

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS ABOUT HATE SPEECH: A CASE STUDY OF THE CYBER SECURITY AND LAW STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions and experiences of young undergraduate students about hate speech and the laws regulating such an act in society. With the ever-growing influence of access to digital technology, social media platforms, and the desire to express yourself freely, hate speech has become common in Pakistani society, especially in educational institutes. Therefore, a qualitative case study was undertaken to explore the perspectives of undergraduate students in Cybersecurity and law about hate speech. Data for this research was collected using purposive sampling from 48 undergraduate participants. Focus group interviews were conducted to record and analyse respondents' views using thematic analysis. The study's findings suggest cybersecurity students associate hate speech with digital media, while law students relate it to their daily discourse and experiences. Similarly, Law students had better knowledge about offences and judicial laws, while very few participants from the other disciplines knew the laws regulating hate speech in society. However, the experiences of the respondents reflected that most of them have faced hate speech on campus or in society. The results are insightful for educationists and policymakers to educate students about hate speech and laws, especially those enrolled in information technology-related fields during their early education.

Keywords: *Hate-speech, Laws, Discourse, Perceptions, Experiences, Pakistan*

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Introduction

Hate speech acts have increased, especially in the post-social media era (Iqbal et al., 2023). In particular, the young generation is exercising free speech in the name of hate speech. Therefore, it is vital to explore the younger generation's understanding of hate speech, existing laws regulating it, and whether they account for it. Although hate speech has been a global phenomenon recently, it has also made inroads in Pakistani society.

United Nations, an international organisation of world nations, explains hate speech as an offensive discourse that aims to target an individual or group of people based on their nationality, colour, race, religion, and gender (UN, 2023). It may be observed in case of disagreement over a topic, issue, or gossip in the contemporary world. It can be conveyed through images, cartoons, memes, objects, gestures, or verbal (U.N, 2023). Despite the severity of the issue, there is no universal definition of hate speech under international human rights. Hate speech has multiple interpretations depending on the context, society, and individual involved in producing and perpetuating hate against anyone.

Hate speech has been defined using various perspectives. Generally, it is defined as an act that offends the opposing person based on skin colour, race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation (Lewis, 2012). On the individual level, Cohen-Almagor (2011) defines it as individuals' motives of hatred towards others due to real-life problems and jealousy. Similarly, Gagliardone (2014) defines group-level perspective and narrates that hate speech is used to harass, attack, and victimise a target group for any act in society.

Hate-Speech Laws in Pakistan

The Pakistan Penal Code defines hate speech and related offences in Sections 153-A, 153-A (b) and 153-A (c). However, we have the legal provision to monitor and criminalise hate speech. However, there has been no case in which an individual has been punished for offensive words. Section 153-A defines the term hate speech as an act performed:

“By words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representations or otherwise, promotes or incites, on the 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” (Ameer et al., 2023, p.3).

Similarly, 153-A (b) further explains about hate-speech that it 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.).

Section 153-A (c) defines the punishment of committing a hate crime as *“penalising such criminal act with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and with fine”* (Pakistan Penal Code). Similarly, the Anti-Terrorism Act (1997) explains the terminology hate-speech to counter sectarian hatred, which is common in a diverse society like Pakistan. Section 8 of the act defines hate speech as *“threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour to stir sectarian hatred and carries a penalty of up to seven years imprisonment”* (Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997). In addition, National Action Plan (2014) point 5 narrates that strict action must be taken against those promoting hatred on sectarian and religious grounds, which are the root cause of extremism in society.

Social media has digitalised the global world, and easy access has allowed youth to express themselves freely through online platforms. Hence, to stop hatred on digital platforms, the government introduced the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act PECA (2016), which aims to monitor and criminalise hate speech in the social world. Section 11 of the PECA (2016) 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”* (Suo Motu Notice 7/2017, p.28).

The applicability of laws in cases of hate speech issues in Pakistan depends on the nature of the hate speech and the platform where it is spread. Sometimes, students are targeted on their religious sects. In general, Section 295-A and Section 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) are

the primary laws used to address hate speech in Pakistan. Section 295-A of the PPC prohibits the deliberate and malicious uttering of words or sounds to wound the religious feelings of any person. The punishment for violating Section 295-A can be imprisonment for up to two years, a fine, or both. In the same way, section 298 of the PPC prohibits the deliberate and malicious utterance of words, sounds, gestures, or acts to cause injury, annoyance, danger, hatred, or ill will to any person, group of persons, or religion. The punishment for violating Section 298 can be imprisonment for up to seven years, a fine, or both.

