



Unmasking the Shadows: Exploring Religious Vandalism in social media

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Abstract:

Religious vandalism in social media has emerged as a significant challenge in contemporary society, with far-reaching implications for intergroup relations, social cohesion, and online discourse. Against the backdrop of increasing polarization and digitalization, this research study aims to explore the dynamics, impacts, and effective strategies for combating religious vandalism in social media. The study is driven by the recognition of the urgent need to address this issue and foster a more cohesive, collaborative, and diversified social structure in online spaces. The research adopts a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on insights from sociology, communication studies, and digital humanities to investigate the phenomenon of religious vandalism in social media. Interpretivism philosophy, inductive research approach has been undertaken. The research employs a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative analysis of social media content with systematic literature review to capture the perspectives and experiences of users affected by religious vandalism. Findings from the study reveal the multifaceted nature of religious vandalism in social media, with impacts ranging from amplifying intergroup tensions and perpetuating stereotypes to undermining trust and cohesion within online communities. Effective strategies for combating religious vandalism include strengthening content moderation, fostering interfaith dialogue, empowering community leaders, promoting digital literacy, leveraging technology for positive impact, advocating for legal measures, investing in education and awareness campaigns, facilitating cross-sector collaboration, encouraging empathy and respect, and supporting initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance online. Overall, the research highlights the importance of

collective action and collaboration across different sectors to address religious vandalism and build a more cohesive and collaborative social structure in online spaces.

Keywords:

Vandalism, Interfaith Dialogue, Social Media, Hate Crime, Community Leaders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Religious vandals on social media are a pressing issue of the utmost importance for intercultural relations and the wellness of individuals. Due to the diverse range of plights that it causes, the virtual world of social media has proved to be a scourge that involves spreading misinformation and stereotypes, escalating religious disputes and conflicts, as well as destroying social unity. Perhaps the most deceitful of all characteristics that religious vandalism on the Internet has been its part in deepening prejudice and incarnating discrimination, particularly within societies (Pew Research Center, 2021). The careless spreading of incorrect or deceptive information regarding the essence of religious thought and practices has an active role in the establishment of a prejudiced mindset. As per a Pew Research Center recent study, it is found that more than two-thirds 64% of internet users, clearly show that it is a big matter of concern especially on social media platforms.

This misinformation not only leads to the distortion of perceptions but also inflames discriminatory conduct, in addition, it further escalates division among societies based purely on religion. Moreover, the vandalism of religions on social media accelerates onto a powerful platform which is stimulating for the sake of the conflicts on the online and offline levels (Brown, 2022). Instances of hate speech and incitement of hate to religious communities have taken dramatic growth over the recent years, with 20% online attacks against religious groups (Anti-Defamation League, 2023). Such hate speech not only flames up with the anger in the virtual space but also seeps out into actual life violence that is a direct threat to the safety and security of people. Social media religious vandalism causes separation of the community by creating conflict and hate, and destruction of social cohesion narrative by laying distrust of each other.

They reached a result indicating that seventy per cent of Muslims in the US have been victims of online discrimination. Such occurrences increase the sense of alienation. Such diminishing of trust by itself is extremely dangerous for peace and harmony in society, but also hinders the construction of a society where all people are equal and respected. Religious vandalism on social media is one powerful tool that spreads inaccuracies, stereotypes and escalation of conflict. The cooperation of all stakeholders including social media platforms, policymakers

and civil society groups becomes the stress factor for advocacy of responsible digital citizenship and the building of mutual respect in multi-ethnic, multicultural societies.

It is necessary to develop effective measures to prevent the vandalism of religious objects because of their crucial significance for a community and human beings. The first step for certain is to come up with a way to prevent the perpetration of religious vandalism because it is crucial to preserve religious liberty and to promote mutual respect among different religious groups (Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020). This is a finding of a Commission on International Religious Freedom of the United States that cases of religious intolerance and discrimination are growing rapidly across the world where popular social media is becoming the place for such behaviors to hatch. This is a way society can safeguard universal appointments like religious freedom and create a society where no religious bias will exist. Additionally, confronting the attitude of religious vandalism is the most effective solution for ensuring the safety of a person's mental health and eliminating bullying (Cyberbullying Research Center, 2020).

Cyberbullying Research Center's study supports the idea that a typical victim of internet harassment experiences great psychological strain, such as anguish, depression, and low self-esteem. Religious minorities and the selection of communities including vulnerable ones are the triggers for cyberbullying and the expression of hate speech that may take root and grow into mental problems and loss of belongingness. This, and other factors, thus the implementation of measures to put an end to digital religious vandalism is the mandatory action to create safer digital spaces and shield individuals from abuse. Besides, dealing with religious vandalism is necessary for the protection of the public image of the platforms as trustful media spaces (Williams, 2020). In recent years, tech giants have been criticized repeatedly regarding their practices about the dissemination of harmful content, which includes verbal abuse and false information. The battle between the secular Internet and religious extremism not only damages the image of social media platforms but also undermines their credibility as fair and moral gatekeepers on the Internet. The companies can do that by enforcing several moderation policies and proactively engaging in behaviours to remove religiously motivated hate speech from their platforms. This will show the companies' commitment to creating an equitable online space where all users can interact safely and respectfully.

Religious vandalism should not be underestimated. It isn't just about defending religious freedom and mutual respect – it is also about safeguarding people's mental health and the integrity of social networks. Stakeholders must act swiftly and decisively to eradicate religiously motivated vandalism and to create a cyberspace where diversity is acknowledged

and celebrated; all individuals can be active members of this space. In the recent past, there's been an alarming increase in the cases of hate speeches and vandalism incited by religious resources on social media platforms (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2022).

Statistics showed that the Anti-Defamation League recorded over 50% increase in online hate speech that focused on religious groups in the past year. This trend highlights how religious vandalism is ubiquitous in digital spaces where people may be affected by online trolls and bigots. The real-life examples often convey evidence of religious denigration on social media (Smith, 2020). For example, a religious minority group at some important point in its struggle became a target of a well-coordinated cyberbullying campaign on various social media platforms ranging from Twitter to Facebook. The community members strongly commented that there were messages and threats which were derogatory. This showed that discrimination and animosity were very well established in the online society. The understanding of what exactly makes people go to the extent of such deeds shows how religious vandalism is really a complex mix of factors. Some abusers may hold extreme views as tools with which they try to divide up the religious communities. Still, there could be people with personal and even blatant hatred, who use online resources for their own narrow-minded criticism of faith-based communities. Be it about the root causes of such acts, the impact on the communities is devastating, breeding feelings of fear, mistrust, and marginalization among the locals.

Also, some people may be empowered by the privacy of social media to perform acts of virtual vandalism against religious figures without the worry of being held accountable (Davis, 2022). The anonymity associated with the online space not only eases the proliferation of hateful rhetoric but also makes it difficult for the responsible parties to track and prosecute offenders. Thus, the internet is exploited by the perpetrators to target religious minorities and vulnerable groups without hope for justice or protection. Lastly, the patterns and illustrations of the religious vandalism of the media in social media show an alarming picture of prejudices and bigotry being on the rise in the digital world. The alarming spread of hatred towards religious groups through hate speech and cyberbullying points to the grave necessity of refraining from any inaction and combating this scourge head-on. Through raising awareness, adopting effective moderation policies, and building a culture of respect and equality in the virtual sphere, stakeholders can strive to change the digital ecosystems into safer and more diversified reliant for everyone. Fighting for religious vandalism through social media meets the challenges that demand careful analysis and strategic intervention (Jones, 2023). However, the sheer magnitude and privacy of these websites, among other things, are significant obstacles to successful content control. Studies demonstrate that the anonymity associated with social

media provides fodder for the spread of hate speech and online harassment which is difficult to trace and deal with. This anonymity allows the perpetrators of religious vandalism to engage in their harmful activities without any fear of consequences which makes it difficult to enforce community guidelines and uphold the respectful dialogue.

