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BRIDGING FAITHS: MEDIA'S ROLE IN FOSTERING INTERFAITH HARMONY DURING SIKH COMMUNITY'S ANNUAL FESTIVAL

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Abstract

In the present period, stronger relationships, tolerance, and peace are needed across nations, religions, and communities than at any previous time in human history. Interfaith harmony has thus emerged as the most important endeavour in this era of conflict and strife. Due to its significance, several religious and non-religious organisations as well as political parties have taken an active role in it. The Mass Media is a distinctive aspect of contemporary life. Its growth has coincided with an expansion in the scope and complexity of human activities, fast social change, technological innovation, growing personal affluence and standards of living, and the waning of certain old systems of power and control. Although the extent and nature of this link are still up for question even after decades of research into media impact, there is a correlation between the rise of mass media and societal change. The public mind serves as the "media's" primary raw material, and it trades primarily in "moral values." This places "media" in a unique position. The media is the most significant, efficient, widespread, convenient, affordable, and safest tool of shaping and forming public opinion. It is the most significant component that makes up public opinion. Discord among communities is a problem that has several causes. The media also contributes to these variables. This medium, which works as a public information conduit, plays a crucial role in fostering intergroup harmony. The yearly celebration of the Sikh Community is the centre of this research paper's examination of such ideas and the role of the media and religious minorities in Pakistan. This conversation uses quantitative analysis as its technique. The inference made is that Pakistan's Constitution guarantees religious freedom to the nation's minorities of all major religions. Finally, this study offers some doable solutions for bridging Pakistan's many religious communities.

INTRODUCTION:

Communication among religions has gained greater significance in the study of peaceful coexistence between peoples of different religions. The 20th century is considered a pivotal moment for interreligious engagement

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focused on fostering relations between Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as among a variety of Christian groups (Kewuel, 2019). Communication technology then opened up possibilities for interaction beyond geographical, cultural and religious lines. Communication is also part and parcel of everyday life in the age of social media and Muslims, as all communities, are becoming more and more active on these platforms. Social media can quickly reach a wide audience, and media, in general, include the methods of communicating information that serve the public interest (Mayfield, 2008). Mass communication involves translation of the message from communicators to audiences, which interpret the information, and then act individually or collectively.

Conceptualizing Harmony and Communalism

It is about living together in balance with people and communities in harmony despite social-cultural, religious and economic differences. Some consider harmony to be about connectedness and balance (Francez and Dyckhoff 2012), while others focus on social, economic, political and ecological aspects of equilibrium (Easley 2007). In a variety of societies, harmony thus demands that difference between genders, castes, classes, ethnic groups and religions be recognized and accommodated. Brosché and Elfversson (2012) connect communal to common interests, common purposes and dialogue between communities whereas Aubriot (2022) links communalism to "high attachment to one's ethnic or communal group over the larger social group." Communal identities are capable of reinforcing group solidarity and at the same time setting limits on the other group. Harmony is an active social process that is characterized by communication, recognition, participation, mutual respect, and institutional arrangements that allow for the equitable interaction between different groups.

Understanding Religious Minorities

According to Laurie and Khan (2017), minority communities could have less power over day-to-day decisions and social outcomes compared to dominant communities. Iorgulescu (2017) distinguishes the statistical minorities from the socially subordinate groups and relates the concepts of minority with discrepancies in political power, economic resources, legal rights, access to public offices and public benefits. In this sense, a community can be a minority due to its numerical size and to its institutional disadvantage. Booth et al. (2012) link numerical and social differences to minority groups, and Okazaki and Sue (2016) highlight political, religious, and linguistic differences. The contribution of minority communities to social peace and national development is emphasised by Temdee (2021). The minorities should be looked at not merely as vulnerable or marginalized but they are also active and engaged in the economic, cultural, professional and civic life. The importance of their wider development is stressed by Crabtree and Wong (2013). Media representation is also important since mediated visibility and image construction can have an impact on the image of the majority and minority communities.

