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RESEARCH PAPER

Impact of Hate Speeches by Political Leaders on Political Behavior among Private University Students in Pakistan: The Mediating Role of Locus of Control

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of hate speeches by political leaders on political behavior among private university students, with a focus on the mediating role of locus of control. Hate speeches by political leaders have become prevalent in public discourse, raising concerns about their impact on behavior so it is crucial to understand the relationship between variables for addressing the consequences of rhetoric in political domain. A quantitative research methodology was employed to collect the data from private universities students in Pakistan. Regression and Correlation test have been conducted by using the SPSS. Results have shown that there is no connection between hate speeches and political behavior but there is a positive correlation of hate speeches and political behavior with external locus of control and there is a strong negative association between internal locus of control and political behavior. The recommends a more comprehensive study by collecting a larger sample size to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the variables and their relationships.

KEYWORDS	Hate Speeches, Locus of Control, Political Behavior, Political Participation, University Students

Introduction

Politically speaking, hate speech is any speech that incites hatred towards a certain group of people. This irritation frequently takes the form of differences in gender, color, culture, customs, lifestyle, and religion, among other things. This implies that any statement, symbol, or piece of evidence addressed or viewed by someone with the intention of inciting fear and violence qualifies as hate speech (Gupta, 2021). Political leaders who make hate rhetoric polarize the public. Our culture has become mistrustful of "Us and Them" groups due to toxic divisiveness. It is weakening our social ties, causing division and intolerance, and harming social cohesiveness (Saleem, 2021).

Since Pakistan's creation, national identity and ethnic integration have swept the country. Society is still traditionally split along racial, religious, linguistic, and provincial lines. But the last ten years of political upheaval have brought another level, splitting society along ideological lines. The foundations of the Pakistani nation and state are being undermined by disturbing features of the ongoing trend to instill violence into our political behavior and culture. It is easier said than done to put an end to opponents and incite confrontation in Pakistani streets by using hate speech. Furthermore, this has exacerbated the division and degradation of our society, which is already beset by a dearth of fundamental services like work, healthcare, and education. Our sense of national identity and values are undermined by the overwhelming drive for power at any cost. (Farooq et al., 2024).

In this modern age of technology, where innovations have been smoothly incorporated into every aspect of life (Akram et al., 2021a; Akram & Abdelrady, 2023; Abdelrady & Akram, 2022), digital media has an enormous influence on various parts of our society, including politics (Ramzan et al., 2023). Technology has flooded the market with opportunities as well as difficulties. Digital media's influence on Pakistani politics is particularly noticeable since it has fueled the growth of political skepticism and revived hate speech. While keyboard warriors are using social media to disparage opposition party representatives' personal lives, political leaders are also not holding back in utilizing derogatory and aggressive language in their public and media speeches to address members of their rival political parties (Ramzan et al., 2023; 2020).

According to National Human Development Survey conducted by UNDP (United Nations Deevelopment Program), Pakistan currently has the greatest number of young people in the world with 64% of the population under 30 and 29% between the ages of 15 and 29. As a result, the attitudes and actions of this group in particular are crucial in determining political trends in the country. The demographic situation of a country in which a sizable portion of the population is under 29 (usually between the ages of 15-29) is described by the phrase "youth bulge". Youth have the potential to reform the country and are the most powerful forces to implement social solidarity. In a community, youth can encourage creativity and innovation (Farooq et al., 2014).

Young people are often at the forefront of political protests and movements, with passion to bring reforms in the country and to improve administration. However, the political participation of youth is greatly influenced by the external or outside elements such as political discourse, media representations and most significantly, hate speech. It is imperative to understand the impact of all these external elements on the political behavior of youth in order to predict future political trends and to encourage a healthy democratic environment (Idrees et al., 2015; Khan, 2018).

This investigation aims to highlight the impact of political hate speech commonly used by political leaders in their public orations and online media forums, on the political behavior of students exposed to the phenomenon. Also, this research explains the relationship between psychological orientation (Locus of control) and political behavior. Locus of control is a psychological construct that refers to the extent to which a person believes they have control over their lives. The concept was introduced by Julian B. Rotter in 1954. According to Rotter, a person's "locus" can either be internal, such people believe that they have a complete control over their lives, or external, these people believe that chance or fate or other outside forces that they cannot control, govern their lives (Rotter, 1966).

