

Hate Speech Acts against the Shia Community: Focus on Pakistani Social Media Users

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how hate speech is used against Pakistan's Shia community in social media domains. Pakistan is a Muslim-majority, multi-sectarian country, and misunderstandings on the basis of sectarian differences often result in conflicts and violence. Hate speech is one of the manifestations of sectarianism in Pakistan. Two major Islamic sects namely Shias and Sunnis live in Pakistan. Data collected through purposive sampling from social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter are qualitatively analyzed using Austin's speech act theory and national and international legal provisions to report findings. Research findings reveal that Pakistan's Shia minority community faces hate crimes in both online and offline domains; inspired by majoritarian rightist ideology, hate groups target the minority group violating Pakistan's constitutional provisions that guarantee freedom of religion and association. It is concluded that a more comprehensive understanding of hate crime and social conflict must incorporate group interests and social freedom, and further research needs to be undertaken on other communities who suffer from hate speech acts in a range of contexts.

Keywords: community; hate speech; legal provisions; minority; speech acts; Pakistan; Shia

1. Introduction

One of the most important characteristics of free democratic and modern societies in today's world is peoples' right to free speech (Dewberry et al., 2018; Rosenthal, 2020). However, as messages of hatred, denigration, and dehumanisation against particular individuals or groups of individuals on the grounds of political, ethnic, religious, or other types of affiliations nowadays grow and expand, infecting many humans, it has become debatable if hate speech should be simply seen as free speech (Goodman, 2015).

A brief look at research on hate speech (Demaske, 2020) and its nexus with free speech shows that there is a vast spectrum of diametrically opposing viewpoints. One school of thought identifies hate speech as free speech because it enhances the chances for individual expression and cultural regeneration, while the other school of thought sees hate speech as a separate but dangerous phenomenon that should be suppressed and penalised (Trajkova and Neshkovska, 2019). The third school of thought that lies in the middle ground of the spectrum claims that "only targeted vilification of a person on the basis of race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, and sexual

orientation, or other protected characteristics should be classified as hate speech and proscribed” (Trajkova and Neshkovska, 2019: p. 72).

Though hate speech is an ancient phenomenon, only recently it has begun to resurge in an invigorated way (Mårtensson, 2013). Its rapid and intense spread can be imputed, up to an extent, to social media (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), as these provide channels by which hate speech is spread globally like wildfire (Alkiviadou, 2018). Trajkova and Neshkovska (2019) state that the lack of accountability apparatus to identify and intercept fake social media accounts enables many persons to indulge in the use of aggressive rhetoric.

Hate speech is a phenomenon also found in Pakistan (Sarraz, 2017). In 1947 and in 1971, the newly born country witnessed violence on religious and ethnolinguistic lines respectively (Ali and David, 2021). Sectarian violence is a resurging phenomenon in the country, and religious, and ethnic violence can be witnessed sometimes (Lakshman, 2020).

1.1 Defining hate speech

Hate speech has not been clearly defined and enshrined in international law, however, there are some provisions which help identify expressions considered as hate speech.

In his qualitative description of hate speech, Lewis (2012) says that any speech that offends others along the lines of gender, religion, race, or sexual orientations can be described as hate speech. Though this definition delineates offensive dimensions of hate speech, it does not identify linguistic features of hate speech. According to Council of Europe (n.d.), hate speech contains “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin”. This definition mentions different forms of expression; however, it also does not postulate how such forms of expression are realised using different linguistic items.

Cohen-Almagor (2011) gives a far-reaching definition of hate speech and defines it as bias motivated, hostile, malicious speech made against a person or a group of people because of their real or conceived characteristics.

Though this definition elaborates on thematic ambitions of hate speech, how such ambitions are realized using different linguistic terminologies has not been discussed in the definition. He further expands the thematic ambitions of hate speech and defines it as “discriminatory, intimidating, disapproving, antagonistic, and/or, prejudicial attitudes towards those characteristics, which include gender, race, religion, ethnicity, colour, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation”. The thematic ambitions of hate speech have also been defined by Gagliardone (2014) who suggests that hate speech is intended to “injure, dehumanize, harass, intimidate, debase, degrade and victimise the targeted groups, and to foment insensitivity and brutality against them”. This definition also falls short of identifying linguistic features of hate speech.