Pakistan is a multilingual nation with four provinces, and every province has its own languages. The people who are making, circulating, or publicly exhibiting any statement, rumour, or false report to create or promote feelings of enmity, hatred, or ill-will between different religious, racial, language, or regional groups or castes or communities. Section 505(2) of the PPC can also be applied to hate speech cases. The punishment for violating Section 505(2) can be imprisonment for up to two years, a fine, or both.

Hate speech is not a strict liability crime, which means that the prosecution must prove that the defendant intended to wound religious feelings or cause harm. The burden of proof lies with the trial to demonstrate that the defendant's words or actions were designed to incite hatred or violence. The courts have interpreted hate speech laws narrowly, often requiring that the defendant's words or actions be directly linked to a specific act of violence or hatred. Overall, the legal framework in Pakistan provides a basis for addressing hate speech. However, challenges remain in terms of enforcement and judicial interpretation. Continued efforts to raise public awareness, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and ensure consistent judicial interpretation are essential to combat hate speech in Pakistan effectively.

Judicial Practices in Pakistan

Besides the laws that regulate hate speech in Pakistan, the Supreme Court of Pakistan also took a *Suo motu* notice regarding a sit-in (dharna) and noticed the propagation of political hate speech by the leaders of the religious political party in the capital city and gave a detailed verdict in this regard in 2019 (*Suo Moto*, 7/2017). Recently, the Supreme Court of Pakistan has been hearing the review petitions and implementation of court orders (Petition 266, 267 & 268 of 2019). In its verdict, the SC narrated that the leaders of TLP used threats, abused, provoked, and promoted hatred. The media live telecast this, and spreading hate speech is a serious offence, as narrated in the judgment. It was reported that hate spread through the political leaders and media was not investigated. The court ordered that federal and provincial governments must monitor individuals advocating hate and must be prosecuted as per the law.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan also declared hate speech as acceptable at all. In the case of "*Muhammad Asghar vs. The State*" (PLD 1986 SC 839), the petition challenged the constitutionality of Section 295-A of the PPC. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the section but noted that it must be interpreted narrowly to avoid infringing on the right to freedom of speech. Similarly, the case of "*Pervez Masih vs. State*" (PLD 1990 SC 280) declares the involvement of a petition challenging the constitutionality of Section 298 of the PPC. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the section but noted that it must be applied with caution to avoid suppressing legitimate criticism of religion or religious beliefs. In addition, another case was reported as "*Tahir Mahmood vs. The State*" (PLD 2002 SC 1299). This case involved a petition challenging the constitutionality of Section 505(2) of the PPC. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the section but noted that it must be interpreted narrowly to avoid infringing on the right to freedom of expression. "*Ali Musa Gilani vs. The State*" (PLD 2022 SC 91) This case involved a petition challenging the constitutionality of Section 295-A of the PPC. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the section but emphasised the need for a balanced approach that protects both religious freedom and freedom of expression. Political and Religious hate speech has become common within the elite class in Pakistan as well. Politicians, religious heads, and senior officers of the armed forces are also involved in it.

It is important to note that the law on hate speech is constantly evolving, and new case laws are being decided regularly. Overall, hate speech has been defined in the Pakistan Penal Code, Anti-Terrorism Act (1997), National Action Plan (2014), Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act PECA (2016), and Supreme Court's Suo Motu Notice 7/2017. Despite the legislation about hate speech, several loopholes in the legal laws lead to misinterpretation and a lack of concrete measures to implement the law (Chaudry et al., 2021). Hate Speech within the Pakistani legal statutes and social context has been defined as a negative sentiment against religion, sectarian violence, race, ethnicity, linguistic groups, and inciting violence on digital platforms. However, internationally, hate speech also includes hatred towards gender, sexual orientation, personal attributes, and characteristics and professional. Therefore, this study aims to explore the understanding of Pakistani youth about hate speech, legal provisions, and personal experiences to know whether the young generation knows hate speech and the laws regulating it within Pakistan.