Besides, there is considerable opposition from extremist groups looking to benefit from social media for spreading violence across different religions (Wong, 2020). These are the main actors who are constantly engaged in spreading such propaganda and disinformation. And they use social media as an open platform in support of this objective. The deep-rooted ideas and the ideals of these groups especially give them resistance to the initiatives and plans for eliminating religiously motivated intolerance. Additionally, the shortage of resources and competent staff makes it even more difficult to contend with the religious vandalism online. Technical constraints and resource deficiencies that encompass social media firms act as the main barrier to the freedom and effective removal of hate content (Lee, 2021). The large amount of information especially post content on these platforms is rather fulfilling the supervisory mechanisms, and the malicious content continues to spread beyond control. Tackling religious vandalism on social media is a challenge that calls for a multifaceted approach involving various parties (European Commission, 2021). First of all, an important step should be to strengthen the algorithms of moderation and content filtering on social media platforms. A report from a Center for Countering Digital Hate indicated that current approaches are insufficient in the fight against hate speech, with just one-fifth of reported content removed. Thus, platforms can achieve this by upgrading their mechanism which enables them to easily point out and eliminate religiously-inspired vandalism, thereby creating a safer internet space for users.

To fight against religious vandalism, campaigning for digital literacy and critical thinking skills is important (Richards, 2023). Research has shown that people with better digital literacy tend to have the ability to recognize the difference between true information and misinformation. Educating users in critical assessment of online content forms the basis for communities to let individuals become aware of and reject religiously motivated hate speech which in turn leads to reduced presence of such speech on social media platforms. Besides, cooperation between governments, high-tech companies as well as civil society is indispensable for the realization of laws and the prevention of religious tourism.

The study of the European Commission does not only point to the importance of collaboration between the various stakeholders, but it underlines the need for combined actions to develop and implement efficient strategies to deal with this problem. Through joint efforts, all

stakeholders can utilize the knowledge and assets they have at their disposal to influence positive change and uprightness and as a result, make the digital platforms tolerant. Essentially, combating religious vandalism on social media will necessitate an integrative approach that involves all parties involved. Through enlightening moderation tools, increasing digital literacy, and encouraging the involvement of governments, tech organizations, and civil society, the community will build a hate-speech-free online community. Collaborative work and involvement of various parties is a crucial part of the effort in combating and lessening the impact of religious vandalism on social media (Patel, 2021).

First of all, policymakers, law enforcement experts and religious leaders should collaborate to set up inclusive strategies. Studies indicate that what contributes to the effectiveness of the interactions among these organizations is the fact that they are coordinated rather than individualized initiatives. Similarly, collaborating with tech companies is paramount. Research suggests that social media is a very crucial tool in the circulation of disgraceful information, with more than 90% of online hate speech happening on these platforms. Policymakers, which can team up with tech corporations, can pressure them on the elimination of hate speech and the implementation of stricter moderation. In addition to this, making dialogue and cooperation between various religious groups a priority is inevitable. Research has proven that interfaith dialogue presents a solution to healing and fostering respect. Through providing means for communication and cooperation among religious groups, communities will develop the ability to repel religious vandalism and cultivate a culture of tolerance and welcoming. Finally, shared efforts between policymakers, law enforcement, religious leaders and tech companies are needed to mitigate religious vandalism in social media.

This study serves a vital role as a diagnostic measure when applied to the impact of religious vandalism on social media networks. It does this through presenting research-based information which influences both policies and actions that are always directed at ensuring social media platforms are kept at the optimum level. The research not only offers tangible recommendations like reinforcing content moderation and talking to participants about digital literacy but could also help in setting up safer online spaces. Additionally, dialogue and understanding among all sorts of religious communities as well as social unity and conciliation are fundamental for promoting social integration. Collaboratively, based on research outcomes, we can push towards crafting platforms and establish closer together the diverse religious groups and societies.

1.2 Problem statement

In recent years, the proliferation of social media platforms has transformed the way individuals interact, communicate, and express their beliefs. While social media offers unprecedented opportunities for connection and community building, it has also become a breeding ground for various forms of abuse, including religious vandalism. Religious vandalism in social media encompasses a wide range of behaviors, from derogatory comments and hate speech to the dissemination of offensive images and videos targeting individuals and religious communities. This phenomenon poses significant challenges to social cohesion, intergroup relations, and individual well-being, necessitating a deeper understanding of its dynamics and impacts.

1.3 Research rationale

The phenomenon of religious vandalism in social media represents a complex intersection of technology, society, and belief systems. With the increasing integration of social media platforms into daily life globally, understanding the dynamics and implications of religious vandalism within these digital spaces is crucial. This research seeks to delve into the shadows cast by religious vandalism, shedding light on its multifaceted nature and exploring its impacts on individuals, communities, and societies. Firstly, it's essential to recognize the evolving digital landscape and the role of social media in shaping contemporary interactions and discourse. Social media platforms have become primary arenas for communication, information dissemination, and community building. However, alongside these positive aspects, they have also become breeding grounds for various forms of abuse, including religious vandalism. Understanding the nuances of religious vandalism within this digital context is vital for comprehending its scope and devising effective strategies for mitigation. Exploring the diversified ranges of the digital landscape of religious vandalism involves understanding how different social media platforms facilitate the spread and perpetuation of such behaviours. From inflammatory comments and hate speech to the dissemination of derogatory images and videos, religious vandalism manifests in myriad forms across platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. By examining the ways in which these platforms are utilized to propagate religious vandalism, researchers can gain insights into the underlying motivations and mechanisms driving such behaviours. Identifying the dimensions, types, categories, and nature of religious vandalism in social media is crucial for developing targeted interventions and countermeasures. Religious vandalism is not monolithic but rather encompasses a spectrum of actions and expressions, ranging from subtle microaggressions to

overt acts of violence. Moreover, religious vandalism is not confined to any single religious group or community but can target individuals and beliefs across various religions and denominations. By categorizing and analysing instances of religious vandalism, researchers can discern patterns and trends, thereby informing the development of more nuanced and effective responses. Moreover, understanding the impact of religious vandalism on social media is essential for assessing its broader implications for social cohesion, intergroup relations, and individual well-being. Religious vandalism can engender feelings of fear, alienation, and mistrust among targeted communities, exacerbating existing social tensions and divisions. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of social media means that instances of religious vandalism can quickly gain traction and reach wide audiences, amplifying their impact and perpetuating harmful stereotypes and narratives. By elucidating the ramifications of religious vandalism, researchers can advocate for greater awareness and accountability among social media users and platforms. Finally, recommending effective strategies to combat religious vandalism in social media requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both individual behaviours and systemic factors. This may involve promoting digital literacy and empathy among users, fostering dialogue and understanding across religious divides, and advocating for more robust moderation and enforcement mechanisms on social media platforms. By drawing on insights from this research, policymakers, educators, and community leaders can work collaboratively to create a more inclusive, respectful, and resilient digital public sphere. That is why this research seeks to shine a light on the shadows of religious vandalism in social media, illuminating its complexities and consequences for contemporary society. By exploring the digital landscape, identifying patterns and impacts, and recommending strategies for intervention, this study aims to contribute to the development of a more informed and empowered approach to addressing religious vandalism in the digital age.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

The aim of the research is to explore the shadows and impacts of religious vandalism on social media considering the recent shift, trends and directions of social media usage, integration and emergence globally. The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the diversified ranges of digital landscape of Religious Vandalism on modern contemporary world viewpoint.
- To identify dimensions, types, categories and nature of religious vandalism in social media across different groups, sub-groups, regions and religions.