The definition of hate speech proposed in Hate Speech in the Media and Internet Report (n.d.) categorically identifies three forms of hate speech and its discursive contents. Identifying forms and contents of hate speech cannot account for the context in which hate speech is used. Based on its levels of threat that hate speech poses to individuals and society, researchers explain that it can be manifested in three forms: soft, moderate, and harsh forms (Hate Speech in the Media and Internet Report, n.d.). Soft forms include negative statements used against an individual or a group of individuals, while moderate forms encompass justification of historical incidents of violence and discrimination. Harsh forms of hate speech involve implicit and explicit calls for discrimination and violence (Hate Speech in the Media and Internet Report, n.d.).

The same definition can be applicable to online hate speech. However, some social media sites have their own definition of hate speech. According to Facebook (n.d.), “content that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease is not allowed”. Moreover, this definition does not identify incendiary terminologies used in hate speech.

The Council of Europe’s Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime (n.d.) has also defined online hate speech without identifying its marked linguistic features. It defines online hate speech as “any written material, any image or any other representation of ideas or theories, which advocates, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence, against any individual or group of individuals, based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin, as well as religion if used as a pretext for any of these factors”.

1.2 The context of hate speech in Pakistan

If we look at the case of Pakistan, the historical, religious, sectarian, and socio-political context of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan appears to be conducive for hate speech to thrive and flourish. Although Pakistan is a country of approximately 208.57 million inhabitants (Statista, n.d.), the majority of whom are Muslims (97%), 3.5% of these are minorities who belong to faiths, such as Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism etc (Statista, n.d.). Pakistani Muslims are divided along sectarian lines. According to Ahmar (n.d.), 80% of Muslims in Pakistan belong to the Sunni sect, while 15-20% belong to the Shia sect. The Shia-Sunni conflict has deep roots in the history of Islam (Hazleton, 2010) and of Asia (Nuruzzaman, 2017). In her narrative history, Hazleton (2010) mentions that the Shia-Sunni divide occurred after Prophet Mohammad passed away in 632 AD.

The sectarian conflict has been a problem in Pakistan (Ahmar, n.d.). This conflict between the Shia minority and the Sunni majority on the one hand and among different schools of thoughts¹ of Sunnis on the other hand intensified in late 1970s and 1980s, when a Shia-led government came to power in Iran and a Sunni-led government under Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship came to power in Pakistan (Ahmar, n.d.).

This study problematizes the speech acts of hatred against the Shia community in Pakistan because such speech acts can result in sectarian conflicts. We interpret anti-Shia discourse as a criminal speech act using speech act theory and national and international protocols and legal provisions on hate speech.

1.3 International and national legal provisions on hate speech

There are some provisions which help identify expressions considered as hate speech. These provisions also help in curtailing the spread of hate speech both in online and offline domains. Such provisions criminalise and penalise hate speech. However, none of the laws/provisions, to the best of our knowledge, identify linguistic features of hate speech. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (n.d.) suggests that states should criminalize "direct and public incitement to

commit genocide" (p. 1). This suggestion also does not provide any guides regarding linguistic characteristics of such incitement. Similarly, International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (n.d.) also seeks to criminalize "all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or racial hatred as well as incitement to racial discrimination". In linguistic terms, the features that constitute such racism have not been mentioned.

Another important covenant is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1976) which advises all countries that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law". Though in this covenant advocacy of hate speech has been identified as a criminal act, no mention to specific terminology that constitutes hate speech has been made. Pakistan also ratified this covenant in 2009, and debate on how the country's laws should be amended in compliance with ICCPR soon started in its parliament (Sirmed, n.d.). This debate also neglected the linguistic dimension of hate speech.

In addition to these provisions, national law codes of Pakistan, such as Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) (n.d.) defines and distinguishes hate speech. Although these legal provisions criminalise and penalise hate speech, there is no linguistic mechanism in place to identify such crimes and implement these laws. The lack of linguistic identification of hate speech has caused a big gap between these laws and their implementation. Bearing this in mind, we have discussed Pakistan's laws on hate speech. For instance, Section 153-A (a) of PPC criminalizes anyone who "by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representations or otherwise, promotes or incites, on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, caste, or community or any other ground whatsoever, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities" (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.).