Locus of control is quite influential in determining the political behavior of people by mediating their responses towards external stimuli such as political messages and hate speeches. Political hate speeches are capable of energizing and demoralizing young voters, depending on the orientation of their locus of control. Young voters having an internal locus of control might interpret hate speech as a call to be more engaged politically and fight against injustices while youngsters having an external locus of control might feel disappointed, helpless and withdraw from political activities believing that their efforts cannot change the heavily corrupted political system.

This study aims to elucidate ways in which various psychological orientations affect the political participation and perception of young people who are exposed to hate speech. The findings of this research have important ramifications for political leaders, educators, and legislators in providing guidance on how to nurture our youth to be politically engaged and resilient, capable of making constructive contributions to the democratic process.

Literature Review

Council of Europe's Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime describes "hate speech" as any remarks and expressions that spread hate based on intolerance such as xenophobia, anti-Semitism, racial hatred, and other types of hatred, whether they are spoken or unspoken. According to another statement, hate speech is any form of communication, whether it be nonverbal or verbal, which incites animosity toward a particular racial, ethnic, or political group by dehumanizing them or displaying any other form of prejudice (Neisser, 1994).

Pakistan is a country renowned for its vibrant history and rich cultural variety. Currently Pakistani nation is grappling with the emerging trend of hate politics. For the last decade, there has been an alarming increase in the use of hate speeches by politicians as a mean to promote their agendas and gaining public support at the cost of creating intolerance among the supporters of different political parties. There have been few studies on the propagation of political hate speech in Pakistan. The little research that has been done have mostly examined the prevalence of hate speech motivated by religion in Pakistani society. Political hate speech must therefore be addressed because of its profound effects on society. There is a little and negligible body of research on the subject of politicians using hate speech during their processions.

In 2020, Rao examined the role of social media in the 2018 general elections in Pakistan and the spread of hate through social media platforms by the politicians. On the basis of critical examination of the situation, Rao suggested in his findings that a code of conduct should be issued by the government to check the use of hate speech in political campaigns on social media (Rao, 2020).

Later in 2020, a case study of Sargodha, Pakistan, tried to analyze cyberbullying and political hate on different social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and its impact on the political behavior of supporters of different political parties. the study explained the impact of social media-based spread of hatred separately on male and female users, and how the trend is influencing youth mindset (Qaiser et al., 2022).

Sultana and Ibrahim in 2024, discussed the relationship between the exposure of university students to media and their political views and involvement. The key feature of the study was to elaborate the influence of media on political behavior of the students.

According to a recent study, the rise of politically motivated hate speech in Pakistan against rival politicians is associated to extreme ideologies and purposeful exaggeration of hatred in public speeches in order to reach a wider audience. Additionally, it explains the theories regarding the examination of the use of hate speech and other strategies used by politicians to defame their opponents (Rafi & Shafiq, 2024).

The complicated dynamic that originates from the intersection of political hate speech, locus of control and political behavior is worthy of academic attention. This research will be a notable contribution in future endeavors to understand political trends, role of hate speeches in shaping youth mindset as well as political involvement and potential of Pakistani youth.

