



RESEARCH PAPER

Hate Speech Prevalence and Identification in Pakistani Academic Environments: An Exploratory Study

¹Naila Rafique, ²Saima Iqbal* and ³Sidra Huma

1. Designation Lecturer, Department of Media and communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan
2. Designation Lecturer, Department of Communication Studies, Queen Mary Graduate College, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Designation, Lecturer Department of Media and Communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author: pusaima5@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

Hate speech is the use of insulting, hostile, and malicious rhetoric towards a person or group of people because of what is believed to be their fundamental qualities. It can be harmful to people. To enhance comprehension regarding the frequency and attributes of hate speech, this research aims to investigate prevalence of hate speech in Pakistani academic institutions. To foster a climate of acceptance and kindness, it is important that students are aware of hate speech and alert when it is spoken. By doing this, an atmosphere where everyone has the chance to thrive may be created where everyone feels safe and at ease in their surroundings. Almost 215 students fill the survey questionnaire. The results showed that, even if they were unaware of it, majority of respondents had encountered hate speech.

KEYWORDS Academic Setting, Hate Speech, On-Campus Activities, Pakistan

Introduction

Hate speech, which is defined as derogatory and discriminating words directed towards any individual or group, has become a critical concern in today's technologically evolved and globally networked society. Although hate speech is not a new phenomenon, its exposure and impact have increased due to factors such as increased immigration, globalization, the proliferation of information, multicultural contacts, and the extensive use of social media. Even academic environments, which were historically regarded as havens of learning and diversity, are not exempt from this alarming pattern. The purpose of this study is to investigate the existence of hate speech on university campuses as well as its effects. Today's globalized world encourages the coexistence of many cultures and viewpoints in surroundings. But this diversity also makes it easier for misinformation to be spread and for misconceptions to arise, which fuels prejudice and intolerance. These settings can be especially chaotic in academic institutions since they bring people from different backgrounds together, which frequently leads to conflicts over values and views. The purpose of this study is to ascertain whether there is a rise in the frequency of unpleasant and hostile remarks directed toward particular groups in academic contexts.

Kaplin (1992) discussed that it is a fact that institutions encompassing considerable diversity could serve as the breeding ground of hate culture. Educational institutions do have not like-minded audiences so there are considerably high chances of clashes amongst diverse opinions. Tensions in this situation could escalate if opinions are not confronted creatively and rationally; rather violent tactics are used to silence the

nonconformists. To promote a creative learning environment where everyone exhibits a respect for other's opinions, there must be general norms of courtesy in expressing ideas (Rodney A Smolla, 1990). Opinions when expressed in an insensitive manner exhibit disapproval for other groups. Hence the learning environment of any educational institute will suffer irreparable damage until the issues are handled in an appropriate unbiased manner (Kaplin and Lee, 1995). The injuries inflicted by verbal assaults or non-verbal contemptuous expressions are not restricted to psychological distress or trauma of one individual, but their magnitude is large enough to blow the social identity and self-esteem of the entire community of stigmatized individuals (Leets, 2002). The students, who are once or constantly targeted based on factors that are not under their control, tend to remain silent and choose seclusion over the limelight (Delgado, 1993). They have to fight other mental battles and concentrate more on defensive tactics rather than competition. Boeckmann and Liew (2002) assert that depressed and isolated students waste their energies in surviving the battle of their identity and existence, leading to fewer public appearances, less participation in dialogues, and withdrawal from academic opportunities.

The youth who come to seek education in these Pakistani institutions also hold certain biases, opinions, affiliations, and stances. When they encounter a platform to express their opinions then they don't hesitate. As they are constantly exposed to blunt offensive messages and extremist rhetoric they form and express their inner selves accordingly. They do not mind caring for other's sentiments because they have never seen it in their practical life. Haque (2014) argued that owing to deep-rooted polarization that is the presence of extreme school of thoughts and their vehement following, a general extremist mindset prevails. So in political or social rhetoric, the rules of mutual respect and courtesy which must govern the process of communication are deliberately ignored. Most significantly, hate speech is not perceived as offensive or intimidating in Pakistan (Haque, 2014).