Likewise, Section 153-A (b), punishes anyone who "commits, or incites any other person to commit, any act which is prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony between different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities or any group of persons identifiable as such on any ground whatsoever and which disturbs or is likely to disturb public tranquillity" (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.). Section 153-A (c) also criminalises incitement to violence and penalises such criminal act "with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and with fine" (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.).

¹"The Sunni Muslims of South Asia are divided into two major schools of thoughts, i.e. Deobandi and Barelvi, named after their places of origin in India in the 19th century. Because of abiding differences between them, these two groups have built up walls of hatred and mistrust between them over time. The faultline between them has erupted violently in Pakistan since the late 1970s" (Behuria, 2008).

Section 295-A of PPC criminalises and penalises “deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs”. It suggests that criminals of such an offence “shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both” (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.). Moreover, section 295-C of PPC criminalizes and penalises the use of derogatory remarks against Prophet Mohammad. Someone involved in such a crime “shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine” (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.). Section 298 of PPC also criminalizes utterance of words with deliberate intention to wound religious feelings. A person involved in this type of crime “shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year or with fine, or with both” (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.).

Section 298-A of PPC criminalizes derogatory remarks used against holy personages. If a person is found guilty of such a crime, he/she “shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both”. Section 499 also criminalizes defamation perpetrated in any form whatsoever (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.). Section 500 of PPC penalises such an offence with imprisonment “which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both” (Pakistan Penal Code, n.d.).

Under The Defamation Ordinance (2002), civil remedies against hate speech have also been provided. In section 3 of the ordinance, defamation has been defined as “any wrongful act or publication or circulation of a false statement or representation made orally or in written or visual form which injures the reputation of a person, tends to lower him in the estimation of others or tends to reduce him to ridicule, unjust criticism, dislike, contempt or hatred shall be actionable as defamation”. Under the defamation ordinance, defamation has been categorized in two forms: slander and libel. “Any false oral statement or representation that amounts to defamation shall be actionable as slander”, while libel has been defined as “any false written, documentary or visual statement or representation made either by ordinary form or expression or by electronic or other modern means of devices that amounts to defamation shall be actionable as libel” (The Defamation Ordinance, 2002). Thus, in this research, false oral defamation/hate speech has been conceptualized as defamation, while false written defamation has been conceptualized as libel.

Section 9 of the ordinance gives remedies for defamation. “Where defamation shall be proved to have occurred,

the Court may pass order directing the defendant to tender the apology, if acceptable to the plaintiff, and publish the same in similar manner and with the same prominence as the defamatory statement made and pay reasonable compensatory damages as general damages with minimum of Rs. 50,000/- (Rupees fifty thousand) and in addition thereto, any special damage incurred that is proved by the plaintiff to the satisfaction of the Court... provided that in case of the originator the minimum compensatory damages as general damages shall be three thousand rupees” (The Defamation Ordinance, 2002).

Pakistan has its own cyber laws which also criminalise hate speech. Pakistan’s Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) (2016), also criminalises glorification of offences and hate speech (see sections 9 and 11). Section 11 of PECA states that “whoever prepares or disseminates information, through any information system or device that advances or is likely to advance interfaith, sectarian or racial hatred shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years or with fine or with both” (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016).

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To explore anti-Shia discourse on social media domains (Facebook, Twitter).

This study addresses the following research questions:

- i. What speech is used against Shias on Facebook?
- ii. How are Shias described on Twitter by hate groups?

2. Literature Review

Previous studies in Pakistan’s context focused on hate speech along religious, ethnic, political, and sectarian lines. However, none of the studies conceptualised how hate speech used against Shias is a sectarian crime, and how it is perpetrated through speech on social media. It is hoped that this research fills the research vacuum by investigating the known type of hate speech using the above stated legal provisions and the theory of speech acts as a theoretical framework.

This research takes place against the backdrop of burgeoning body of research on hate speech in Pakistan’s context (Lall, 2008; p. 58; Ali, 2020). Some researchers have identified hate speech as one of the causes of violent extremism and terrorism (Weinbaum, 2019; Ali, 2020).

Lall (2008) in Pakistan and India's context conducted fieldwork interviews and drew on textbook data to demonstrate how religion was used as a tool to inculcate ideologies of hate in curricula of both the countries. In their empirical study of Pakistan, Syed et al. (2014) also demonstrated that systemic incendiary language and bigotry have been embedded in Pakistan's educational curricula. Such violent elements and ideologies have resulted in non-Shia militant groups perpetrating acts of terrorism against the Shia community in Pakistan (Ali, 2020).