- To show the impact of religious vandalism on social media unmasking the detailed and elaborative shadows in contemporary world viewpoint.
- To recommend some effective strategies to combat religious vandalism in social media to develop and build a cohesive, collaborative and diversified social structure.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions are –

- What are the diversified ranges of digital landscape of Religious Vandalism on modern contemporary world viewpoint?
- What are the dimensions, types, categories and nature of religious vandalism in social media across different groups, sub-groups, regions and religions?
- What are the impacts of religious vandalism on social media unmasking the detailed and elaborative shadows in contemporary world viewpoint?
- What are some effective strategies to combat religious vandalism in social media to develop and build a cohesive, collaborative and diversified social structure?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Today human beings live in an era of digital life where social media platforms are the ones allowing people to connect with each other and also a place where they argue about cultural and religious matters. According to Jones et al. (2020), along with the beneficial side of online interactions, 'vandalism' is a bad trend which has grown in the religion field as well. Schliesser et al. (2020) also added that this type of negative behaviour represents the real-world antagonist ranging from creating rude comments to religions insulting religious messages or content. The investigation of religious vandalism on social media which has a complex standpoint, requires the implementation of theoretical frameworks, realism world parameters and measures of intervention tactics. This literature review focuses on the core issues of religious vandalism and shows how to promote digital ethics, interfaith relationships and show respect to others online.

2.2 Theoretical frameworks

2.2.1 Application of Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel and John Turner came up with the Social Identity Theory which helps the community to understand how religious vandalism occurs on social media. According to Scheitle (2018), this theory states that people get their sense of self-worth and sense of identity from being a part of social groups such as religious groups, communities, organisations or societies. People who use social media often act in ways that are in line with the beliefs and standards of the groups they choose to join. They do this because they want to feel that they belong and are validated through their online interactions.

Lim (2020) added that by applying Social Identity Theory to the subject of religious vandalism in social media, one can see why people might do these kinds of acts to show who they are in their online communities or to show their dislike for people they see as belonging to different groups. They consider different groups as the opposing group. One example is that people might say hurtful and insulting things about religion to others or change religious symbols to show their support for certain beliefs or ideas while simultaneously putting down others. Lee (2020) mentioned that it focuses on how people's feelings of ingroup superiority and outgroup derogation influence how they act and react to people from different religious groups.

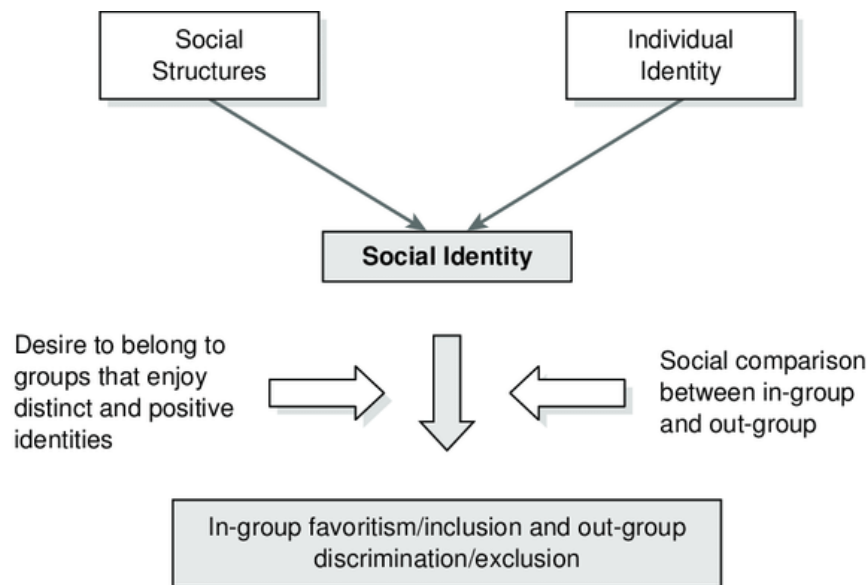


Figure 1: Social Identity Theory (Source - (Adams, 2020))

Understanding this theory can enable people to practice empathy, tolerance and respectful conversation with different religions in online places despite belonging to specific social groups or identities (Adams, 2020). SIT helps to explain how individuals' religious identities intersect with their online behaviors and interactions. Social media platforms provide individuals with the opportunity to express and affirm their religious affiliations, creating virtual spaces where religious groups can coalesce and interact. However, these platforms also facilitate the formation of ingroups and outgroups, where individuals may perceive members of other religious communities as threats to their own group identity (Adams, 2020).

According to SIT, individuals are motivated to enhance the status and cohesion of their ingroup, often at the expense of outgroups. In the context of social media, this can manifest in the form of derogatory comments, hate speech, and the dissemination of offensive content targeting members of other religious communities. Such behaviors are driven by the desire to assert one's own group identity and maintain social dominance within the online space (Barre et al., 2023).

Moreover, SIT highlights the role of social categorization and intergroup comparisons in exacerbating ingroup-outgroup tensions (Barre et al., 2023). On social media platforms, individuals may engage in stereotyping and dehumanization of members of other religious groups, viewing them through the lens of negative stereotypes and attributions. This can lead to the escalation of conflict and hostility between different religious communities, as individuals seek to defend their own group's honor and integrity (Basedau et al., 2023).

Despite its potential for promoting intergroup conflict, SIT also offers avenues for mitigating religious vandalism in social media. By emphasizing the importance of shared identities and

common goals, SIT encourages intergroup cooperation and reconciliation (Basedau et al., 2023). Interventions aimed at fostering positive intergroup relations and reducing prejudice can leverage social identity processes to promote empathy, understanding, and solidarity across religious divides.

Social Identity Theory provides a powerful framework for understanding the dynamics of religious vandalism in social media, highlighting the role of group identity, intergroup dynamics, and social categorization in shaping online behaviors and interactions (Brown, 2020). By applying insights from SIT, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies for combating religious vandalism and promoting harmony and tolerance in digital spaces (Brown, 2020).

2.2.2 Application of Deindividuation Theory

Leon Festinger, Stanley Schachter and Kurt Back came up with the Deindividuation Theory which states that when people are in a crowd or a faceless group, they may lose their sense of personal identity and responsibility. Tarantino and Zika (2019) stated that it can make them less shy and more likely to act impulsively or antisocially. Because of the anonymity and supposed anonymity that social media platforms offer, users may commit acts of religious vandalism. Some people may feel less responsible for their actions when they are hidden behind a screen name.

According to Redekop (2017), the feeling of not being known in an online environment can also make people feel disconnected from the results of their actions. Consequently, it can make religious vandalism even easier to do. Kwan and Yu (2019) showed that people may not realise how their actions online affect others in real life, which can make them not care about their thoughts and feelings. They may also be more likely to do things they wouldn't do in person. Understanding this theory can encourage responsibility, kindness, and accountable online behaviour. This can help reduce religious desecration and make the online community more respectful and caring too.