Fostering inclusive and respectful learning environments is severely hampered by the prevalence of hate speech in academic settings. This problem is especially concerning in Pakistani academic institutions because of an array of cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds among the student body. Even though hate speech is known to have negative effects on people and communities, thorough information about its prevalence and the forms it takes in these settings is lacking. The present study aimed to assess the presence of hate culture and its manifestation through most pervasive channel that is hate speech in multicultural social setting; campus premises of universities. This study looks into the forms of hate speech that are encountered, the places where they are most common, and the academic community's awareness levels in order to determine the prevalence and identification of hate speech in Pakistani academic environments. By filling in these gaps, the study hopes to aid in the creation of plans and regulations that would lessen the effects of hate speech and foster an environment that is more welcoming and courteous at Pakistani universities.

Literature Review

Hate speech is a complicated issue with multiple dimensions that take many different shapes. It is undeniable that hate speech does harm, even though some contend that some forms of it are protected as free speech (Yong, 2011). Hate speech can spread via a variety of mediums, such as written or spoken words, pictures, memes, gestures, and symbols. This is a widespread problem that affects people both offline and online and can have catastrophic consequences for both individuals and communities (United Nations, 2022). It is useful to classify hate speech to address and combat it effectively.

For example, Yong (2011) distinguishes four categories of particular interests in free speech: deliberate vilification, widespread vilification, coordinated political support for legislation that marginalizes or outlaws particular groups, and other claims.

Matsuda (1993) defined hate speech as communication whose purpose is to harm someone due to societal biases and personal attributes. Kaplin and Lee (1996) stress that; hate speech involves derogation of underprivileged groups by oral, written or symbolic communication. There is an immediate need to address the issue and this initiative could only be possible by first defining what exactly constitutes the hate offence. Either, policies to restrict it must prohibit only written hate speeches or it must forbid all sorts of intentional discriminatory harassments whether orally or by written and deliberate symbolic actions to exhibit one's dominance. For instance, Stanford University, while implementing their speech codes, made it compulsory that action will be forged only when contempt will be expressed to the specific individual. While some educational institutions remain clueless regarding how to exactly find out whether the alleged victim is really "stigmatized" or "harassed" owing to intentional proclamation of discriminatory words or actions. The educational institutions must be capable enough to provide a healthy and tolerable environment to the future asset of nations, in which all opinions must be regarded, valued (Altman, 1995).

Kaplin (1992) discussed that freedom of expression is useless if it impedes someone's personal growth. The freedom of speech definitely grants civil liberties to the majority segment of society but its misuse could silence the voices of underprivileged segments, specially in multicultural social setting. This will definitely promote inequalities in society, with respect to broad implications of hate speech.

Theoretical Framework

A Cultural Approach to Communication

This study has taken inspiration from a communication theory namely "A Cultural Approach to Communication" presented by James W Carrey in 1989. Carrey terms communication as a process which could create a symbolic reality to maintain conventional thoughts, opinions, beliefs and ideas for the purpose of control over society. This theory attempts to illustrate the process of communication through two divergent conceptions that are transmission view of communication and ritual view of communication. In accordance with the transmission view of communication, hate speech is a practice whereby hatred or aggression against a particular community is transmitted by communication. So, communication is used as a tool to spread the societal biases and manipulated facts in order to maintain control. This transmission is essentially done to spread religious beliefs, though political or social beliefs are also imparted. According to this view, transmission of messages in any social setting is done to impose and maintain cultural dominance. Communication not only serves the purpose of presentation of reality but also it directs the dramatic role change in status.