Literature Review

Previous research conducted in Pakistan's context discussed hate speech along religious, ethnic, political, and sectarian lines. However, none of the studies explored undergraduate cyber security law students' perceptions of hate speech, and it is hoped that this research fills the research gap by examining hate speech from a legal perspective. This research takes place against growing research on hate speech in Pakistan's context (Ali et al., 2023; Ali, 2020; Lall, 2008; p. 58). Although there are some researchers (Weinbaum, 2019; Ali, 2020) who have identified hate speech as one of the causes of violent extremism and terrorism, this study at the intersection of undergraduates' perceptions and cyber laws conceptualises hate speech as a criminal act.

Lall (2008) conducted fieldwork interviews and analysed textbook data in Pakistan and India to show how religion was used as a means to promote hateful ideologies in the educational curricula of both countries. Syed et al. (2014) conducted a similar empirical study in Pakistan and found evidence of systemic inflammatory language and intolerance embedded in the educational curricula. Such violent elements and ideologies have resulted in anti-Shia hate speech (Ali et al., 2023) and militant groups perpetrating acts of terrorism against the Shia community in Pakistan (Ali, 2020).

Researchers have also investigated how social media platforms are increasingly used to spread hate speech (Qasim & Usmani, 2021; Rao, 2020; Ali et al., 2021). Qasim and Usmani (2021) conceptualise hate speech as a hybrid war that is waged along sectarian lines in Pakistan. Religious educational institutions also foster this intolerant culture (Ahmar, n.d.). Rao's (2020) content analysis of social media campaigns by Pakistan's political parties during 2018 demonstrated how the parties propagated hate speech in their Facebook and Twitter posts. Ali et al. (2021) also described how some students rely on social media sites to propagate their racist, sexist, sectarian, homophobic, or transphobic views.

Markogiannaki et al. (2021) explored the views and perceptions of adolescents about online hate speech in Greece. A qualitative study using focus-group interviews with 36 participants was utilised to gather data from the respondents. The findings showed that the participants had no understanding of hate speech. The key characteristics of hate speech, as narrated by the participants, were hate, gender, racism, ethnicity, physical weakness, and disability.

Ameer et al. (2023) focused on the influence of social media on hate speech. Researchers investigated how hate speech is used for sectarian reasons against the Shia community. This qualitative study collected data through social media websites and analysed using legal provisions and Austin's speech act theory. The findings of the study suggested that the Shia community faces hatred on social media and daily life as well.

In a similar study, Riendeau (2013) explored the understanding and attitudes of undergraduate students at Ohio State University, where such incidents have been reported at a higher rate. The university provides admission to diverse international students from China, India, and other countries. Eight students were interviewed using purposive sampling. The findings showed that students were aware of what hate speech means but did not know about the constitutional and legal provisions regulating hate speech in the United States. Four participants associated hate speech with verbal or written hate, while the remaining associated it with power used to convey a message verbally. While explaining their understanding of hate speech, participants used the words "minority, defame, identify, difference, derogatory, offensive, negative" (Riendeau, 2013, p.13).

Chaudry et al. (2021), in their policy report, focused on understanding hate speech and its impact on minority groups due to the escalation of hate speech in society. Researchers observed that hate speech has become common, and its frequent use in society, newspapers, literature, education, and public space has led to heinous crimes towards minority religious groups in Pakistan. For this project, data was collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions with minority communities in rural and urban settings, including men and women. The study documents different derogatory terms used against the minority community as well. The implications of hate speech include loss of self-esteem as a Hindu man reported that her daughter lost interest in studies as she faced hatred because of belonging to the Hindu community. Another impact of hate speech is that it results in violent attacks. Within Pakistan, such attacks are pretty common against the Ahmadiyya and Shi'a communities. Similarly, as hate speech has prevailed in society, it has created divisions based on caste and religion in professional life and education.

Most studies on hate speech have focused on the views and perceptions of online hate speech. However, it is essential to explore whether the young generation, which is freely expressing themselves in the physical and online space, knows what hate speech means and the laws regulating hate speech. Therefore, this study has been conducted to understand the perceptions and experiences of undergraduate students in two different disciplines about hate speech in Karachi, Pakistan.