The concept of Religious Pluralism and Minority Rights in Pakistan

The Objective Resolution of 7th March 1949 is an important document in which tolerance, justice, equality, democracy, religious freedom and minority rights are mentioned. The Constitution also has the Articles 20, 21, 22, 25, and 36 which are relevant to religious freedom, equality, and protection of minorities (Akhter et al., 2022). Koohli, a woman from a minority community, was elected to the Senate in 2018; as per Ruhland (2019), this is a case of a minority representation. Such participation goes beyond protection from discrimination to institutional channels for minority issues to be included in the public policy process. Despite that, religious minorities experience problems of religious misconceptions, unequal political processes, prejudicial discourses, insecurity on religious institutions, unequal socio-economic resources,

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and lack of representation of non-Muslim views in educational curricula, concerns about the misuse of blasphemy laws and more (Nawaz et al., 2022). There has been also documentation of violence and intimidation of Christian communities and places of worship (Shumaila Ahmed, 2014). The legal protection should thus be supported by social interaction, equal opportunities, inclusive education, responsible representation and public discourse that do not reproduce prejudice.

Inter Faith Harmony and Sikhism

Alvin Jakobsh (2006) equates Sikhism with peace, acceptance, tolerance and respect for others of different traditions. The Guru Granth Sahib is an important document for the analysis of Sikh perspectives on religious diversity and the Sikh perspective on "religious other" is an important starting point for interfaith dialogue as suggested by Nesbitt (2016). Sikh thinking promotes interaction with religious diversity. In his book (2020), D. P Singh discusses the messages in Sikh scripture that can aid dialogue between traditions and the messages that enable dialogue to allow communities to identify common concerns and peaceful solutions. N.-G. K. Singh (2012) describes Guru Nanak's attitude as a focus on spiritual and ethical understanding, rather than domination or humiliation or forced conversion. Takhar (2016) also speaks about the Guru Granth Sahib being aware of the sacred traditions of various faiths. Sidhu (2015) mentions four main factors – historical interaction with other faiths, interfaith ethical orientation, seva or service, and Sarbat da Bhala – associated with welfare and prosperity of all, which enable the participation of Sikhs in interfaith initiatives. According to D. Singh (2003), there are four types of dialogue which are: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, theological exchange and dialogue of religious experience. Interfaith engagement can take place in every-day interactions, shared community work, thoughtful conversation and spiritual practices, not just in formal meetings.

Exploration of the Sikh Community, Religious Identity and Festivals

There are various groups identified in the literature, including Ramgarhias, Nam Dharis, Bhatra Sikhs, Jats, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, Ravidasis and Valmikis, who, while not necessarily mutually exclusive, can vary in terms of social background, religious practice, occupational history and institutional organization (McLeod, 2009; S. Gupta, 2002; N.-G. K. Singh, 2012; Nesbitt, 2016; Takhar, 2016). Another example of diversity within Sikhism is the separation between Khalsa and non-Khalsa identities. The shared values and diversity are discussed by N.-G. K. Singh (2012) and the significance of the Five Ks and amritdhari tradition is explained by Nesbitt (2018). Historically and religiously the celebrations of Vaisakhi, Hola Mahalla, Bandi Chhor divas, Gurus birthdays, and martyrs' birthdays are of utmost importance (McLeod, 2009; N.-G. K. Singh, 2012; S. Gupta, 2002).

Interfaith harmony is important in Pakistan because of religious diversity.Interfaith harmony is a need in Pakistan due to Religious Diversity. Historical interaction is stressed by Andrabi (2020), in the process of interaction with different cultural and religious influences, and social development is linked with communal peace and national unity by Kruja (2022). Religious diversity is linked to social and political issues, and can be linked to stereotyping and perspectives on "terrorism, radicalism, or conflict," Kholil et al. (2020) point out. Interfaith harmony is therefore a social and developmental issue and not just a religious issue. Nawaz et al. (2022) highlight the importance of universities, workshops, seminars, public events and other institutional settings for interfaith engagement and collaboration. With respect to reducing prejudice and enhancing interpersonal trust, Bagir (2005) suggests that dialogue can achieve this goal, and Martin (1971) is of the opinion that real dialogue is a sharing of experiences that build understanding. Nawaz et al. (2022) also

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note a need for empathy in listening and an attitude of openness to different views. There is a potential to foster openness and engagement by having knowledge of other cultures, as suggested by Ruhland (2019). But when dialogue is seen as the means of conversion or proselytization, there may be difficulties in the dialogue, as warned by Muhammad et al. (2014). Trust, reciprocity, respect and clear goals are thus essential.