Research on the role of different media in spreading hate speech has also seen an increase in recent years (Qasim and Usmani, 2021; Rao, 2020; Ali et al., 2021). Qasim and Usmani (2021) qualitatively conceptualize hate speech as a hybrid war waged along sectarian lines in Pakistan. Religious educational institutions are also fostering this culture of intolerance (Ahmar, n.d.). Rao (2020) conducted qualitative, content analysis of social media campaigns by Pakistan's political parties during 2018 and demonstrated how they propagated hate speech in Facebook and Twitter posts. Ali et al. (2021) also investigated how some students use social media to propagate their racist, sexist, sectarian, homophobic, or transphobic views via social media.

In this research, hate speech is conceptualized as a criminal act. The concept of speech as an act was first discussed by John Langshaw Austin in 1962. According to Austin (Searle, 1965), "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as saying something" (p. 6). He elaborated on the idea and added that requesting, advising, ordering, or congratulating a person are acts which are performed via language (Austin, 1962). Speech can be locutionary acts (the action of saying something), perlocutionary acts (conventions that make possible performing acts in saying something), and illocutionary acts (consequences of action by saying something) (Searle, 1965). Illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts can either be intentional or unintentional, and accordingly researchers should take different stances on hate speech (Di Rosa, 2019).

After Austin, Searle (1965, 2001) reduced speech acts/performatives to illocutionary acts. According to Searle (2001), all speech acts are actions whose effects depend on social conventions. He also added that illocutionary acts rely on intentionality, while perlocutionary acts depend on both intentionality and physical action. His debate with Jacques Derrida (cited in Nealon, 2017: p. 1-5) demonstrates that performatives are product of repetition beyond a particular context (Alfino,

1991: p. 147-148). Performatives carry all the track of their previous uses in other contexts, and they are a constant citation of other infinite speech acts (Derrida, 1988).

Many researchers have studied the role of speech acts in different contexts (David, 2016; 2018; 2021; Meier, 2010). Employing qualitative analyses, these researchers have demonstrated that the use of speech acts varies from one cultural context to other cultural contexts. Though these researchers have explored how lack of cultural competence can lead to conflict and misunderstanding when performing speech acts, their focus was not on how the resulting conflict and misunderstanding can cause hate speech.

Using this theory of performativity, we conceptualize hate speech used against Pakistani Shias as criminal acts.

3. Materials and Methods

This research uses qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Data were collected from Facebook, and Twitter through purposive sampling. Collected data were codified and thematically analysed using legal provisions and speech acts theory.

The research design used in this study can be sequenced in four stages given and discussed here.

3.1 Social media search for relevant posts

Twenty social media posts were selected through retrieval from the internet search. These posts were retrieved by using keywords, such as 'shia', 'shia kafir', 'boycott shia', etc. These social media (Facebook and Twitter) posts were purposively chosen based on a list of selection criteria, specifically: (1) Social media posts published within the past 10 years; (2) written in English and Urdu (translation for posts in Urdu is provided for analysis); (3) contain evidence of hateful, sectarian speech against Shias in Pakistan; and lastly, (4) posted and perpetrated in Pakistan.

3.2 Selection of relevant chunks containing the hateful, sectarian speech acts in the greatest density for each post

For each post, relevant excerpts which contain speech acts of sectarian hatred across all the posts and comments

were selected as the unit of observation, being *the who or what being studied in an analysis* (Miles, 2019).

3.3 Transcription for each excerpt into Microsoft Word document

The selected excerpts comprising the speech acts of hate from the selected social media posts were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document as “running verbal texts” in “orthographic units” or sentences (Srinivass, 2011: p. 197).

3.4 Analysis of speech acts

Research findings obtained at this stage have been tabulated and analysed to demonstrate how speech acts of hatred can break legal provisions and are criminal acts.