Methodology

This study aims to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of hate speech; therefore, a qualitative study has been undertaken. A qualitative study explores the problem in detail and provides rich insights into the analysis of the problem (Crewell, 2014). The focus of the study was young undergraduate students; therefore, a multiple-case study approach was adopted. Numerous case studies compare the similarities and differences in participants' responses (Baxter and Jake, 2008 & Yin, 2003). This study adopted a comparative multiple-case approach to determine the participants' responses. The study population includes the young generation residing in Karachi. The target population comprises undergraduate students in a public sector university's Cybersecurity and Law bachelor's degree program. Data from the target population has been collected from BS Cyber Security and LLB (Law) students based on their consent,

interests, and experiences. Data has been collected from the participants using purposive sampling. The study's sample size is 48 (24 CS and 24 LLB students). The researcher wanted to know the understanding and experiences of the participants in both disciplines enrolled in the first year.

Data from the participants had been collected using focus group interviews. Due to the many participants, semi-structured interviews were impossible, and the researcher wanted to elicit responses from cybersecurity and Law students. Focus group interviews focus on collective responses and views of individuals (Creswell, 2014). Hence, this study's focus group interviews best suit the respondents' objectives, sample size, and comparative perceptions. Four focus group interviews (2 with CS and 2 with LLB students) were conducted with 12 participants. Participants in a single focus group were asked to share their perspectives and understanding. The focus group interviews were recorded after formal consent was obtained from the respondents, and the researcher took field notes as well. Each focus group took 40 to 50 minutes. Hence, data for the study was collected in approximately 3-4 hours from two classes (CS and Law).

Data collected through the recording was transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. After the data transcription, codes and categories were assigned, and themes were generated. Ethical consideration has been followed in the study; participants were assured that their identity would not be disclosed and that the data would be used for research purposes only. Pseudonyms were given to the participants, such as CSHS01-24 and LWHS25-48. In addition, participants' time, convenience, and ease were considered while collecting data for the study, which was collected during one of their leisure time at the university.

Findings

Understanding Hate Speech: Incidents of hate speech have become common in Pakistani society in the contemporary era. However, considering the available literature, it is interesting to explore the understanding of hate speech among the young generation in the IT and law fields. Therefore, the researcher asked the participants to share their knowledge about hate speech.

Defining Hate Speech	No of Participants
Abusive, offensive, or threatening Speech on digital platforms	10
Verbal offence or threatening acts in face-to-face communication	10
False Language	4
Encourage violence by words	4
To hate a person or say negative things about a person.	4
Speaking against the person without reason	3
Talking bad about a person and gossiping about it with everyone.	3
Criticising someone on their cast, race, gender, and class in society intentionally or unintentionally	2
Religious discrimination	2
Cultural Discrimination	2
Personal Attack	1
Hurting someone emotionally	1
Embracing someone due to his height, weight, and body shaming	1
Label to escape the truth	1
Total	48

Table No. 1 Defining Hate Speech (The participants' responses)

Table No. 1 narrates the responses of Cybersecurity (CS) and law students regarding their understanding of the phenomenon of hate speech. 10 CS students regarded hate speech as offensive or threatening language on digital platforms. In comparison, the 10 Law students reported that hate speech is abusive and language of hatred is being used in face-to-face discourse. The remaining students associated hate speech with false language, individual hatred, religious sin, and discrimination on cultural, gender, and race basis. Out of the 24 students from CS, 15 reported that hate speech occurs mainly on social media, while the remaining differed in their understanding. Similarly, most of the law students, 18 out of 24, reported that hate speech occurs in face-to-face situations due to various individual, political, religious, and social reasons.

Hate Speech Law and Regulatory Body

Most of the CS participants (20 out of 48) reported they were not aware of any law that regulates hate speech in Pakistan. One participant said, *“No, I do not know about any law related to hate speech”* (CSHS-24). Another participant said, *“I do not know any law regarding this, but even if it exists, it is not applicable in Pakistani society”* (CSHS-08). Similarly, CSHS-12 said, *“No, I do not know about any law, but he must be punished.”* Also, another participant, CSHS-07, remarked, *“I do not know about any law regarding hate speech in Pakistan; one obvious reason for not knowing about the law is simply the fact that it is not implemented in our state.”*

In comparison, most participants enrolled in the Law discipline reported contrastive information. Almost 21 out of 48 shared that they knew about hate speech laws. As LWHS-36 said, *“Certain articles within the Pakistan Penal Code define hate speech and the offences related to it. Similarly, LWHS-29 said, “Article 153 defines hate speech and crime related to it.” Consequently, LWHS-26 said that the Anti-Terrorism Law and National Action Plan also talk about religious hate speech. In addition, LWHS-44 said, “The recent legislation done by the Parliamentarian defines hate speech.” In the same manner, LWHS-48 said, “PECA law defines hate speech and the offences related to it on digital platforms.” Similarly, LWHS-39 said, “Although the law exists about hate speech, we have not witnessed any related punishment. In addition, LWHS33 said, “As the law is not practice and the judicial system has not charged offenders regarding hate crime, hate speech is increasing within the society.”*

In short, participants from the CS discipline had no adequate information about hate speech laws in Pakistan. In contrast, law students had little information about the legal statutes and punishments related to them.