The importance of Media in Interfaith Harmony

Shoaib & Shabbir (2021) highlight their role in social attitudes and perceptions. People can be informed through newspapers, TV, radio, digital media and social media, and at the same time create specific images. Partisan or selective coverage can help foster division through limits on tolerance for alternate perspectives, and the media's capacity to reinforce normative standards and shape attitudes has been noted by Raghavan (2015). Language, images, framing, and source selection, then, are important in reporting religion, conflict and minority rights. Akbar and Yaseen (2020) have concluded that media can play a role in the discussion and harmony of religion. Akhter et al. (2022) speak about a television programme called Dialogue Harmony, which aims at convening religious leaders of diverse faiths to address important issues. Saifuddin (2014) also points out the vital importance of positive portrayal of religion. Shoaib and Shabbir (2021) explore cohesion as a potential area of support for socially responsible media, and Tiripelli (2016) considers the role of media framing in the areas of security, conflict and peacebuilding. The media frame the issues and are expected to be socially responsible and religious.Media should frame the issues, be socially responsible and religious. As Kabir (2020) highlights, the headlines, images, words and context help to shape interpretation, and hence the importance of responsible reporting. However, there have been instances of apparent change in population of Muslims as reflected in media reporting of such information by which there is a lack of adequate explanation of the boundary conditions of the data (see Sonwalkar, 2006). Responsible reporting therefore demands accuracy, public-interest, context, and potential social impacts.

Media, Peacebuilding and Digital Communication

While social media can help to create dialogue and minority self-representation, it can also help to speed up hate speech, misinformation, and religiously inflammatory material. Tiripeli (2016) points to interfaith fora as potential mediators between communities and wider society and Spencer (2005) emphasises the need to tackle hate speech and harmful religious expression. Saeed et al. (2021) suggest that there is a need for special mechanisms in interfaith institutions to handle religious tension that arises from social media. Therefore, interfaith harmony needs to be addressed from traditional and digital communication, involving the participation of institutions with monitoring and trained personnel.

Interfaith Harmony Forums and Institutional Mediation

Their mediating and communicative function is highlighted by Tiripeli (2016). Traditional mediation might not be enough in the case of online conflicts, given that they can quickly escalate. Saeed et al. (2021) thus suggest a structured institutional response to religious disputes in online environments which engage cooperation between religious scholars, community representatives, communication professionals and information-technology specialists.

Synthesis and Research Gap

The prejudice, insecurity, unequal resources, educational constraints, and sensitive discourse are all recognized as impediments to the minorities in Pakistan, along with constitutional guarantees and political participation as identified through research. There is often a lack of integration between the studies of constitutional rights, religious teachings, minority

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experiences, dialogue, and media responsibility in the existing literature. In general, the goals of sustainable interfaith harmony are religious freedom, minority rights, fair participation, intercultural dialogue, education, community engagement, responsible news and digital communication. Further studies might explore the portrayal of religion in the media, interfaith experiences at the community level, and the means by which communication hinders or promotes peaceful relations.

Objectives of Study

1. To determine the exposure of media toward promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan.
2. To check the attitudes toward media users for promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan.
3. To check the role of media in creating social awareness regarding Inter-Faith Harmony.
4. To investigate the challenges to promoting of Inter-Faith Harmony in Pakistan.
5. To investigate the media role in promoting interfaith harmony during annual festival of Sikh Community.
6.

Research Questions

1. What is the exposure of media toward promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan?
2. What are attitudes toward media for promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan?
3. What is the role of media in creating social awareness regarding Inter-Faith Harmony?
4. What are the challenges for media promoting of Inter-Faith Harmony in Pakistan?
5. What is the role of media in promoting interfaith harmony during annual festival of Sikh Community?

Methodology

The current study employed a quantitative research design using a structured survey questionnaire to examine the role of media in promoting interfaith harmony and religious equality in Pakistan. The study population comprised media professionals and members of religious minority communities in Pakistan, as these participants possessed relevant knowledge and experience concerning media and interfaith relations. Due to the absence of a clearly defined sampling frame, non-probability purposive sampling was adopted to select respondents who met the study's inclusion criteria. A total of 300 respondents participated in the study. Data were collected through a structured, close-ended questionnaire consisting of demographic information and items measuring the study variables, including the role and importance of media and interfaith harmony. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of the adopted/adapted measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable. Data were analysed using SPSS. Ethical procedures included informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of respondents' identities and organizational affiliations.