Social Identity Theory

This study strives to understand the effects of hate speech upon victims under findings of Social Identity Theory. It is one of the comprehensive social psychological theories which explain the formation of self-perception and group identities. In an attempt to explore the implications of communication in a collectivist environment, Social Identity Theory demonstrates that how self identities are formulated as a social process rather than merely a psychological process. Educational institutions serve as a

multicultural collective social platforms whereby chances to associate certain attributes towards one's self identity amplify. The core assumptions of this theory are suggestive that as affiliation towards a group is the founding stone of our dignity and self identity so relative groups in a social institution tend to enhance the outlook of their supremacy. In an attempt to intensify the privilege of one's assumed social group, individuals resort to such tactics as degrading and demeaning other communities by discriminatory comments, taunts, slurs or insults, etc.

Material and Methods

This research work is an investigation of hate speech and its effects, organized within the context of academic settings. To examine its presence and implications, a survey was formulated and employed in educational institutions. Researcher employed quantitative research methodology whereby descriptive research is its category that utilizes survey as its tool. This study attempts to seek information from academic audience so targeted population comprise students of universities. This survey is conducted in the International Islamic University Islamabad, Government College University Faisalabad, Iqra University, Islamabad, and SZABIST (Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Technology). The responses were collected from 215 respondents. A closed-ended, self-administered Questionnaire, consisting of 34 statements was used to collect responses.

Results and Discussion

For the sake of investigation of hate speech and its effects in campus premises, 160 questionnaires were distributed in International Islamic University Islamabad, 30 in SZABIST, 30 in Government College University Faisalabad and 30 in Iqra University. From 250 questionnaires, 220 were returned. Amongst 220 questionnaires, the researcher found 215 questionnaires appropriately filled and suitable for research.

Demographics

Table 1
The age group is divided into four categories.

S.No	Age Group	Valid Percentage
1	15-19	7%
2	20-24	75%
3	25-29	17%
4	30%	1%

Note: Almost 7% respondents lie between age limits 15-19. Approximately 75% respondents fall within age limit of 20-24. 17% respondents lie between age limit of 25-29. 1% respondents fall within age groups of 30 and onwards. Hence most of the respondents lie between age limit 20-24.

Table 2
Demographic

S. No	Category	Valid Percentage
Education Level		
1	Undergraduate	67%
2	Graduate	28%
3	Post graduate	6%
Gender		

1	Male	7%
2	Female	93%
Religion		
All the participants were Muslims		
Nationality		
All the respondents were Pakistani		

The abovetable shows that education level is divided into three categories. (1) Under graduate (2) Graduate and (3) Post Graduate. Education level of 28% respondents is graduation. A majority of respondents that is 67% are under graduate. Approximately 6% respondents are post graduate. 7% respondents are male whereas 93% respondents are female. All respondents are Muslim and have Pakistani nationality.

To investigate the occurrence and identification of hate speech in campus premises, researchers asked various statements from the respondents. The responses are shown in the graph below. Respondents were asked whether they identify the hate expressions or not. A majority of respondents verified that they can identify hate expression.

Table 3
Identification of Hate Speech

Category	Valid Percentage
Identification of Hate Speech	76%
Encounter or experienced on campus	81%
Did not experience hate speech	10%
Neutral	9%

The above table shows that 76% of respondents can identify hate speech. And the following figure shows encounter with hate speech in which 81% of respondents agreed that they had experienced it on campus, while only 10% disagreed, and 9% remained neutral. This significant majority suggests that hate speech is a common issue faced by the students.

Table 4
Encounter with Hate Speech

S.No	Frequency of Encounters	Valid Percentage
1	Often	71%
2	Sometimes	18%
3	Seldom	8%
4	Never	2%

The above table shows that the frequency of these encounters was also notable, with 71% of respondents indicating that they often encountered hate speech, 18% sometimes, 8% seldom, and only 2% never experienced it. This frequent exposure underscores the persistent and pervasive nature of hate speech in these academic settings.