4. Results

In this section research findings are analysed based on three main headings: *Hate Speech of Declaring all Shias as non-Muslims (Kafir); Boycotting Shias; Threatening Shias.*

4.2 Hate Speech of Declaring all Shias as non-Muslims (Kafir)

Some non-Shia Muslims use negative slurs and libels against Shias in Pakistan. Shias in Pakistan are accused of

introducing new concepts and practices in Islam (Bid’ah), which is prohibited in Islam. These concepts and practices are used as a tool to spread hate against Shias and declare them as ‘Kafir’ which means non-Muslims. For speech acts of sectarian hatred perpetrated against Shias in Pakistan, see Table 1.

Responses in Table 1 taken from social media sites, Facebook and Twitter, show how hate speech is used against Shias in Pakistan. Shias are not even considered as Muslims, though it is prohibited in Islam to declare a Muslim as an infidel.

Response 1 in Table 1 can be conceptualized as a perlocutionary act, because it is a result of social conventions and norms. According to Austin (1962), perlocutionary speech acts are regulated by social norms and conventions. Similarly, response 1 in Table 1 is a product of the non-Shia’s conventional beliefs and ideas which are held against Shias in Pakistan. As Di Rosa (2019) says, these perlocutionary acts are intentional, there is a need to take a legal stance in interpreting and countering such speech acts. Moreover, the response also violates International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) that prevents and criminalizes hate speech along religious and other lines, which Pakistan has ratified. Response 1 that declares all Shias in Pakistan as non-Muslims also violates sections 153-A (a) and 153-A (b), 295-A and 298 of Pakistan Penal Code, and section 11 of PECA which criminalizes and prohibits such spread of hate speech by any means.

Table 1. Aspersions cast against Shias

No.	Hate speech	Violation of legal provisions
1.	Shias are Kafir (infidels or non-Muslims), and I don’t consider them as Muslims, because during their Ashura procession in the month of Moharram, they shut down mobile and the internet networks. Only some stupid persons will accept them as Muslims (slander).	Violation of international conventions on hate speech and Pakistan Penal Code sections 153-A (a) and 153-A (b). Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
2.	Shias are born because of illegitimate relation which they have on the night of Sham-e-Ghariban. Thus, they are born Kafir (slander).	Hate speech violating PPC and international provisions against such speech. Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
3.	Shias are Rafzi and Kafir because they abuse the companions of the Prophet of Islam (Slander).	Violation of PPC and other conventions. Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
4.	Shia sect is the only sect whose foundations stand on blasphemy and bid’ah (adding new things to Islam) (slander).	Violation of PPC and other legal provisions. Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
5.	Truth is bitter. Shias are worse infidels (Kafir) than Jews and Christians. They are involved in the worst form of polytheism. Shias much like other infidels are to be punished in this world and in hereafter. Oh God, protect us against these infidels (slander).	Violation of PPC and other legal provisions. Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.

Source: Author

Response 2 in Table 1 is yet another accusation levelled against Shias in Pakistan. It misinterprets Shia’s recalling of the sacrifice and tolerance of the family of Imam Hussain on the night of the oppressed (Sham-e-Ghariban). Such misinterpretation is intentional, and it amounts to hate speech. It is a speech act of sectarian hatred that spreads propaganda and misinformation against Shias in Pakistan. Such speech acts go beyond the context and tend to have far-reaching effects (Loxley, 2007). Rendering such far-reaching effects using hate speech acts against a minority is considered as an echoing responsibility (Medina, 2006). Spreading this type of hate and propaganda is a serious violation of sections 295-A, 298 of PPC and section 11 of Pakistan’s Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (2016).

Response 3 in Table 1 is yet another speech act of sectarian hatred committed against Shias in Pakistan. It demonstrates that Shias are Rafzi/Rafdhi infidels. Using such illocutionary speech acts can create distorted reality against an individual or a group of individuals (Butler, 1997). Similarly, Shias in Pakistan are also victims at the hands of some hate groups who use those performatives which negatively define Shias and their beliefs. Performatives are citations of other infinite speech acts (Derrida, 1988). Such negative performatives used against Shias in Pakistan are also citations/repetitions of negative slurs/performatives perpetrated against Shias in different contexts and times. It also violates sections 295-A and 298 of PPC and section 11 of PECA.

Pakistani Shias have also been accused of blasphemy and Bid’ah. Such hate speech has been repeated in response 4 of Table 1 which claims that the Shia sect stands on the foundations of blasphemy and Bid’ah. The speech act of sectarian hatred was posted on Twitter, and the tweet violates the policy of Twitter on hate speech.