Results and Analysis

Both educated and illiterate respondents were given access to an interview schedule that was carefully constructed as a data gathering instrument. Almost every component of the research was covered by this interview schedule. The aim was best served by collecting the necessary basic data and to investigate the question of concord between these two religions' adherents' social and cultural activities. Data that was gathered was by utilizing SPSS-20 for analysis. The information was tallied and presented in percentages and frequencies for ease of comprehension. The suppositional relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable has been examined using the Chi-square

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test. News articles, social media posts, and other internet information pertaining to yearly Sikh festivals in various countries were used as secondary data sources.

Variables
Independent Variable: Media Coverage
Dependent Variable: Interfaith Harmony
Control Variables: Festival time, geographic region, Time horizon.

From the above questionnaire it is observed that most of the respondent gave a positive response related to the affect of the media on interfaith harmony. There is total 100 respondents from which 65 are men and 35 women, while most of them are educated. The range of age is in between 24-65 years while the average age of the respondents was 42 years. All of they belong to different areas and different religions and have very radical ideas about the role of the media.

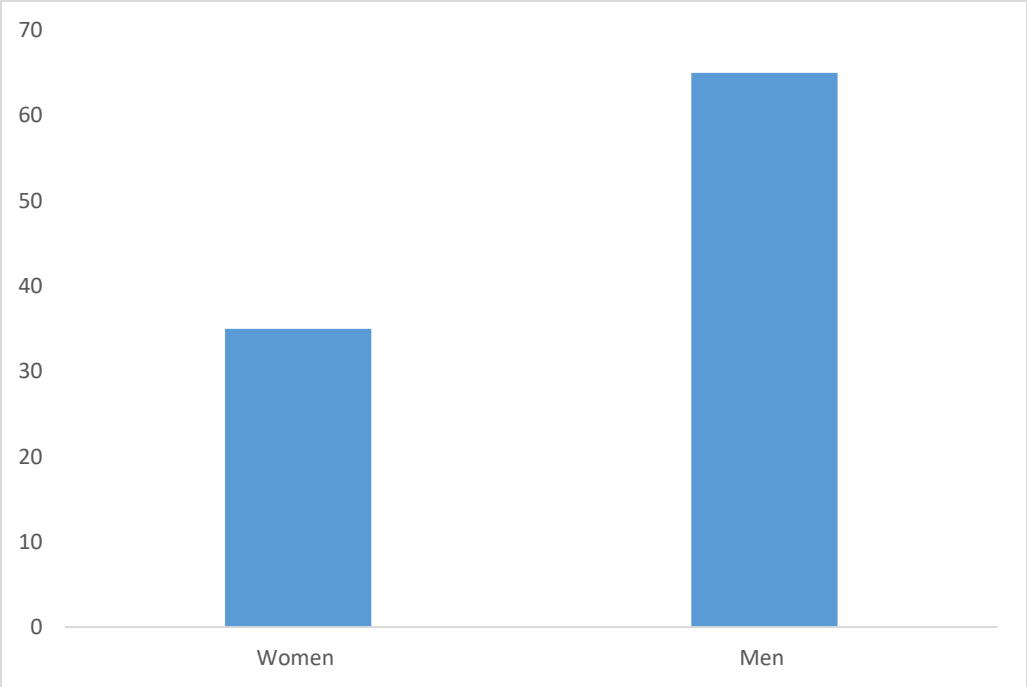

Figure: Ratio of Men and Women

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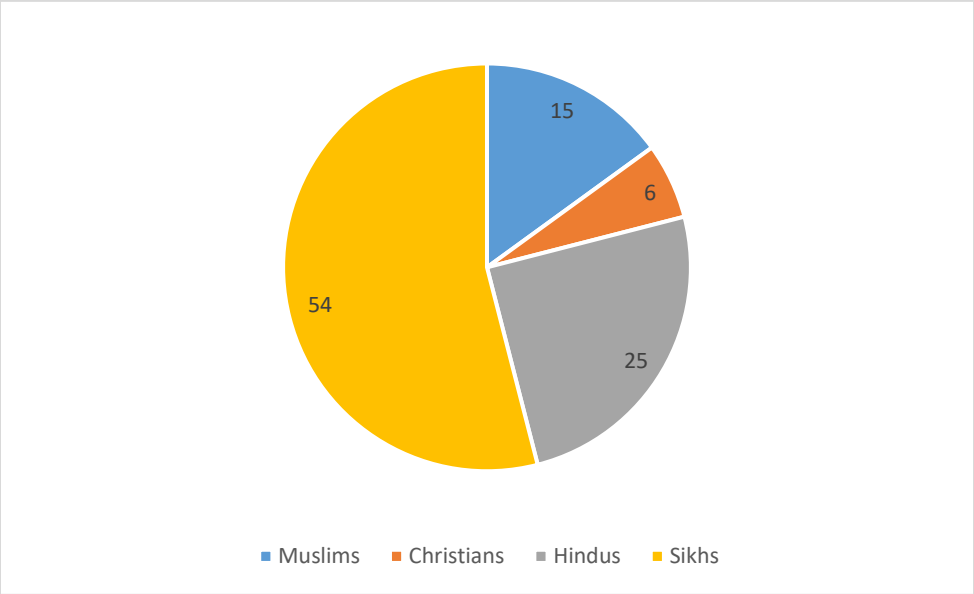

Figure : Participants from different Relegions

