responses were neutral.

Table 6
Attitude towards political WhatsApp message that has any reference from Islam

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	134	13.4%
	Agree	300	30.0%
	Neutral	61	6.1%
	Disagree	389	38.9%
	Strongly Disagree	116	11.6%
	Total	1000	100%

From among 1000 participants 134(13.4%) responded strongly agreed with the statement ,*"I completely believe on any political WhatsApp message if it has any reference from Islam"* , 300(30%) responded agree, 61(6.1%) responded neutral, 389(38.9%) responded disagree and 116(11.6%) responded strongly disagree as shown in table 6. This shows that 30% participants agree with the given statement and 6.1% responses were neutral.

Table 7
WhatsApp Statuses by religious party workers/ followers and knowledge about religion

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	241	24.1%
	Agree	433	43.3%
	Neutral	48	4.8%
	Disagree	140	14%
	Strongly Disagree	138	13.8%
	Total	1000	100%

The above table shows percentage of participants' responses regarding the statement ,*"Reading of political statuses on WhatsApp by religious party's workers/followers enhance my knowledge about religion (Islam)"* , From among 1000 respondents, 241(24.1%) responded strongly agree, 433(43.3%) responded agree, 48(4.8%) responded neutral, 140(14%) responded disagree and 138(13.8%) responded strongly disagree. This shows that 43.3% participants agree with the given statement and 4.8% responses were neutral.

Table 8
Political statuses on WhatsApp and Confusion regarding the knowledge about Islam

	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	Strongly Agree	120	12%
	Agree	139	13.9%
	Neutral	62	6.2%
	Disagree	534	53.4%
	Strongly Disagree	145	14.5%
	Total	1000	100%

The table presents the responses to the statement that “*Reading of political statuses on WhatsApp by religious party's workers/followers confuse my knowledge about religion (Islam)*”. It shows that 120(12%) participants, responded strongly agree, 139(13.9%) responded agree, 62(6.2%) responded remain neutral, 534(53.4%) responded disagree and 145(14.5%) responded strongly disagree to the statement. This shows that 53.4% participants disagree with the given statement and 6.2% responses were neutral.

Table 9
Extent to which the users agree to follow the directions given in the political WhatsApp statuses of religious party workers

	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	Strongly Agree	236	23.6%
	Agree	410	41%
	Neutral	59	5.9%
	Disagree	159	15.9%
	Strongly Disagree	136	13.6%
	Total	1000	100%

Responses regarding the extent to which the users agree to follow the directions given in the political WhatsApp statuses of religious party workers are presented in the table 9. This table shows that from 1000 participants 236(23.6%) responded strongly agree, 410(41%) responded agree, 59(5.9%) responded neutral, 159(15.9%) responded disagree and 136(13.6%) responded strongly disagree as shown in table 5.19. This shows that 41% participants agree with the given statement and 5.9% responses were neutral.

Table 10
Influence of political decision taken by the leaders of religious parties on user's behaviour

	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	Strongly Agree	496	49.6%
	Agree	148	14.8%
	Neutral	69	6.9%
	Disagree	156	15.6%
	Strongly Disagree	131	13.1%
	Total	1000	100%

“*I do follow any political decision taken by the leaders of religious parties*”, from 1000 participants 496(49.6%) strongly agreed with the statement, 148(14.8%) responded agreed, 69(6.9%) responded were neutral, 156(15.6%) responded did not agree and 131(13.1%) responded strongly disagreed, as shown in table above. This shows that

49.6% participants strongly agree with the given statement and 6.9% responses were neutral.

Table 11
Status posted by religious party workers as guideline for user about recent political situation

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	141	14.1%
	Agree	551	55.1%
	Neutral	65	6.5%
	Disagree	137	13.7%
	Strongly Disagree	106	10.6%
	Total	1000	100%

The table presents the responses of users on statement that was made to seek the degree to which status posted on politics by religious party workers guide the users about recent political situation. It can be seen that 141(14.1%) responded strongly agree, 551(55.1%) responded agree, 65(6.5%) responded neutral, 137(13.7%) responded disagree and 106(10.6%) responded strongly disagree. This shows that 55.1% participants agree with the given statement and 6.5% responses were neutral.