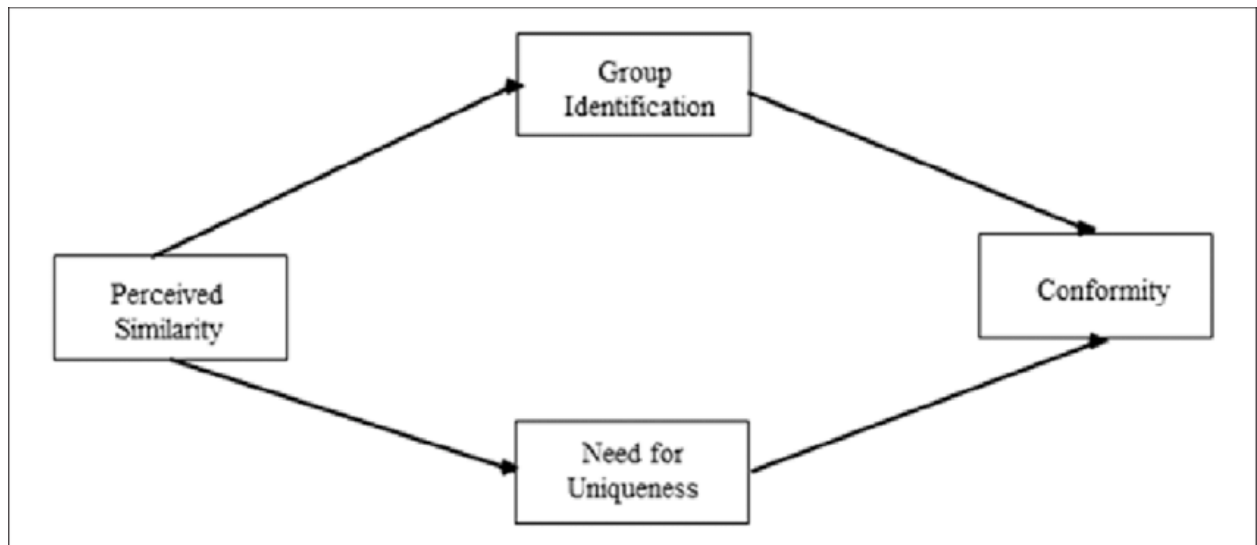


Figure 2: Deindividuation Theory (Source- (Bruce, 2018))

In the context of social media, where users often interact behind screens and pseudonyms, deindividuation processes can be particularly pronounced (Bruce, 2018). Anonymity and reduced accountability can embolden individuals to engage in behaviors they might refrain from in face-to-face interactions, including religious vandalism. When users feel less personally identifiable or responsible for their actions, they may be more likely to engage in derogatory comments, hate speech, or the sharing of offensive content targeting religious groups (Bruce, 2018).

Moreover, the group dynamics inherent in social media platforms can further exacerbate deindividuation processes. As individuals participate in online communities and echo chambers, they may experience a heightened sense of solidarity and belonging with like-minded individuals, which can foster a sense of collective identity at the expense of individual accountability (Bruce, 2018). In such contexts, normative constraints against deviant behaviors may be weakened, leading to the normalization and reinforcement of religious vandalism within certain online subcultures.

Furthermore, the affordances of social media, such as rapid communication and virality, can amplify the effects of deindividuation on religious vandalism (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Offensive content targeting religious groups can quickly spread across platforms, reaching wide audiences and fueling intergroup conflict and polarization. The speed and scale of information dissemination on social media can create an environment where individual users feel less personally responsible for the consequences of their actions, contributing to a sense of detachment and disinhibition (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021).

Despite its potential for promoting negative behaviors, deindividuation theory also offers insights into potential interventions to combat religious vandalism in social media (Fox, 2020). By increasing users' sense of individuation and accountability through strategies such as personalized feedback, identity salience, and social norms enforcement, platforms can encourage more responsible online conduct and discourage the propagation of harmful content targeting religious groups (Fox, 2020).

Hence, deindividuation theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying religious vandalism in social media, highlighting the role of anonymity, reduced accountability, and group dynamics in facilitating disinhibited and deviant behaviors (Hedges, 2021). By addressing these factors and promoting a greater sense of individuation and responsibility among users, social media platforms can work towards creating more respectful and inclusive online environments (Hedges, 2021).

2.3 Empirical evidence

2.3.1 The Digital Landscape of Religious Vandalism

Various types of online platforms are included in the digital landscape. These platforms are used to desecrate, disrespect or deface religious symbols, beliefs, or communities which fall under the issue or concern of religious vandalism. According to Féron (2015), often wicked individuals use social media, forums, websites, and other digital places to commit a wide range of crimes. Those issues range from insulting, hurtful speech to changing the meaning of religious images, values, beliefs and texts. This trend is often becoming worse as the internet makes it easy to be anonymous. In social media platforms spreading vandalism is easier without expressing a clear and precise identity. Religious vandalism in the digital world can have big adverse effects. Silaeva (2018) added that it changes how people think, makes tensions or instability between religions worse and keeps up stereotypes.

Also, the speed and reach of online communication make the effects of these kinds of actions even stronger. Accessibility to social media has negative the potential to hurt people all over the world in an instant. Understanding the dynamics of online communities, the function of algorithms and moderation policies and the reasons why individuals participate in such behaviour are all necessary for understanding the digital landscape of religious vandalism. van Liere and Meinema (2022) suggested that technology companies, religious groups, lawmakers and the public must work together to solve this problem by encouraging the ideal use of technology, and digital literacy, promoting respectful conversation and stopping the spread of harmful content. Various stakeholder parties can work towards a more welcoming and peaceful online platform that respects all religious beliefs and practices by fighting against religious vandalism in the digital world.

One aspect of the digital landscape of religious vandalism is the proliferation of hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric targeting religious groups on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (Phadke and Mitra, 2020). These platforms, which boast billions of users worldwide, have become primary arenas for the expression of diverse viewpoints and beliefs. However, they have also become breeding grounds for intolerance, bigotry, and extremism, with individuals and groups using them to propagate hateful ideologies and dehumanize members of religious communities (Phadke and Mitra, 2020).

On platforms like Twitter and Facebook, users may encounter derogatory comments and slurs directed at individuals based on their religious beliefs, with hashtags and trending topics often

being hijacked by malicious actors seeking to spread divisive and inflammatory content (Ruland, 2020). Similarly, on video-sharing platforms like YouTube, users may come across videos promoting conspiracy theories, misinformation, and conspiracy theories targeting religious groups, further fueling mistrust and animosity.

Religious vandalism also extends beyond mainstream social media platforms to niche online communities and forums, where individuals may gather to discuss and disseminate extremist ideologies and propaganda. Websites and forums dedicated to white supremacy, radical Islamism, and other extremist movements serve as echo chambers for individuals seeking validation and reinforcement of their prejudiced beliefs (Ruland, 2020). In these digital spaces, users may engage in discussions glorifying violence against members of religious minority groups or advocating for the destruction of sacred sites and symbols.

Moreover, the digital landscape of religious vandalism encompasses the phenomenon of doxing and online harassment, whereby individuals are targeted for their religious beliefs or affiliations (Scheitle, 2018). Doxing involves the malicious exposure of personal information, such as home addresses, phone numbers, and workplace details, with the intent of intimidating or silencing individuals perceived as threats or adversaries. Religious minorities, activists, and outspoken critics of religious extremism may be particularly vulnerable to such attacks, which can have serious real-world consequences, including physical harm and social ostracization.

The digital landscape of religious vandalism is also characterized by the proliferation of extremist content and propaganda on encrypted messaging apps and dark web forums, where individuals may engage in clandestine communications and coordination of illicit activities (Scheitle, 2018). These platforms provide a refuge for extremist groups and individuals seeking to evade detection and surveillance by law enforcement authorities, making it difficult to monitor and counter their activities effectively.