The above table shows the results from the descriptive statistics which shows that the mean value of the participants which shows the positive response was 64 and standard deviation was observed to be 19.313, kurtosis and skewness of the data is also calculated which shows that the data is skewed right.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is done with the help of the SPSS. For the regression analysis media coverage is used as an independent variable while interfaith harmony as a dependent variable. Interfaith harmony is a dependent variable (measured on a scale of 1-10, where 1 indicates low interfaith harmony and 10 indicates high interfaith harmony) Role of Media is an independent variable (measured as the number of news articles and social media posts related to Sikh festivals and interfaith harmony).

Interfaith harmony = $\beta 0 + \beta 1$(Media coverage) + ε

Where:

$\beta 0$ = the intercept

$\beta 1$ = the coefficient for Media coverage

ε = the error term

Regression Analysis Results:

The intercept ($\beta 0$) = 3.5, which represents the predicted value of Interfaith harmony when Media coverage is 0.

The coefficient for Media coverage ($\beta 1$) = 0.8, indicating that for every additional news article or social media post related to Sikh festivals and interfaith harmony, the predicted value of Interfaith harmony increases by 0.8 units. The R-squared value = 0.7, indicating that 70% of the variation in Interfaith harmony can be explained by Media coverage.

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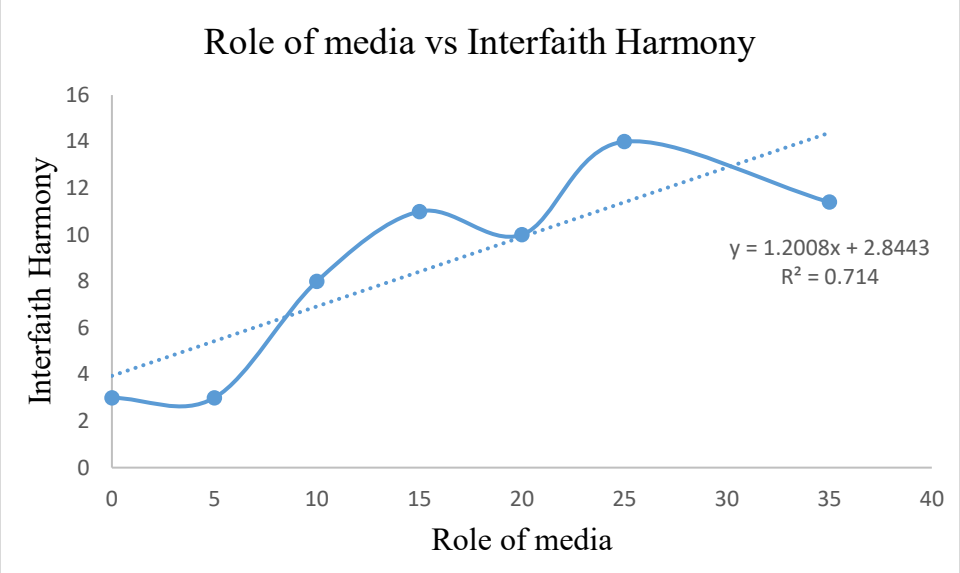

Figure: Scatter plot of the role of media and interfaith harmony

Above scatter plot shows that there is a direct relationship between the role of the media in interfaith harmony in Sikh community. The value of the R square also shows the same thing that there is a direct and linear relationship between the two variables. According to the regression study, there is a statistically significant link between media coverage and religious concord during the Sikh community's yearly festivals. An increase in interfaith peace is correlated with an increase in media attention. It's crucial to remember, though, that a connection does not always indicate a cause, and other elements may also play a role in interfaith harmony.