Hypothesis Tests Interpretation

Hypothesis 1

Table 11
Correlations between exposure to politico-religious statuses and religious association

		Exposure to Politico Religious Statuses		
		Correlation Coefficient	Religious Association (Islam)	
Spearman's rho	Exposure to Politico Religious Statuses	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.008**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	1000	1000
	Religious Association (Islam)	Correlation Coefficient	.008**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	1000	1000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman's rho Correlation coefficient test was applied on data to investigate presence of correlation amongst the taken variables. The relation of exposure to politico-religious statuses as studied with religious association of WhatsApp users. The results suggested that there is a significant correlation exists between exposure to politico-religious statuses and religious association, and the calculated P value is 0.000 which is less than 0.01, the relation between above mentioned variables is said to be highly significant. The r value is .008** which is positive correlation coefficient and N value is 1000. Consequently, it is proven that there is a positive correlation amongst exposure to politico-religious statuses and religious association. This shows a systematic outlook of the variables in a way that the more a person expose to politico-religious

statuses, the more will be religious association. As a result, the proposed hypothesis is accepted with strong significance.

Hypothesis 2

Table 12
Correlations between Religious association and political decision making

			Religious Association (Islam)	Political Decision Making
Spearman's rho	Religious Association (Islam)	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.745**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	1000	1000
	Political Decision Making	Decision Making	Correlation Coefficient	.745**
Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.
		N	1000	1000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman's rho Correlation coefficient test was applied on data to investigate presence of correlation amongst the taken variables. The relation of religious association was studied with political decision making. The results suggested that a significant correlation exists between religious association and political decision making, and the calculated P value is 0.000 which is less than 0.01, the relation between above mentioned variables is said to be highly significant. The r value is .745** which is positive correlation coefficient and N value is 1000. Consequently, it is proven that there is a positive correlation amongst religious association and political decision making. This shows a systematic outlook of the variables in a way that the more the exposure to the politico-religious statuses, the more will be religious association which effects the political decision making of WhatsApp users. As a result, the proposed hypothesis is accepted with strong significance.

According to the results find in the light of survey questionnaire descriptive analysis, from the total one thousand respondents who participated in responding to the survey questionnaire, it is observed that most of the respondents were 18-22 years of age and majority of the total sample were male. While checking the education level of respondents, it has been witnessed that most of the respondents were in Masters. While responding to the question about their locality, majority of respondents said that they belong to urban area. While checking the politico-religious inclination of respondents, it has been witnessed that most of the respondents were associated with or inclined to Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). To measure the exposure to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses, the participants responded that they frequently found WhatsApp statuses on politics and religion and most of them found 5-10 statuses a day on WhatsApp. Most of the participants responded they find political statuses posted by religious party's follower on daily basis.

To find out the religious association after exposed to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses, the participants were agreed that they get more religious association after exposed to WhatsApp statuses. In response of question, if they want to get more close to their religion", mostly respondents agreed that after exposed to politico-religious content on WhatsApp statuses, they want to get close to their religion and want to learn more about their religion.

To analyze that how exposure to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses effect the political decision making of users, the majority of the participants agreed that after exposing to religious content share by religious parties' followers, they think they should follow the directions given in the political WhatsApp statuses and most of them also agreed that they do follow any political decision taken by the leaders of religious parties.

To test the first hypothesis, *More is the exposure to politico-religious statuses on WhatsApp, more will be the religious association of WhatsApp consumers with Islam*, it is proven that there is a positive correlation amongst exposure to politico-religious statuses and religious association. This shows an organized stance of the variables in a way that the more a person expose to politico-religious statuses, the more will be religious association. As a result, the hypothesis was accepted with strong significance.

Finally, to test the second hypothesis, *There is a significant association between the religious association (Islam) and political decision making scores of WhatsApp users exposed to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses*, it is proven that there is a positive correlation amongst religious association and political decision making. This shows a systematic outlook of the variables in a way that the more the exposure to the politico-religious statuses, the more will be religious association which effects the political decision making of WhatsApp users. As a result, the proposed hypothesis was accepted with strong significance. And by these tests, all the proposed hypotheses were proven and accepted with significance.