Furthermore, the digital landscape of religious vandalism intersects with broader societal issues such as polarization, disinformation, and algorithmic bias, which exacerbate existing social tensions and divisions (Schirch, 2022). Social media algorithms, which prioritize engagement and virality, may inadvertently amplify extremist content and polarizing narratives, leading to the radicalization of vulnerable individuals and the normalization of hateful ideologies. Moreover, the echo chamber effect, whereby users are exposed primarily to content that reinforces their existing beliefs and biases, can contribute to the entrenchment of extremist views and the marginalization of dissenting voices (Schirch, 2022).

The digital landscape of religious vandalism in the modern contemporary world is characterized by a complex interplay of online platforms, behaviors, and ideologies

(Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020). From hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric on mainstream social media platforms to extremist propaganda on encrypted messaging apps and dark web forums, religious vandalism takes on various forms across the digital landscape, posing significant challenges to social cohesion, intergroup relations, and individual well-being. Understanding the nuances of this digital landscape is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat religious vandalism and promote tolerance, understanding, and respect in online spaces (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020).

2.3.2 Types, categories and dimensions of religious vandalism in social media

According to Mayer (2013), there are many different kinds, categories and levels of religious vandalism on social media. These levels show the different ways that religious symbols, beliefs, and communities are attacked and harmed online. These instabilities and hostilities make the groups, ethnicities and cultures adverse to each other. Direct attacks on religious symbols or holy places through digital manipulation, distortion or defacement are a common type of religious vandalism. Schliesser et al. (2020) found that often it also occurs by changing religious pictures or symbols to send rude or insulting messages. Making religious jokes or spreading content that makes fun of or insults religious practices can be taken under violation of neutrality and religious vandalism within a society.

Hate speech and discriminatory language that targets individuals or groups based on their religious affiliations are another form of religious vandalism on social media. This usually occurs in the form of insulting remarks, slurs or threats made towards people or groups that follow certain religious views and beliefs. Haynes (2019) revealed that on social media, religious vandalism can also come in the form of spreading false or misleading information about religious figures or customs. This is called disinformation or misinformation campaigns. Some examples of this are making up fake news stories regarding religion, spreading conspiracy theories or changing the truth about the past to intentionally hurt religious groups' reputations. Different categories or types are –

1. Hate Speech and Derogatory Comments:

- Hate speech targeting religious groups is one of the most common and pervasive forms of religious vandalism in social media. This includes derogatory comments, slurs, and insults directed at individuals based on their religious beliefs or affiliations (Adams, 2020).

- Hate speech may take the form of explicit expressions of hostility and animosity towards specific religious communities, as well as more subtle forms of discrimination and prejudice.

2. Dissemination of Offensive Content:

- Another prevalent type of religious vandalism in social media involves the dissemination of offensive content targeting religious groups. This can include images, videos, memes, and other multimedia content that denigrates or mocks religious beliefs, symbols, and practices (Barre et al., 2023).
- Offensive content may be designed to provoke outrage, incite violence, or promote negative stereotypes and biases about particular religious communities.

3. Cyberbullying and Harassment:

- Cyberbullying and online harassment targeting individuals based on their religious beliefs or affiliations is a significant dimension of religious vandalism in social media. This can involve the repeated sending of threatening or abusive messages, as well as the sharing of personal information (doxxing) with the intent to intimidate or harm (Basedau et al., 2023).
- Religious minorities, activists, and outspoken critics of religious extremism may be particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying and harassment in social media.

4. Trolling and Provocation:

- Trolling and provocation are tactics commonly employed by individuals seeking to disrupt online discussions and provoke conflict. In the context of religious vandalism, trolls may deliberately post inflammatory or controversial content with the intention of eliciting strong reactions from members of religious communities.
- Trolling and provocation can create a hostile and toxic atmosphere in online spaces, making it difficult for constructive dialogue and engagement to take place (Basedau et al., 2023).

5. Fake News and Misinformation:

- The spread of fake news and misinformation about religious groups is a growing concern in social media. False or misleading information about religious beliefs, practices, and events can contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and biases, as well as the stigmatization and marginalization of religious minorities.

- Misinformation about religious groups may be disseminated intentionally as part of propaganda campaigns or inadvertently as a result of algorithmic biases and echo chamber effects.

6. Incitement to Violence and Extremism:

- Religious vandalism in social media can also involve the promotion of violence and extremism against members of religious communities. This may take the form of explicit calls for violence, glorification of terrorist acts, or recruitment efforts targeting vulnerable individuals (Brown, 2020).
- Incitement to violence and extremism in social media can have serious real-world consequences, including acts of terrorism, hate crimes, and intergroup conflict.

7. Online Radicalization and Recruitment:

- Social media platforms serve as recruitment grounds for extremist groups seeking to radicalize and indoctrinate individuals into their ideologies. Religious vandalism in social media may involve the dissemination of extremist propaganda, recruitment materials, and ideological narratives aimed at attracting new followers and supporters (Brown, 2020).
- Online radicalization and recruitment efforts can exploit vulnerable individuals' grievances, insecurities, and feelings of alienation, leading them down a path towards extremism and violence.

8. Algorithmic Bias and Echo Chamber Effects:

- Algorithmic bias and echo chamber effects in social media can exacerbate religious vandalism by amplifying extremist content and polarizing narratives (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Social media algorithms may prioritize engagement and virality, inadvertently promoting divisive and inflammatory content that reinforces users' existing beliefs and biases.
- Echo chamber effects can create a feedback loop wherein users are exposed primarily to content that confirms their worldview, leading to the entrenchment of extremist views and the marginalization of dissenting voices.

Schliesser (2023) opined that wicked individuals often make religious symbols and rituals negatively which can be seen as religious vandalism on social media. Often, religious images or symbols are used for marketing reasons without taking into consideration how holy or important these symbols are in their religions. Suppression is another type of extreme religious vandalism that violates the rights of another religion by enforcing or detracting from religious

events or prayers coercively (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Besides, some users on social media might engage in religious vandalism by creating satire or trolling content to provoke other religions, groups, religious communities or organisations.

2.3.3 Impact of religious vandalism on social media

Individuals, groups, and societies are all impacted in different ways by religious vandalism on social media. For example, it can create tensions and conflicts between religious groups making the situation worse. Wiśniewski and Zwęgliński (2022) delineated that it can also make things worse between religious groups and spread hate and mistrust among different groups or individuals. Whether it's done to holy objects, places or people, desecration can make people very angry or upset and widen religious gaps in a civil society. Consequently, it makes the world a more hostile and intolerable place to survive.

Kiper (2023) added that religious vandalism on social media can have deep psychological effects on the people who are targeted as it makes them feel upset, anxious, alone or left out. It makes them frustrated to send a message that they belong to the minority and they are bound to tolerate injustice. People who are victims of religious harassment, cyberbullying or hate speech online might experience mental trauma. They might have trouble with their sense of who they are and where they fit in their communities. According to van Liere and Meinema (2022), spreading false or misleading information about religious views or practices can also make people less likely to trust religious institutions and leaders. It can make followers confused and unsure. Online stories or plot theories that aren't true might also spread fear, prejudice and shame against certain religious groups.

1. Psychological Harm and Emotional Distress:

- Religious vandalism in social media can have significant psychological effects on individuals who are targeted or exposed to hateful and derogatory content. For members of targeted religious groups, encountering hate speech, harassment, and offensive imagery online can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and emotional distress (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021).
- Cyberbullying and online harassment targeting individuals based on their religious beliefs or affiliations can have long-lasting effects on mental health, contributing to depression, low self-esteem, and even suicidal ideation in extreme cases (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021).