Table 5
Prevalence of Hate Speech

S.No	Categories targeted by hate speech	Valid Percentage
1	Physical Appearance	41%
2	Political Orientation	17%
3	Gender	14%
4	Socioeconomic Class	10%

5	Religion/Sect	13%
6	Ethnicity	6%
7	Physical Disability	5%
8	Learning disability	5%

The study also examined the specific categories targeted by hate speech, finding that physical appearance was the most common basis (41%), followed by political orientation (17%). Other notable categories included gender (14%), socioeconomic class (10%), sect/religion (13%), ethnicity (6%), physical disability (5%), and learning disability (5%). This distribution indicates that hate speech is directed towards various aspects of personal and social identity, affecting a wide range of students.

Table 6
Sites of Hate Expression

S.No	Primary sites of Hate Speech	Valid Percentage
1	Classrooms	39%
2	Online Platforms	24%
3	Academic Events	18%
4	Cafeterias	14%
5	Other Locations	25%

The above table identified the primary sites where hate speech occurs. Classrooms were reported as the most common site (39%), followed by online platforms (24%), academic events (18%), and cafeterias (14%). Other locations accounted for 25% of the encounters.

Table 7
Pearson's Correlations

Variable		Age	Gender	Education	Nationality	Religion	hate speech computed
Hate speech computed	Pearson Correlation	-.311(**)	.213(**)	.145(*)	-.008	-.008	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.034	.909	.909	
	N	215	215	215	215	215	215

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

One of the primary variables studied was the student's experience of hate speech on campus premises. Age, gender and education reflected positive correlations with students' experiences; however nationality and religion did not affect their experience of hate speech on campus.

- For age the correlation was statistically significant at the ($r = .311$, $n = 215$, $p = .000$).
- For gender the correlation was statistically significant at the ($r = .213$, $n = 215$, $p = .002$).
- For education the correlation was statistically significant at the ($r = .145$, $n = 215$, $p = .034$).
- For nationality and religion the correlation was statistically insignificant.

The study's analysis focused on examining the connections between the encounters that students have with hate speech in educational environments and a range of demographic factors, including age, gender, educational attainment, nationality, and religious affiliation. Important trends were revealed by the Pearson correlation analysis results: Age showed a significant negative connection ($r = -0.311$, $n = 215$, $p < 0.01$) with hate speech incidences, indicating that older students are less likely to encounter hate

speech. On the other hand, gender showed a statistically significant positive association ($r = 0.213$, $n = 215$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that male and female students were significantly exposed to different amounts of hate speech. Similarly, achievement in school showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.145$, $n = 215$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a relationship between different educational attainment and different experiences with hate speech. However, neither religion nor nationality showed any significant connections with hate speech encounters ($r = -0.008$, $n = 215$, $p = 0.909$ for both), indicating that these specific demographic factors have no bearing on how often students encounter hate speech in educational contexts.

Discussion

The underlying intention of this study was to investigate the presence and implications of hate speech in academic settings. A substantial number of respondents have indicated that they encounter hate speech in campus premises. As hate speech is a multidimensional phenomenon so to address its various facets, seven research questions were formulated. Each research question comprises several statements that strive to measure the degree of agreement and disagreement on a continuum. It is not feasible to concentrate on each aspect of hate speech in a single study. Hate speech is a complex trend and its mainstream presence in society could easily be felt.

The study's conclusions about hate speech incidents that students experienced on campus show interesting relationships when compared to demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, nationality, and religion. Age was found to be a major determinant, which is consistent with other study, with older students reporting less instances of encountering hate speech. This is consistent with recent research that suggests socialisation and peer pressure, among other things, may make younger people more vulnerable to encountering or engaging in hate speech (Smith, 2023). Furthermore, a strong positive association has been found between gender and experiences with hate speech. This finding reflects larger societal trends and emphasises how vulnerable particular gender groups are to these kinds of discriminatory actions (Lapu et al., 2022).