Hypothesis Testing

Interfaith harmony and media coverage had a positive correlation (r = 0.75, p 0.05), pointing to a significant association between the two variables. The anticipated value of interfaith peace grows by 0.7 units for every extra news item or social media post about Sikh holidays and religious harmony, according to the slope coefficient for media coverage, which was 1 = 0.7. The p-value was below than the significance level of 0.05, at 0.02, and the computed t-statistic was 2.6. As a result, the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. It may be said that during the yearly festivals of the Sikh community, there is a considerable beneficial association between media coverage and interfaith cooperation.

The findings of the hypothesis testing indicate that media coverage has a substantial influence on interfaith cooperation during the Sikh community's yearly festivals. The substantial regression coefficient and the positive association suggest that greater media attention during the yearly Sikh festivals may result in greater interfaith cooperation. This result lends credence to the idea that, during the Sikh community's yearly festivals, media coverage contributes significantly to the promotion of interfaith cooperation.

According to the descriptive data, the majority of respondents agreed that media coverage of the yearly Sikh festivals contributes to the promotion of interfaith cooperation. During the yearly Sikh festivals, there was a positive and substantial

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correlation between media coverage and interfaith harmony, according to the regression study. According to the slope coefficient, the anticipated value of interfaith harmony rises by 0.7 units for each extra news story or social media post about Sikh holidays and peace. The findings of the hypothesis test showed a strong positive association between media coverage and interfaith harmony during the Sikh community's yearly festivals. This result confirms the idea that, during the Sikh community's yearly festivals, media attention is crucial in fostering interfaith cooperation. Overall, the statistical study indicates that media coverage during the Sikh community's yearly festivals has a significant role in fostering interfaith cooperation. These results have ramifications for the media sector as well as for those working to advance societal interfaith peace. It could be feasible to promote greater understanding and concord across various religion communities by expanding media coverage of interfaith activities and encouraging positive messages about religious diversity.

The interfaith harmony research, which had a particular focus on Sikhs and the function of media relationships, was carried out in Pakistan to ascertain the degree of interfaith concord. Social and cultural events, together with a shared daily living system, were all conducted in a pleasant and friendly environment. Regardless of their position as a minority group, Muslims loved to partake in all of the Sikhs' cultural and ceremonial customs. According to the findings, there was a calm, pleasant, and respectful climate between the two populations. A lively media must play its part by focusing on cohesiveness goals and indoctrinating people with the concept of closeness through religious texts

Discussion

In contrast to the majority of other programmes on television, Dialogue Harmony offers a refreshing change of pace. It is based on a television show that airs in nations with less developed economies and offers dialogues between individuals of various religions. Despite the fact that it is still in its infancy and may be more tough to adopt for some groups, dialogue harmony is a good method for lowering tensions between people of different religions. This is due to the fact that it is a multi-faith approach to conflict resolution (Ali & David, 2021). Within the setting of a media landscape that is both multiethnic and multireligious, the Harmony course can serve as a conversational module for interfaith dialogue. In addition, the Harmony project is an interfaith conversation initiative that strives to promote acquaintance with and appreciation for the many different religions that are practised in this nation.

According to the findings of this study, it is vital to integrate all of the demographic aspects that have been discussed thus far in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of issues pertaining to religion and race and to foster interfaith cooperation. The Dialogue Harmony initiative may also function as a gathering place for people of many religious traditions, with the goal of luring young people to Pakistan and educating them about the country's diverse religious history (Saifuddin Ahmed, 2010).

The results of this research indicate that it is impossible to place an adequate amount of emphasis on the part that the media plays in illuminating the interfaith conversation that takes place in Pakistan. It was observed that the government, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, the media, and other groups work more closely together and cooperatively in order to formulate a policy on the prevention of religious and racial issues or negative sentiments that may be destroying the harmony that exists in daily life among people of different faiths in this country (Akbar & Yaseen, 2020).