Authority for Controlling Hate Speech

Similarly, CS and Law discipline participants reported perceptions about the authority controlling hate speech acts in Pakistan. LWHS-37 said, “*Judiciary and state controls hate-speech.*” While LWHS-28 said, “*Law-enforcement agencies control hate-speech offences and crime in the society.*” In the same manner, LWHS-41 said, “*It is the prime responsibility of FIA cyber wing to control crime related to hate speech,*” while few participants knew about the laws prohibiting and controlling hate speech. As one participant remarked, “*I do know about any authority that controls hate speech in Pakistan*” (CSHS-07). In the same manner, another participant, CSHS-14, remarked, “*We do not have enough police for citizens and control crime in the city, then how can we expect to have a force for controlling hate speech.*”. Another participant, CSHS-21 remarked, “*I believe FIA has a role and its cyber security wing is operational but does not have any information about its role regarding hate speech.*” Similarly, another participant, LWHS-35, reported, “*I do know that FIA regulates laws about hate speech and are constantly monitoring.*” However, FIA is a law-enforcement agency that monitors and regulates under the Federal Government of Pakistan's law frame and is currently acting against those who spread hatred in society.

In the same manner, another participant, CSHS-14, said, “*I do not know about the law, but there would be one of the international bodies that took a strong stance against the arrest of a local politician who was arrested for using hate speech.*” These remarks reflect perceptions about the rule of law in Pakistan among the young generation studying IT and law discipline.

Islamic Law Regulating Hate Speech

A few of the participants also said that “*we do not need a law to regulate hatred; as a Muslim nation, we must not spread hatred against anyone*” (LWHS-32). Similarly, one participant, CSHS-24, said, “*There is no law, but it is written in the Holy Quran not to abuse someone through bad words.*” Another participant, LWHS-28, responded similarly: “*Islam is the complete*

code of life, which guides individuals in their daily life.” Hence, few of the participants related hate speech with abiding by Islamic values and principles in daily life as a Muslim. However, some participants had a contrastive opinion as well. One of the participants, CSHS-11, said, *“There should be a law which takes action against hate speech as your word can hurt the sentiments of anyone.”*

Experiences of Hate Speech

When asked whether they observed or encountered an act of hate speech, the participants responded that there are different ways through which the respondents express hate speech.

Verbal Hate Speech

Most participants stated that they faced verbal hatred in their daily lives. As one of the participants said, *“I remember that on the first day of university. I was sitting in the university bus when a senior verbally abused me and asked me to stand up from the seat as it belonged to him”*. (LWHS-27). In the same way, another participant, CSHS-16, remarked, *“Seniors bullied newcomers on the orientation day through their speech.”* Similarly, one participant, LWHS-33, noted, *“Teachers abuse us in the classroom.”* Another CSHS-21 participant said, *“The teacher used abusive language during the seminar.”* Consequently, another participant, LWHS-31, presented a similar view: *“Classmates abuse us while asking questions from the teacher during the classroom lecture so that the teacher can finish the lecture quickly.”* Another participant, CSHS-09, remarked, *“My teacher called me Eiffel Tower because of my height in front of the class.”* Similarly, another participant, LWHS-40, remarked, *“During elections of students, all groups abused each other.”*

Overall, the participants' responses reported that they experienced hate speech in their lives. However, most of the reported incidents do not fall under the different laws of hate speech in Pakistan. However, it was a reality that most of them did encounter a hate speech incident.