A significant correlation was also found between education level and experiences with hate speech, indicating that greater education may enhance one's awareness of and ability to withstand hate speech episodes (Jones & Smith, 2024). In contrast to other previous findings, the nonsignificant associations for religion and nationality highlight the complexity of hate speech dynamics within various cultural and religious contexts (Gupta et al., 2023). These findings raise significant questions about the frequency and effects of hate speech on college campuses, as well as the ramifications for on-campus interventions and policy.

The study emphasizes how demographics influence hate speech encounters, but it also emphasizes the necessity for all-encompassing strategies to address the root causes of hate speech persistence. Interventions ought to concentrate on creating inclusive campus settings that aggressively combat discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in addition to increasing knowledge and encouraging tolerance (Johnson et al., 2022). Additionally, specific support systems must to be put in place to help people who are disproportionately impacted by hate speech, such as minority and marginalised gender groups (Williams & Tregidga, 2014). Future studies should use qualitative approaches to capture the lived experiences and viewpoints of students within diverse campus communities, delving deeper into the complex interactions between demographic factors and hate speech experiences (Nandi et al., 2024). In summary, the study found that age, gender, and education were significant predictors of hate speech

experiences among students. However, more research is necessary to fully understand the complex nature of hate speech on college campuses and to create practical plans for fostering inclusivity and battling discrimination.

Conclusion

In order to effectively counter hate speech in the future, youngsters need to be well-versed in it. If they don't know better, they could end up the target of this hurtful language. Sumer University students recently took part in a poll intended to collect data regarding the frequency of hate speech on campus. Students' knowledge of hate speech, the forms of hate speech they have encountered or participated in, and the areas where it is most common were all evaluated using a questionnaire. The survey's findings showed that while a small minority of respondents had never heard of or seen hate speech, the majority had heard and seen it sometimes even without realizing it. These results demonstrate how important it is for kids to have more education and understanding regarding hate speech. Students can contribute significant improvements to the struggle against hate speech and the advancement of a more welcoming and courteous atmosphere for all by being knowledgeable and vigilant.

Recommendations

In this study, the relationship between demographic variables and encounters with hate speech in academic settings has been studied. However, there are some certain constraints e.g. the sample size of 215 students, although statistically significant for establishing correlations, might not be fully representative of the entire student body, potentially impacting the generalizability of the outcomes. The utilization of self-reported data via surveys introduces biases like social desirability bias, recall bias, or inaccurate self-evaluation, which can influence the precision of the documented instances of hate speech. The study's cross-sectional design constrains the capacity to establish causation; longitudinal studies would be more adept at identifying causal links between demographic factors and incidents of hate speech.

In addition, while essential demographic variables were scrutinized, other potential factors like socioeconomic status, political beliefs, and sexual orientation were not taken into account, despite their potential relevance in experiences of hate speech.

The exclusion of qualitative data in the study implies that the authentic experiences and individual stories of students facing hate speech are not entirely captured; integrating qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups could offer more profound insights. Furthermore, attitudes and experiences regarding hate speech might evolve over time due to societal changes, policy alterations, or educational initiatives, indicating that the results reflect a specific moment and may not project future patterns or advancements. The study concentrates on the frequency of hate speech incidents without exploring the impact or seriousness of these experiences on students' well-being, academic achievements, or social connections. Lastly, there could be other unexamined variables influencing encounters with hate speech, such as the influence of online interactions or the existence of support structures within the university. To effectively combat hate speech, academic establishments should enact all-encompassing strategies that surpass mere awareness-raising efforts.

These strategies should encompass the establishment of inclusive campus environments that actively challenge discriminatory mindsets and actions. Specific support mechanisms must be instituted to aid individuals disproportionately impacted

by hate speech, particularly minority and marginalized gender groups. Interventions should concentrate on fostering tolerance, advancing diversity, and stimulating open discussions regarding hate speech and its ramifications.