According to Loizidou (2007), such speech acts of hatred are socially *iterable*, because these are not exclusively individualistic or material, rather they transgress a certain context and render far-reaching effects. Similarly, speech acts of sectarian hatred used against Shias may have far reaching effect on the entire community and in such circumstances, Di Rosa suggests (2019), legal stance should be taken against such hate speech acts. This response is also a violation of sections 295-A and 298 of PPC and section 11 of PECA. Response 5 in Table 1 is a result of religious conventions which determine whether a person is an infidel, a polytheist or whether he/she is to be punished or not. Though social conventions result in intentional production of perlocutionary hate speech acts against a minority, these need to be critically evaluated. If the role of social conventions is not critically evaluated, this can create the sense of echoing responsibility in some people to spread such speech acts of hatred against others (Medina, 2006). As shown in response 5, the same situation can be witnessed in Pakistan, where using hate speech against Shias is propagated as a social responsibility. Such anti-Shia discourse is a criminal violation of sections 295-A and 298 of PPC and section 11 of PECA. In addition to declaring Shias as infidels, social boycott against Shias in Pakistan is also encouraged, and this is now discussed in the following section.

4.2 Boycotting Shias

Boycott against Shias is also propagated through social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. For details, see Table 2.

Response 1 in Table 2 is a product of social conventions of cleanliness and uncleanliness. Shias have been associated

Table 2. Propaganda against Shias

No.	Hate speech	Sectarian criminal act
1.	There is no difference between a Shia and a Hindu. They wash horses and use the same water for drinking as they claim it will cure them. It’s time to distance yourself from them (slander).	Violation of international conventions and national legal provisions. Also, violation of social media policies on hate speech. Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
2.	There should be not any relationship with Shias because they do not believe in the finality of Prophethood (slander).	Violation of international conventions and national legal provisions. Violation of Section 295-A, Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA. Also, violation of social media policies on hate speech.
3.	Don’t eat or drink with Shias, because their Niaz (food prepared during Muharram) and Sabeel (water or drink fed during Muharram mostly by Shias) are prohibited in Islam (slander).	Violation of international conventions and national legal provisions. Also, violation of social media policies on hate speech. Violation of Section 295-A, and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
4.	It is not allowed to marry a Shia person. Therefore, you should avoid it (libel).	Violation of international conventions and national legal provisions. Also, violation of social media policies on hate speech. Violation of Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.

Source: Author

with drinking unclean water as the respondent claims they superstitiously believe that this will cure all their ills. These social conventions of cleanliness have been embodied in the speech acts of sectarian hatred used against Shias in Pakistan. Moreover, these performatives rely on intentional sectarian hatred to create negative social reality against the Shia community. Such constructed reality, in the words of Medina (2006), can cause the spread of hate speech.

Shias are also wrongly blamed that they do not believe in the finality of Prophethood. This is mentioned in response 2 of Table 1. Though all Shias in Pakistan and other countries believe in the finality of Prophethood, such hate speech is intentionally used against Shias to misrepresent them. This claim was asserted in Pakistan on Facebook, and this incendiary message used against the Shia minority community in Pakistan also violates Facebook's policy on hate speech. It also flouts international conventions and violates local laws on hate speech and is therefore seen as a criminal, sectarian speech act.

Response 3 in Table 2 is also a speech act of sectarian hatred committed against the Shia community in Pakistan on Facebook. Supposedly relying on Islamic conventions, the respondent asks people not to eat and drink with Shias. This response incites others to boycott and isolate the Shia community in Pakistan. Though the sectarian speech act relies on religious conventions, its message of hatred is intentional. According to Searle (2001), perlocutionary speech acts, though drawing on social norms and conventions, have certain intentions to fulfil. In this case, the sectarian perlocutionary acts are aimed at negatively representing Shias. This negative representation of the Shia community on social media is a manifestation of hate speech, and it violates sections 9 and 11 of Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crime Act (2016).

Response 4 in Table 2 also incites many non-Shia not to marry a Shia. This is an open call to boycotting the community in Pakistan. These acts of hatred and

discrimination against the Shia community not only flout social media policies but also violate sections 9 and 11 of Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (2016).

All responses in Table 2 (with the exception of response 4) violate sections 295-A and 298 of PPC and section 11 of PECA.