This research focused on the perceptions of the youth regarding the influence of social media textual data on their religious association and behaviors. The aim was to examine how the content developed by the politico-religious WhatsApp statuses can have a double-edged effect. Also how much-developed content affects the political decision-making of the consumers exposed to those statuses. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of cultivation theory and through the angle of mainstreaming, the study tends to investigate how the exposed to such contents gets effected in terms of their thoughts, opinions and actions. Followers of different politico-religious parties of Pakistan such as Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat e Ulema-e-Islam F (JUI F) and others (such as Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf (PTI)).

Descriptive data shows an increased ratio of exposure to politico-religious WhatsApp statuses among youth as majority of the respondents reported to receive five to ten politico-religious statuses in a day. . One possible explanation can be the general increase of whatsApp as an SNS among youth. Furthermore, majority of the respondents included in study were having association with some religious political party. This also limits the generalization of the study. Statistical analysis revealed that authenticity of WhatsApp statuses was judged on the basis of having reference from the religion. A vast majority of youth was found to consider these statuses as credible. Some however also found these statuses to create confusion regarding religion .Politico-religious statuses not only affect the attitudes of the users but also have significant influence on their behaviors as ratio of those who follow the instructions given in religious statuses given by the party workers was significantly high. Political decisions taken by the leaders of religious parties and shared on whatsApp statuses were also appreciated and even adopted. WhatsApp statuses not only influence the behaviors but also a source of knowledge regarding current political situation. That shows that the users see the political situations from the lens created by political and religious leaders via WhatsApp statuses.

The exposure to politico-religious content on WhatsApp statuses not only enhances the religious association of users but also instigate them learn more about their religion. The finding highlights the positive role WhatsApp statuses are playing in the religious context. This, however also rise the question of the authenticity of the information. Majority of the participants said that they post 1-5 statuses a day. If a user further shares or copy the status on his/her wall, he/she may unconsciously spread information that could have been biased, fake, haterd-based and so on. The majority of the participants agreed that after exposing to religious content share by religious parties' followers, they think they should follow the directions given in the political WhatsApp statuses and that they follow any political decision taken by the leaders of religious parties. In country like Pakistan, religious associations of people are deep rooted and are based on sentiments and even inheritance . Socialization and low literacy rate, results in the form of rigidity in religious belief. Political association with parties founded on religious grounds works as double dose to the pre existing beliefs. This can be exploited by the politicians or pressure groups for their own interests. The issue becomes more sensitive due to the fact that uncertainty in political, social and religious issues causes sentiments of extremism among people (Asif, Ishtiaq, Aljuaid & Shah,2020). The tendency of following politico-religious WhatsApp statuses therefore can be interpreted as having double fold effects. It is a common practice among the users and particularly among youth to forward the received messages without verifying the information and source credibility. Similar they not only copy WhatsApp statuses developed by religious party workers but also share and forward. The results reveal that in the context of Pakistan, politics can't be separated from religion. Particularly when it is reported to influence the political decision making of the users.

Statistical analysis proved the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between exposure to politico-religious statuses and religious association. This shows an organized stance of the variables in a way that the more a person expose to politico-religious statuses, the more will be religious association. Accepted with strong significance this association between the posting of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses and religious association supports the mainstreaming concept proposed in cultivation theory. According to this concept, heavy viewing (heavy use in case of SNS)converges the perceptions of viewers.

Recommendations

This research has been conducted by collecting survey responses from the students and young adults only from Lahore. Future researchers can study the effects of politico-religious WhatsApp statuses by taking a large sample from different universities across Pakistan.In future, content analysis method can be applied to study politico-religious and to know the social media as well as public agenda. Further future scholars can also study the same area through critical discourse perspective. This research is only focusing on checking the effects of WhatsApp statuses related to religion and politics. However, there is a great scope to study the psychological issues and behavioral changes of WhatsApp users. Moreover, future researchers can also study the phenomenon by getting professional opinion from psychologists and behavioral experts and media experts so that they may explore the factors that make the users to become vulnerable to be effected by these type of politico-religious statuses and posts on SNS.

Conclusion

Beside certain limitations, this study has found that religious content posted by the political workers /followers not only affects the religious association of WhatsApp users but also determine their political decision making .The explored association

between these variables suggests a sensible attitude from both content creators and the users of WhatsApp to make a positive and productive use of SNS's . It also highlights the need to devise regulations by the concerned authorities and those who manage these Apps.

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