THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ISLAMOPHOBIA

COVID-19 MISINFORMATION, FAKE NEWS AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Muslims have faced accusations, many right-wing members have claimed they are spreading the virus, describing them as super spreaders and that their Islamic rituals are violating covid-19 restrictions (Bakry, Syatar, Haq, Mundzir, Arif & Amiruddin, 2020; Nagar & Gill, 2020).

What is described as a 22 day of fake news frenzy erupted as a result of the Indian governments profiling of Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim religious organisation that congregated for a religious meet, the government claimed that this meet was a major national covid-19 source (Udupa, 2020).

An influx of fake news has also contributed to Islamophobia, claims that state that Muslims are spreading covid-19 by spitting on policemen as well as fruit, food and utensils (Nagar & Gill, 2020).

DRIVERS OF COVID-19 MISINFORMATION AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

India media outlets such as The Hindu has propagated and encouraged hate towards Islam as a result of printing caricatures depicting a covid-19 shaped virus wearing Muslim clothing (Bakry, Syatar, Haq, Mundzir, Arif & Amiruddin, 2020)

A majority of Hindi news channels as well as some British channels used their platforms to spread misconceptions around Muslims and covid-19, much of this misinformation went on to become viral on social media sites such Facebook, TikTok, Helo, WhatsApp and Twitter This has subsequently led to the tarnishing of India media, that traditionally is viewed as neutral and objective (Jadhav,2020).

PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS MISINFORMATION AND COVID-19

TOP DOWN MISINFORMATION

Religious misinformation comes from a various type of actors, top-down misinformation was used by certain religious leaders who utilised social media platforms to spread false remedies, whereas bottom up misinformation, was used by content creators who took advantage of pandemic-induced uncertainty to attract followers and subscribers. (Alimardani & Elswah, 2020)

BOTTOM UP MISINFORMATION

Politics has also become a significant driver of Islamphobic extremism. Research has highlighted how the pandemic has been used to promote Hindutva ideology, by singling out muslims as spreader of the virus and therefore constructing them as the country's enemy (Prasad, 2020).

This ideological discourse was established through 3 stages, surface level validation (confirming pre-conceived idea about the enemy) and inflammatory rhetoric (scapegoating the enemy) which causes moral panic and in turn the final stage, an environment of fear and paranoia that perpetuates symbolic and physical violence towards the constructed enemy (Prasad, 2020).

CORPUS LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 RELATED ISLAMOPHOBIA ON TWITTER

100,545 Tweets were analysed from 100 Twitter accounts

Participants were rated on anonymity, membership length and postage frequency

AntConc software was used to produce a word list and keyness results for the corpora

28 key terms were generated i.e. islamspreadcovid, ihateislam, islamiccoronajehad, jihadagent, crushtablighispitters, islamicvirus. The frequency of these terms were compared across low, moderate and high level of the three variables

FINDINGS

ANONYMITY

The 28 keywords appeared statistically more frequently in the tweets of low anonymity users than they did in either moderate or high anonymity users, clearly suggesting that low levels of anonymity may be predictive of increased Islamophobic language use.

MEMBERSHIP LENGTH

The 28 keywords appeared statistically more frequently in the tweets of moderate membership length users than they did in either low or high membership length users. Suggesting that moderate levels of membership length may be predictive of increased Islamophobic language use.

POSTAGE FREQUENCY

The 28 keywords appeared statistically more frequently in the tweets of low postage frequency users than they did in either moderate or high postage frequency users. Suggesting that low levels of postage frequency may be predictive of increased Islamophobic language use.

banjahiljamat
saynotohalal
islamistheproblem
ihateislam
coronajehad jihadagent
coronahoax jihadwatchrs delhiagainstjehadviolence
islamisevil banjihadimedia islamspreadcovid
covidiots stayawayfromislam beingmuslimterriost
islamiscancer crushtablighispitters muslimban
covidscam islamicvirus bantablighijamal islamiccoronajehad
spitting coronajihad allahisgay nizamuddinidiots
radicalislamicterrorist islamexposed

Figure 1. Corpus Linguistic Analysis: Islamophobic terms/hashtags