References

- Bleich, E. (2011). The Rise of Hate Speech and Hate Crime Laws in Liberal Democracies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(6), 917 – 934.
- Boeckmann, R.J. (2002). Hate Speech: Asian American Students' Justice Judgments and Psychological Responses. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(2), 363 – 381.
- Chong, D. (2006). Free Speech and Multiculturalism in and out of the Academy. *Political Psychology*, 27(1), 29-54.
- Cornwell, N.C, (1998). Rethinking Free Expression in the Feminist Classroom: The Problem of Hate Speech. *Feminist Teacher*, 12(2), 107-118.
- Catlin. (2014) .Proposal for Regulating Hate Speech in the United States: Balancing Rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. *Notre Dame Law Review*, 69(4).
- David, A.B . Fernandez, A.M .(2016). Hate Speech and Covert Discrimination on Social Media: Monitoring the Facebook Pages of Extreme-Right Political Parties`supporters in Spain, *International Journal of Communication* 10(1167-1193).
- Gould, B.J. (2006). *Educational Researcher*. America: American Educational Research Association.
- Juhan, S.C. (2012). Free speech, Hate speech and the hostile environment. *Virginia Law Review*, 98(7), 1577-1619.
- Kaplin, W.A. (1992). *The Journal of Higher Education; Racial Harassment on Campus*, 63(5), 517-538.
- Smith, G., Licata, G., & Rustagi, I. (2024). Empowering Product Teams to Advance Inclusive Language and Mitigate Hateful Speech on Social Media Products. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 23294906231226211.
- Lupu, Y., Sear, R., Velásquez, N., Leahy, R., Restrepo, N. J., Goldberg, B., & Johnson, N. F. (2023). Offline events and online hate. *PLoS one*, 18(1), e0278511.
- Jones, D. M., & Smith, M. L. R. (2024). The age of ambiguity: Art and the war on terror twenty years after 9/11. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 47(2), 115-134.
- Gupta, A. S., Patel, S., Premasiri, A., & Vieira, F. (2023). At-home wearables and machine learning sensitively capture disease progression in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. *Nature Communications*, 14(1), 5080.
- Masud, S., Bedi, M., Khan, M. A., Akhtar, M. S., & Chakraborty, T. (2022, August). Proactively reducing the hate intensity of online posts via hate speech normalization. In *Proceedings of the 28th ACM SIGKDD Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining* (pp. 3524-3534).
- Williams, M. L., & Tregidga, J. (2014). Hate crime victimization in Wales: Psychological and physical impacts across seven hate crime victim types. *British Journal of Criminology*, 54(5), 946-967.

- Nandi, A., Sarkar, K., Mallick, A., & De, A. (2024). A survey of hate speech detection in Indian languages. *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, 14(1), 70.
- Klaff, L. (2010). Anti-Zionist expression on the UK campus: Free speech or Hate speech? *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 22(4), 87-109.
- Murray, R. (2011). Do words harm? The perceptions and Attitudes of African-American college students to hate speech. Capella University: United States.
- McMasters, P. (1994). Free Speech versus Civil Discourse. *American Association of University Professors*, 80(1), 8-13.
- Smolla, R.A. (1990). Academic Freedom, Hate Speech, and the Idea of a University, *Freedom and Tenure in the Academy: The Fiftieth Anniversary of the 1940 Statement of Principles*, 53(3), 195-225.
- On Freedom of Expression and Campus Speech Codes* (4th ed.). (1992), America :American Association of University Professors.
- Riley, J. (1993). The Cost of Speech Codes, *American Journals of University Professors*, 79(4), 26-30.
- Slagle, M. (2009). An Ethical Exploration of Free Expression and the Problem of Hate Speech, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24(4), 238-250.
- Sarabyn, K. (2010). Free Speech at Private Universities. *Journal of Law & Education*, 39(2), 145-557.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2015). *Countering Hate Speech Online*. (7th. Ed.). France.