Theoretical Framework

The proposed theoretical framework seeks to examine and understand the relationship between political hate speech and political behavior of students in Pakistan, mediated by the role of locus of control. To provide an insight into the connecting links, the framework integrates ideas from communication theory, social cognitive theory and political psychology.
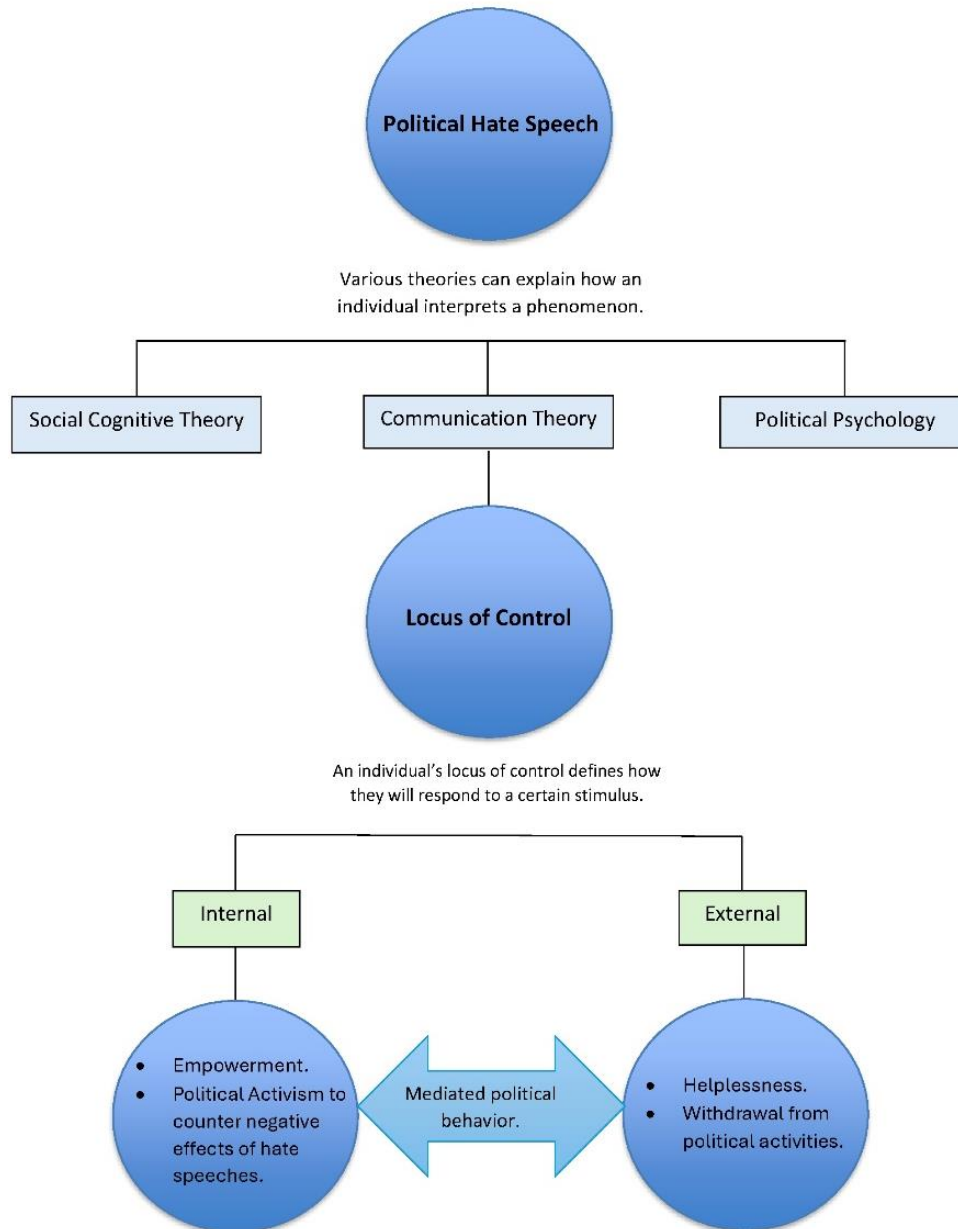
Social Cognitive theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and social experiences in determining human behavior.

- Political psychology explores the influence of psychological processes such as emotions and cognition etc. on the political behavior of people.

- Communication theory analyses the transmission and possible perceptions of a particular message such as hate speech, by people with different psychological orientations and the impact of this perception on their relevant responses.

All the above-mentioned theories are the foundation of the theoretical framework that we have proposed for this investigation.

Material and Methods

A sample of 208 students from private universities in Karachi, Pakistan, participated in the survey. the volunteers were chosen carefully, in order to guarantee a varied representation of gender, socioeconomic status, and academic disciplines. The survey was

designed specifically to shed light on a particular segment of the youth population that is frequently more exposed to political discourse and digital media.

Collection of Data

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure three key variables which are exposure to political hate speech, political behavior, and locus of control. The contents of questionnaire were as follows:

- **Demographic data**: This section contained information regarding the gender, age, socio-economic background and academic discipline of the participants.

- **Exposure to Hate speech**: To analyze, how often and what type of source of hate speech (social media, news etc.) the participants are exposed to.

- **Political engagement**: To access the political activism in participants, they were asked to mention various forms of political engagement such as protests, voting and political discussions.

- **Psychological orientation**: Standard scales were used for determining whether the participant exhibits an internal or external locus of control.

All the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire anonymously to encourage unbiased and honest responses.

Analysis of Data

Quantitative analysis of the collected data was done using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The software is used to analyze and manage social science data. Several steps involved in the analysis of data are listed below:

- **Statistical Analysis**

  - Percentages and frequency distribution for all the demographic variables (Age, gender, socio-economic background, academic discipline).

  - Calculation of standard deviation and mean for the selected key variables (political behavior, locus of control, exposure to hate speech).

- **Reliability Analysis**

  - To evaluate the internal consistency of questionnaire scales and to ensure the accuracy of measurements, Cronbach's alpha was computed.

- **Correlation Analysis**

  - To understand the relationships between exposure to hate speech, locus of control and political behavior, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated.