4.3 Threatening Shias

In addition to negative slurs used against the Shia community in Pakistan, threats against the Shia community in Pakistan are also posed. Many of these threats are performed using perlocutionary performatives. Threats used against the Shia community are shown in Table 3, and these were taken from Facebook.

All responses in Table 3 are examples of sectarian hate speech perpetrated against the Shia community. These threats of murder equate with real murder. Response 1 in Table 3 incites murder of a person because that person professes Shi'ism. Response 3 also violates social media policies and challenges Pakistan's law of registering First Information Report against an accused person. Response 2 in Table 3 incites genocide of the Shia community, and it violates the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (n.d.), which both prevents and penalizes genocide. Responses in Table 3 violate sections 153-A (c), and 98 of PPC, and section 11 of PECA. Thus, speech acts of threats have also been used against the Shia community in Pakistan, and many Shias have also been killed in the country (see Ali, 2020).

5. Discussion

As discussed in the background of this study, hate speech refers to any speech that offends others along the lines of gender, religion, race, or sexual orientations (Lewis, 2012; Cohen-Almagor, 2011). Similarly, this research has

Table 3. Threats used against Shias

No.	Hate speech	Sectarian criminal act
1.	He is a Shia boy. He is spreading propaganda. Just see his snap shots. He should be killed (slander).	Violating national, international, and social media regulations on hate speech. Violation of section 153-A (c), and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
2.	Ohhonourlesswe will destroy your generations. We will kill you.	Violation of section 153-A (c), and Section 298 of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.
3.	I will not register First Information Report against them, rather I will cut off their head (libel).	Violation of section 153-A (c) of PPC. Violation of Section 11 of PECA.

Source: Author

also demonstrated how hate speech is used against the Shia community in Pakistan on social media. Such hate speech used against the community can become a source of widening divides in Pakistan's society. The posts shared by the respondents on social media are intertwined with speech acts of sectarian hatred perpetrated against the Shia community.

Speech acts of hatred against the Shia community resulted in violation of many international, national, and social media policies on hate speech. Findings showed that hate speech used against the Shia community on social media not only flouts international legal provisions but also violates sections 153-A (a), (b), (c), 295-A, and 298 of PPC and section 11 of PECA. Thus, in this research, speech acts of hatred have been conceptualized as crimes.

The sectarian performatives identified in this study are citations and repetitions of infinite speech acts of hatred used in different contexts and periods. Illocutionary acts of sectarian hatred show how hate speech has affected Pakistani society, and there is need to take action against such criminal speech acts. In brief, this study demonstrates how sectarian hate speech acts were propagated against the Shia community on social media, and how these speech acts violated many conventions and legal provisions. We suggest that law makers should linguistically identify linguistic and discursive features of hate speech, both slander and libel, so that such violations can be easily identified and laws on hate speech can be implemented. We suggest policymakers to coordinate with the social media sector and develop a regulatory mechanism to reach a much clearer and consistent policy on hate speech. Such a coordinated approach to policy on hate speech should take into consideration the rights and freedom of minorities.

The speech acts of sectarian hatred against the Shia community were demonstrated by the use of threats, slurs and declaring the Shia community as infidels. This research study also makes a theoretical contribution to current literature on what constitutes hate speech and how it can be identified in both online and offline domains. Unlike other researchers' findings (Weinbaum, 2019; Ali, 2020), our findings relate to the role of speech acts on social media in spreading sectarian violence, and how these can be seen as criminal acts and relate to current laws.

6. Conclusion

Employing legal provisions and speech act theory, this study discussed how Pakistan's Shia community faced hate

speech in a range of social media domains. Data collected from social media posts were qualitatively analysed to show how such platforms are used in propagating hatred. Moreover, this study has extended the definition of hate speech from religious hatred to identify its sectarian dimension in Pakistan's context. It is suggested that such sectarian violence should be strictly prohibited in social media sites, and punitive action should be taken against the owners of social media who should guard and prevent the use of hate speech. Though this research was limited to a small sample taken from Facebook and Twitter in Pakistan's context, a much larger sample from other social media platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, etc. can have similar/dissimilar results. It is hoped that this research study will guide researchers to expand research on hate as a criminal speech act in a wide range of contexts.

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The authors have declared that they have no conflict of interest.

10. Patents

Not applicable.

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