The establishment and upkeep of interfaith harmony, the empowerment of the interfaith harmony forum, and the building of places of worship are the three primary responsibilities of the region's government (province, district, and

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city). The Interfaith Harmony Forum was idealised and founded by society and has the full support of the government. Interfaith Harmony Forum works together with the general public as well as many religious organisations to carry out these responsibilities. This forum acts as a bridge between society and religious groups in times of conflict by acting as a mediator and facilitator.

The Interfaith Harmony Forum's role in addressing the issues of coexistence brought on by the development of social media today, and allegedly in the future, is not only in performing mediation functions and resolving conflicts; they also need to consider mediation and conflict resolution in online-based social media. Interfaith Harmony is regarded as crucial to be responsible in social media concerns since it contains hostility and some other similar things that grow in those online media, relating to religious issues in its implementations (Ansari & Khan, 2020). Relying just on one's own good intentions to maintain self-control in the face of this powerful globalisation stream's allure is not sufficient.

A community that has grown gradually and is well-organized is required by society to insist. The society organisation that approaches from moral and ethical principles must help the government movement in formally approaching any other types. The conscience of Indonesian society is thought to be quite strong when approached from a religious perspective. Interfaith Harmony Forum is capable in this situation. The point is that the administrators of the Interfaith Harmony Forum must begin to develop new skills for resolving online disputes. Thus, in the future, one of Interfaith Harmony Forum's three key responsibilities will be to engage in traditional societal concerns in a direct and transparent manner (Farooq, 2018).

The Interfaith Harmony Forum has to start thinking about options for a common assessment of social media's role in various religious conflicts. Religious approaches to conflict resolution are still effective in Indonesia today. For Interfaith Harmony Forum to effectively handle these new obligations and problems, a defined plan must be developed. The suggestion from a structured strategy, for instance, takes into account the existence of a separate section in the Interfaith Harmony Forum to settle religious disputes in online discourse. This sector allows for the consideration and construction of professional work patterns including collaboration with qualified IT personnel.

Recommendations

The Ministry should use mass media and digital platforms to promote trust, empathy, mutual assistance, and peaceful coexistence among diverse religious and racial communities. A social media policy should define content, formats, languages, posting schedules, and communication standards. The Ministry should use platforms beyond Facebook to expand reach and promote peace and interfaith understanding (Iftikhar, 2021). Its Facebook page should be updated regularly, while critical comments should be addressed respectfully rather than deleted. Communication should remain inclusive and accessible nationwide. Selected languages beyond Amharic should be considered. Periodic assessments should evaluate audience responses, while designed multimedia content should support engagement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that meaningful social integration between religious majority and minority communities is closely associated with the protection of religious freedom, equitable socioeconomic opportunities, inclusive education, and opportunities for intercultural interaction. Although security concerns have contributed to restrictions on public religious activities and celebrations, such limitations can inadvertently reduce opportunities for social contact and community engagement. The findings further indicate that minorities continue to encounter structural and institutional disadvantages in employment, access to financial

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resources, local markets, and educational opportunities, thereby constraining their capacity for socioeconomic participation and reinforcing patterns of social exclusion (Iorgulescu, 2017). At the same time, inclusive educational initiatives and opportunities for religious instruction appear to provide important mechanisms for strengthening interaction and social cohesion, although discriminatory practices and the representation of minority communities in educational content remain areas requiring attention (Islam, 2022). The findings also reveal that cultural and religious norms significantly shape the boundaries of intergroup interaction: while friendship, sports, mutual assistance, and participation in funerals may facilitate social cohesion, practices such as shared meals and interfaith marriage remain subject to considerable religious and cultural restrictions. These patterns suggest that social integration cannot be achieved solely through formal legal protections; rather, it requires sustained institutional, educational, economic, and sociocultural interventions that enable minority communities to participate on an equitable basis. From a theoretical perspective, the findings demonstrate the utility of a positivist orientation in systematically examining the relationship between observable social conditions, collective beliefs, values, institutional structures, and patterns of intergroup interaction. Despite existing structural and cultural constraints, the coexistence of the three religious communities examined in this study, together with evidence of mutual respect and social integration, indicates the presence of important foundations for intergroup solidarity. Overall, the study underscores the need for policies and institutional practices that reduce socioeconomic disparities, expand educational and economic opportunities, protect religious freedom, and create safe spaces for sustained intergroup contact. Such measures are essential for moving beyond mere coexistence toward a more inclusive form of social integration in religiously diverse societies.

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