- **Regression Analysis**

  - Multiple regression analysis was used, using locus of control as mediating variable to calculate the predictive potential of exposure to political hate speeches on the student political behavior.

- **Mediation Analysis**

- A mediation analysis was performed to evaluate the mediating role of locus of control. For the purpose PROCESS macro for SPSS was used which examined the direct and indirect effects of hate speech exposure on student political behavior, mediated by locus of control.

Results and Discussions

This section contains results obtained from the analysis of collected data. The sample population for this study included a total of 208 participants. The statistical package of Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to discover the relation between variables and tabulated results are given below.

Table 1
The Demographic Details of survey Participants (N=208).

Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	88	42.3
Female	119	57.2
Prefer not to say	1	.5
Age		
18-24	184	88.5
25-29	16	7.7
30-34	5	2.4
35 or above	3	1.4
Socioeconomic Status		
Lower class	4	1.9
Middle class	165	79.3
Prefer not to say	21	10.1
Upper class	18	8.7
Education Level		
Associate degree	20	9.6
Bachelor's degree	168	80.8
Doctoral degree	7	3.4
Master's degree	13	6.3

Table 2
Descriptive Analysis of study variables (N=208).

Scales	No of items	N	α'	Mean	SD	SKs	K
Political Behavior	10	208	0.85	28.1250	7.39655	-.124	-.040
Hate Speeches	10	208	0.88	37.0048	7.06115	-.969	2.124
Internal Locus of Control	05	208	0.70	14.3077	3.43912	.648	1.106
External Locus of Control	05	208	0.61	17.1923	3.02989	-.926	2.843

Table 2 includes the alpha reliability of all the scales of our study, and most of the alpha reliability is valid and strong. The table shows the Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness value, Kurtosis value and based on the information we have, we can conclude that data is normally distributed.

Table 3
Correlation analysis was used to find out the relation between variables (N=208).

	Political Behavior	Hate Speeches	Internal Locus of Control	External Locus of Control

Political Behavior	1	.036	-.516**	.453**
Hate Speeches	.036	1	-.052	.325**
Internal Locus of Control	-.516**	-.052	1	-.553**
External Locus of Control	.453**	.325**	-.553**	1

The correlation between the political behavior and hate speech and locus of control is analyzed in table 3. According to the result of the analysis, there is no connection between hate speeches and political behavior but there is a positive correlation of hate speeches and political behavior with external locus of control and there is a strong negative association between internal locus of control and political behavior.

Mediator analysis was done to find the mediating effect of the locus of control between hate speeches and political behavior and the results are given in table 4.

Table 4
Total effect of Hate speeches on Political behavior.

	Coefficient	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
With ILoC Moderator						
Sum_HS	-0.255	.0339	-.7528	.4524	-.0923	.0413
Sum_HS	.0089	.0628	.1422	.8870	-.1148	.1327
Sum_IL	-1.1080	.1289	-8.5972	.0000	-1.3621	-.8539
With ELoC Moderator						
Sum_HS	.1395	.0283	4.9342	.0000	.0838	.1952
Sum_HS	-.1309	.0684	-1.9143	.0570	-.2657	.0039
Sum_EL	1.2048	.1593	7.5617	.0000	.8906	1.5189

Table 4 shows that, for the mediation effect of Internal Locus of Control (ILoC), t-value of -0.7528 and p-value of 0.4524 which suggests that this coefficient is not statistically significant (since p > 0.05) while for the mediation effect of External Locus of Control (ELoC), the coefficient for HS here is 0.1395, with a significant t-value (4.9343) and a very low p-value (0.0000), indicating that there is a statistically significant effect of Hate Speech (HS) on the Political Behavior (PB) when moderated by ELoC.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In mediation analysis, moderators like ILoC and ELoC are influencing the relationship between HS and PB. The interaction with the ELoC moderator appears to have a significant effect on this relationship, whereas the ILoC moderator does not show a significant effect based on the provided data. This suggests that the mediation effect of **HS** on PB is conditional on the levels of the ELoC moderator but not the ILoC moderator in this analysis. In simpler words hate speeches have no direct impact on political behavior but are strongly associated with the orientation of locus of control which influences the political behavior of an individual.

- It is recommended to conduct a more comprehensive study by collecting a larger sample size to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the variables and their relationships.
- it would be beneficial to examine the comparisons among different gender and age groups to uncover potential differences and insights.
- A comparative analysis between government and private universities is recommended to gain insight into the perceptions of students across different institutions.

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