2. Social Cohesion and Intergroup Relations:

- Religious vandalism in social media can undermine social cohesion and trust between religious communities, exacerbating intergroup tensions and conflicts. When individuals are subjected to hate speech and discrimination online, it can foster resentment, mistrust, and animosity towards members of other religious groups (Fox, 2020).
- Polarization and division between religious communities can be further exacerbated by echo chamber effects and algorithmic biases in social media, which reinforce existing prejudices and biases, making it difficult for constructive dialogue and understanding to take place.

3. Normalization of Prejudice and Hate:

- The proliferation of hate speech and offensive content targeting religious groups on social media can contribute to the normalization of prejudice and hate in society. When individuals are exposed to discriminatory rhetoric and dehumanizing imagery on a regular basis, it can desensitize them to the harms of religious vandalism and perpetuate negative stereotypes and biases (Fox, 2020).
- Normalization of prejudice and hate can create a hostile and toxic online environment, where discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are tacitly condoned and even celebrated by certain online communities.

4. Physical Violence and Hate Crimes:

- In extreme cases, religious vandalism in social media can escalate into real-world acts of violence and hate crimes against members of targeted religious groups. Online hate speech and incitement to violence can radicalize individuals and embolden them to commit acts of terrorism, hate crimes, and acts of violence against religious minorities (Hedges, 2021).
- Instances of religiously motivated violence and hate crimes can have devastating consequences for individuals, families, and communities, leading to loss of life, physical injury, and psychological trauma (Hedges, 2021).

5. Undermining Freedom of Religion and Expression:

- Religious vandalism in social media can also undermine fundamental human rights such as freedom of religion and expression. When individuals are targeted or silenced online because of their religious beliefs or affiliations, it restricts their ability to freely practice and express their faith (Phadke and Mitra, 2020).

- Censorship and online censorship targeting religious speech can also inhibit dialogue and debate on important religious and social issues, limiting the diversity of perspectives and viewpoints that are represented in online spaces.

6. Impact on Digital Literacy and Media Literacy:

- Religious vandalism in social media highlights the importance of digital literacy and media literacy in navigating online spaces. Individuals need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to critically evaluate and discern the reliability of information and content they encounter online, including recognizing and responding to religiously motivated misinformation and propaganda (Phadke and Mitra, 2020).
- Improving digital literacy and media literacy can empower individuals to be more discerning consumers of online content, enabling them to identify and counter religious vandalism and hate speech in social media (Ruland, 2020).

7. Community Resilience and Empowerment:

- Despite the negative impacts of religious vandalism in social media, communities can also demonstrate resilience and empowerment in the face of online harassment and discrimination. Building supportive online communities, fostering solidarity among members of targeted religious groups, and advocating for greater accountability and responsibility among social media platforms can help mitigate the effects of religious vandalism and promote resilience and empowerment (Ruland, 2020).

The impact of religious vandalism on social media is multifaceted and complex, encompassing psychological harm, social division, normalization of prejudice, physical violence, erosion of human rights, and challenges to digital literacy. Understanding the consequences of religious vandalism in social media is essential for developing effective strategies to combat it and promote tolerance, understanding, and respect in online spaces. All of those can reinforce harmful stereotypes and false beliefs about certain religious groups or communities. Schihalejev et al. (2020) showed that religious vandalism on social media can also have real-world social and economic effects such as hurting the relationship, image and credibility of religious groups. It can also discourage people from participating in religious activities or seeking spiritual guidance. Because of this, fewer people may join religious groups and donations. Often funding can be lost making the whole community vulnerable and society as a whole might have less social cohesion and connectivity.

2.3.4 Strategies to combat religious vandalism in social media

To stop and mitigate religious vandalism on social media, society needs a combinational method that can look at both the causes and the effects of the problem right now. Sapouna et al. (2023) presented that one important tactic is to teach people how to use technology and think critically so that they can spot and stop the spread of false information, hate speech and content that is harmful to religious groups or beliefs. A more welcoming online space for constructive conversation and mutual understanding can also be created by making people aware of the value of respectful dialogue, interaction and cultural sensitivity.

Ryan and Gardner (2021) showed that the regulators and government should be neutral and improve social media sites' content moderation and enforcement tools which can also help to find and remove religious vandalism more efficiently. It can also make damaging content less visible providing lower exposure and having less effect in society. Farooqui and Kaushik (2021) proposed that by making a clear and consistent rule against hate speech, harassment and calling for violence based on religious beliefs, individual authorities and controller groups in the national and international arena can stop people from doing these things and make the internet a better place for everyone. This can also be done by encouraging discussion and cooperation between religious groups.

1. Digital Literacy and Media Literacy Education:

- Promote digital literacy and media literacy education initiatives to empower users to critically evaluate and discern the reliability of information and content they encounter online (Scheitle, 2018).
- Provide training and resources to help individuals recognize and respond to religiously motivated hate speech, misinformation, and propaganda in social media.
- Collaborate with educational institutions, nonprofits, and community organizations to develop and implement digital literacy and media literacy programs targeting users of all ages (Scheitle, 2018).

2. Community Empowerment and Support:

- Build supportive online communities and networks to provide solidarity and support to members of targeted religious groups who are subjected to hate speech and discrimination online (Schirch, 2022).

- Foster dialogue and collaboration among religious communities, civil society organizations, and social media platforms to develop community-driven solutions to combat religious vandalism in social media.
- Provide resources and tools to help individuals and communities respond effectively to instances of hate speech and harassment in social media, including reporting mechanisms and support services (Schirch, 2022).

3. Platform Moderation and Content Moderation:

- Enhance platform moderation and content moderation efforts to detect and remove hate speech, harassment, and misinformation targeting religious groups in social media (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020).
- Invest in artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies to automatically identify and flag potentially harmful content, including religiously motivated hate speech and propaganda.
- Train platform moderators and content moderators to recognize and address religious vandalism in social media, providing clear guidelines and protocols for handling such content (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020).

4. Algorithmic Transparency and Accountability:

- Increase transparency and accountability around social media algorithms to mitigate the spread of hate speech and misinformation targeting religious groups.
- Provide users with greater visibility into how algorithms shape their online experiences, including how content is prioritized, recommended, and promoted in their social media feeds (Adams, 2020).
- Advocate for regulatory measures that require social media platforms to disclose information about their algorithms and their impact on the dissemination of hate speech and discriminatory content (Adams, 2020).

5. Regulation and Policy Reform:

- Advocate for regulatory reforms to hold social media platforms accountable for addressing hate speech, harassment, and discrimination targeting religious groups in their platforms.
- Enact legislation that establishes clear guidelines and standards for combating religious vandalism in social media, including measures to prevent the spread of hate speech, misinformation, and extremist propaganda (Barre et al., 2023).

- Collaborate with policymakers, lawmakers, and regulatory agencies to develop and implement effective regulatory frameworks that balance the need to protect freedom of expression with the need to prevent harm and promote social cohesion.

6. Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding:

- Promote interfaith dialogue and understanding to foster empathy, tolerance, and respect among members of different religious communities in social media (Barre et al., 2023).
- Facilitate online discussions and exchanges that promote mutual understanding and cooperation between religious groups, challenging stereotypes and misconceptions.
- Engage religious leaders, scholars, and influencers in social media campaigns and initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, leveraging their platforms and influence to reach wider audiences (Basedau et al., 2023).