Race, Gender, and Ethnicity

However, few participants faced hatred based on race, gender, and ethnicity. One participant, CSHS-06, remarked that *“some of my classmates stereotype my personality based on my belonging to an urban space via my speaking accent and vocabulary, but I did not take them seriously; however, their words reflected hatred towards people belonging to a specific area.”* In the same manner, one participant LWHS-26 remarked that recently *“we had an on-campus clash on a small issue in which the two groups abused each other based on ethnicity.”* Another participant CSHS-19 remarked that *“we often have witnessed that one ethnic group abused the other based on language”* In the same manner, one participant LWHS-39 remarked, *“Mohajirs and Sindhis often used derogatory terms for each other.”* Another CSHS-14 participant remarked, *“We are often categorised and abused for our skin colour. While LWHS-44 said, “Student groups often abuse each other based on their skin colour and mother tongue.”* In addition, one participant, CSHS-03, said, *“In our class, one of the students is bullied because of his height and skin colour.”* In the same way, an LWHS-33 participant narrated, *“Once a senior girl was making fun of my body weight.”* Similarly, another CSHS-17 remarked, *“Once a boy commented on my dressing style.”*

Discussion

This study explored an understanding of hate speech, laws regulating hate speech, and the experiences of undergraduate students. There are many laws in Pakistan, including the Pakistan Penal Code, the Anti-Terrorism Act (1997), the National Action Plan (2014), the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act PECA (2016), and the Supreme Court’s Suo Motu Notice 7/2017 notice. All these laws define hate speech. Although hate speech is not new, only 10 out of 48 participants, mainly from the Law discipline, knew about hate speech. In contrast, 10 from the CS discipline associated it with social media. Of the remaining participants, 28 had a different interpretation of hate speech. Markogiannaki et al. (2021) shared similar findings among Greek students. In the same manner, Ameer et al. (2023) related sectarian hatred being spread among the Sunni and Shi’a communities in Pakistan. Also, Riendeau (2013) reported that students in the U.S. had a complete understanding of hate speech, yet such incidents are pretty frequent at the university.

Unlike Lall's (2008) study that focused on hate speech in textbooks targeted against religious communities, the findings of this study show that a few participants, especially those from a Law background, know hate-speech laws. However, most of the participants, mainly from the CS discipline, did not know about any law for hate speech or any regulatory body controlling hate speech in society. At the same time, some of the participants associated hate speech law with Islamic principles and belief systems as the guiding source. Riendeau (2013) shared a similar finding, as diverse students at Ohio State University did not understand the international law and legal provisions against hate speech. At the same time, Ali et al. (2023) compared the findings of the existing hate-speech laws with hatred against the Shi'a community. Similarly, Chaudry et al. (2021) reported that there are serious loopholes in the implementation of existing hate speech laws in Pakistan.

The experiences narrated within this study connect hate speech with violent acts directed towards verbal abuse and criticism directed towards an individual based on race, ethnicity, and gender. Riendeau (2013) also reported that students associated hate speech with verbal or written hatred directed toward each other. Chaudry et al. (2021) shared experiences of hatred against minority and religious communities in their study. At the same time, Ali et al. (2023) reported experiences of hatred against the Shi'a community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the perceptions of the young generation enrolled in the Cyber Security and Law discipline. The study overviewed respondents' understanding of hate speech, laws, and experiences. The findings showed that students enrolled in the law degree had a better knowledge of hate speech and related laws than participants in the cybersecurity field. A few respondents indicated a lack of understanding of laws and their implementation in Pakistan. The participants enrolled in the law degree were aware of the regulatory body controlling hate speech in society. At the same time, participants in Cyber security had less information about the controlling authority for hate speech within Pakistan. Because of this, few of the participants considered Islamic principles and way of life as a guiding law for dealing with hate speech. At the same time, the experiences of the respondents showed that most of them have encountered hate speech acts. The hate speech acts were related to verbal abuse, race, gender, and ethnicity.

Most of these are defined in the Pakistan Penal Code. The government and educational institutes must immediately raise awareness about understanding hate speech in society, laws, and controlling authorities.

Hate speech is quickly escalating in Pakistani society. Therefore, educational institutes need to organise awareness sessions about hate speech and laws that regulate it with the support of law enforcement agencies. They should also promote extra-curricular activities that focus on learning outside the classroom. The students have easy access to social media, which is one of the mediums for spreading hate speech and extremism. Therefore, awareness should be given that social media accounts are being monitored and that laws exist to check free speech and hate speech. The Government should also start awareness campaigns against hate speech through literature, newspapers, advertisements, and sessions in educational institutes.

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