7. Counter-Narratives and Positive Messaging:

- Develop counter-narratives and positive messaging campaigns to challenge extremist ideologies and propaganda targeting religious groups in social media.
- Highlight stories of resilience, solidarity, and cooperation among members of different religious communities, showcasing positive examples of interfaith dialogue and collaboration (Basedau et al., 2023).
- Amplify voices of moderation and tolerance within religious communities, providing alternative narratives to extremist rhetoric and hate speech.

8. Global Cooperation and Collaboration:

- Foster global cooperation and collaboration among governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, and tech companies to combat religious vandalism in social media (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021).
- Share best practices, resources, and lessons learned from successful initiatives to address hate speech, harassment, and discrimination targeting religious groups online.
- Coordinate efforts to develop and implement multilateral strategies and interventions that address the root causes of religious vandalism in social media and promote tolerance, understanding, and respect in digital spaces.

9. User Reporting and Feedback Mechanisms:

- Implement robust user reporting mechanisms that allow individuals to report instances of hate speech, harassment, and discrimination targeting religious groups in social media (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021).
- Provide clear and accessible channels for users to provide feedback on platform policies, content moderation practices, and enforcement actions related to religious vandalism.
- Regularly review and evaluate user reports to identify patterns and trends in religiously motivated abuse and take appropriate action to address them.

10. Empowering Moderators and Content Creators:

- Provide training and support to social media moderators and content creators to effectively identify and address religious vandalism in social media (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021).
- Equip moderators with cultural competency training and resources to recognize and respond sensitively to religiously sensitive content and issues.
- Foster a culture of responsibility and accountability among content creators, encouraging them to create content that promotes tolerance, diversity, and inclusion in social media (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021).

11. Promoting Positive Online Behaviors:

- Launch awareness campaigns and initiatives that promote positive online behaviors and digital citizenship, emphasizing the importance of respectful communication, empathy, and civility in social media.
- Encourage users to be mindful of the impact of their words and actions on others, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as religion (Fox, 2020).
- Highlight examples of constructive dialogue and collaboration among members of different religious communities, showcasing the potential of social media to facilitate meaningful connections and understanding.

12. Crisis Response and Support Services:

- Establish crisis response and support services to provide immediate assistance to individuals and communities affected by religious vandalism in social media (Hedges, 2021).
- Partner with mental health professionals, crisis counselors, and community organizations to offer counseling, support groups, and other resources to those

experiencing psychological distress as a result of online harassment and discrimination.

- Develop protocols for responding to crises and emergencies related to religious vandalism in social media, including coordinated efforts to address threats to personal safety and security (Phadke and Mitra, 2020).

13. Research and Data Analysis:

- Invest in research and data analysis to better understand the prevalence, patterns, and impacts of religious vandalism in social media.
- Conduct longitudinal studies and surveys to track changes in online behaviors and attitudes related to religious groups over time, identifying emerging trends and challenges.
- Share research findings and data insights with policymakers, stakeholders, and the public to inform evidence-based strategies and interventions to combat religious vandalism in social media (Phadke and Mitra, 2020).

14. Ethical Design and Responsible Technology:

- Promote ethical design principles and responsible technology practices that prioritize user safety, well-being, and dignity in social media (Ruland, 2020).
- Advocate for the development and adoption of design features and algorithms that mitigate the spread of hate speech, harassment, and discrimination targeting religious groups.
- Engage with tech companies, designers, and developers to integrate human rights considerations and ethical guidelines into the design and implementation of social media platforms and technologies (Ruland, 2020).

15. Youth Engagement and Education:

- Engage young people in efforts to combat religious vandalism in social media through youth-led initiatives, campaigns, and projects (Scheitle, 2018).
- Integrate digital citizenship and online safety education into school curricula and extracurricular activities, equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to navigate online spaces responsibly and respectfully.
- Foster critical thinking and media literacy skills among young people, empowering them to question and challenge harmful narratives and stereotypes perpetuated in social media (Hedges, 2021).

Combating religious vandalism in social media requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves education, technology, regulation, and community engagement

(Scheitle, 2018). By working together to promote digital literacy, empower communities, enhance platform moderation, advocate for policy reform, promote interfaith dialogue, develop counter-narratives, and foster global cooperation, stakeholders can create a more inclusive, respectful, and resilient online environment that upholds freedom of expression while preventing harm and promoting social cohesion.

Bower (2021) noted that it can also build unity and mutual respect, fight divisive stories and philosophies and create a culture of tolerance and coexistence. Involvement of diversified stakeholders' groups and participation can make the Internet a place where religious beliefs and practices are respected and protected upholding everyone's rights and dignity. It is crucial to work together to stop religious vandalism at its source and encourage positive interactions between people online.

2.4 Literature gap

Even though more and more people are realising how important addressing religious vandalism on social media is, there is still a lack of research that explains the complex and root causes and situations that lead to these actions. Most of the studies that have been done so far have been descriptive and haven't focused on psychological and sociocultural factors. Also, there is a scarcity of research regarding intervention tactics for reducing religious vandalism in online spaces. It is necessary to carry on more research to understand how social identity, social identity behaviour and digital anonymity influence people's activities. Through this effort, it will be possible to suggest more targeted interventions and implementation of policies in the direction of respectful collaboration, social cohesion and a lower level of religious desecration on the Internet.

2.5 Chapter Summary

Religious vandalism on social media is a serious problem for people all over the world at the individual, group, and societal levels. Deindividuation Theory and Social Identity Theory are some of the theories that had a great contribution in identifying the roots and impact of religious vandalism. The occurrence and impact of religious vandalism are demonstrated by an aggregated scope of empirical studies. Furthermore, the conversation highlighted the extent to which it has a corrosive effect on social cohesion, psychological health, and inter-faith relations. A multilateral strategy that involves interreligious dialogue, technological regulation, user enlightenment or education and stakeholder participation is needed to deal with the looming problem effectively. Society needs to avoid religious vandalism and bring a favourable and tolerant virtual society in which people from different religions and beliefs live in harmony. This can be attained by way of supporting digital literacy, promoting courteous communication, mutual respect and robust moderation methods.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research methodology is a central component of research that consists of various steps such as planning, executing and analysing data, information and insights under the study (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). It is a process of specifying philosophical bases, methods, strategies or approaches precisely. This structured method guarantees that research outcomes are relevant, reliable, and replicable. The Saunders Research Onion framework is a handy tool for the researcher as it paves the way for effective research by tackling the dynamics of research theory, approach, strategy, data collection, and analysis (Firdaus et al. 2021). Implementing a solid research methodology by the researchers enables them to maintain reliability and representativeness. Moreover, it also lowers biases, enhances validity, facilitates generalization, promotes transparency and ensures precision within the research.

3.2 Research philosophy

Ontological stance

A research philosophy is the foundational beliefs about the nature of reality. There are two types of research philosophy from the ontological stance: realism and relativism (Sileyew, 2019). Realism believes that there is an objective reality that is separate from individual and subjective perception or understanding within the research. They try to find universal truths and objective viewpoints of the individuals. Relativism, on the other hand, asserts that multiple realities are shaped by cultural, social, and personal differences in perspectives. It also shows the subjective and context-dependent nature of reality. Relativism embraces the diversity of perspectives and interpretations and it emphasizes the significance of context and subjective viewpoint while forming a crucial understanding of reality.

Justification for choosing relativism research philosophy from the ontological stance:

From an ontological point of view, relativism is suitable for the study because it acknowledges the inherent subjectivity and diversity of human experiences and interpretations. According to relativism, there isn't just one objective reality. Instead, there are many realities that change depending on the situation, culture and circumstances. These differences are shaped by cultural, political, and social factors. Adopting a relativism philosophy or viewpoint on the topic of religious vandalism in social media helps the researcher better understand the complex and sometimes shows contradictory perspectives regarding surrounding religious beliefs and

practices. The study can acknowledge the multiple dimensions and diversity of religious identities by accepting relativism. It can help the researcher navigate the complex range of meanings and interpretations associated with religious symbols and rituals from social media contexts. This philosophy can let the researcher focus on how people and groups create their own truths in the digital world. This gives them useful information about the reasons behind and patterns of online religious vandalism under this study. The choice of relativism philosophy under this study also hopes to increase understanding and empathy for various religious groups, perspectives and parties. The choice of dynamic reality can lead to a more open and transformational conversation both online and offline.

Relativism acknowledges the inherent plurality and diversity of religious beliefs, practices, and experiences across different cultures, communities, and individuals. In the context of social media, where users from diverse backgrounds converge and interact, recognizing this plurality is essential for understanding the range of perspectives and experiences related to religion and religious vandalism. By embracing relativism, researchers can approach the study of religious vandalism in social media with openness and sensitivity to the myriad ways in which individuals and communities interpret and express their religious identities online. Relativism emphasizes the importance of context in shaping individuals' perceptions and understandings of reality. In the context of researching religious vandalism in social media, this means recognizing that online interactions and behaviors are influenced by a multitude of contextual factors, including cultural norms, social dynamics, and technological affordances.

Adopting a relativist perspective allows researchers to explore how religious vandalism manifests and is interpreted within specific online communities, platforms, and cultural contexts, rather than imposing universalized assumptions or standards. Relativism encourages epistemological flexibility and reflexivity, recognizing that knowledge is contingent upon the perspectives and positions of researchers and participants. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, this entails acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in the research process and being open to multiple interpretations and understandings of the phenomena under investigation. Researchers adopting a relativist stance are encouraged to engage in reflexive practices, critically examining their own assumptions, biases, and positions of privilege, and considering how these may influence their interpretations and analyses of data. Relativism prioritizes ethical considerations and cultural sensitivity in research, recognizing the importance of respecting and valuing diverse perspectives and experiences. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, this entails approaching research participants and communities with humility, empathy, and respect for their beliefs and values.

Researchers adopting a relativist perspective are attentive to the potential ethical implications of their research practices, including issues of privacy, consent, and representation, and strive to ensure that their research methods and findings are culturally appropriate and ethically sound. Relativism encourages methodological pluralism and interpretive inquiry, recognizing that different research methods and approaches may be appropriate for studying complex and dynamic phenomena. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, this means being open to a range of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, surveys, content analysis, and ethnographic observation. Researchers adopting a relativist stance prioritize the exploration of meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences related to religious vandalism, seeking to uncover the underlying social, cultural, and psychological processes that shape online behaviors and interactions.

Adopting relativism as the research philosophy for studying religious vandalism in social media offers a framework for acknowledging and embracing the complexity, diversity, and contextuality of online phenomena. By recognizing the plurality of religious beliefs and experiences, contextualizing reality within specific cultural and social contexts, maintaining epistemological flexibility and reflexivity, prioritizing ethical considerations and cultural sensitivity, and embracing methodological pluralism and interpretive inquiry, researchers can approach the study of religious vandalism in social media with nuance, humility, and respect for the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals and communities.

Epistemological stance

Epistemological stance is a research philosophy's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how to gain it. Positivism comes from the natural sciences and states that knowledge is objective, and applies to everyone as context does not vary from situation to situation (Greening, 2019). There are two types of research philosophy from the epistemological stance. Positivism philosophy wants value-free, measurable facts to find laws and patterns that apply to everyone. That means the outcome of the research becomes generalizable while positivism is employed within the study. Interpretivism, on the other hand, states that knowledge is subjective and socially created. It focuses on the importance of understanding how people's perceptions, values, beliefs and interpretations are formed in their social settings. Interpretivism philosophy uses a qualitative approach to focus on people's subjective experiences, beliefs, and values (Mishra and Alok, 2022). The researcher wants to get a full understanding matching with the real-world situations and scenarios. Positivism has the goal of finding universal laws, whereas interpretivism focuses on the multidimensional dynamics of

human experiences and social events by recognizing the impact of various interpretations, opinions and perspectives on the formation of knowledge.

Justification for choosing interpretivism philosophy from the epistemological stance: The complex and subjective nature of religious vandalism phenomena is justified by the choice of interpretivism as the research philosophy from an epistemological standpoint for this study. It is much more important to understand people's interpretations and perceptions within their cultural and social contexts (Ocaña-Fernández and Fuster-Guillén, 2021). Interpretivism admits that knowledge is built through social interactions and personal experiences and it enables a dynamic study of the various perspectives, beliefs, and motivations underlying such behaviour in the context of religious vandalism in social media.

By using qualitative methods, interpretivism can allow the researcher to focus deeply on the subjective experiences and views of both perpetrators and victims of religious vandalism. As religious vandalism is quite a sensitive issue to explore, the study can illuminate the underlying dynamics and complexities of this phenomenon using secondary methods and interpretivism philosophy (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). Therefore, interpretivism can make it easier to study how cultural norms, religious differences and social relationships among different communities affect people's thoughts and actions online which can help the researcher to find out possible solutions, and actions to lessen religious tensions online.

Interpretivism recognizes the subjective nature of reality, acknowledging that individuals construct their own understandings of the world based on their interpretations and experiences. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, this means recognizing that online interactions and behaviors are shaped by individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. Adopting an interpretivist perspective allows researchers to explore how individuals interpret and make sense of religious vandalism in social media within their own social and cultural contexts, rather than imposing external or predetermined meanings onto their experiences. Interpretivism focuses on understanding the meaning-making and sense-making processes through which individuals construct and negotiate their social realities. In the context of researching religious vandalism in social media, this involves exploring how individuals interpret and respond to online interactions and content related to religion.

Researchers adopting an interpretivist stance seek to uncover the underlying meanings, interpretations, and motivations behind religious vandalism in social media, recognizing that these may vary depending on individuals' beliefs, values, and social identities. Interpretivism favors qualitative inquiry methods that allow researchers to explore the richness and complexity of individuals' lived experiences within their social and cultural contexts. In the

study of religious vandalism in social media, this means employing methods such as interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation to capture the nuances of online interactions and behaviors. Researchers adopting an interpretivist perspective prioritize contextual understanding, seeking to explore how religious vandalism manifests and is interpreted within specific online communities, platforms, and cultural contexts.

Interpretivism encourages reflexivity and awareness of researchers' own positions, biases, and perspectives, recognizing that these may influence the research process and outcomes. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, this involves acknowledging and critically examining researchers' own beliefs, values, and social identities, and considering how these may shape their interpretations and analyses of data. Researchers adopting an interpretivist stance engage in reflexive practices, actively reflecting on their own roles and positions within the research process and considering how these may impact their understanding of religious vandalism in social media. Interpretivism recognizes that there are multiple realities and interpretations of social phenomena, reflecting the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals and communities. In the context of researching religious vandalism in social media, this means embracing the plurality of meanings and interpretations surrounding online interactions and behaviors related to religion. Researchers adopting an interpretivist perspective are open to exploring and understanding the diverse ways in which individuals interpret and respond to religious vandalism in social media, recognizing that these interpretations may be shaped by factors such as cultural background, religious beliefs, and personal experiences.

Adopting interpretivism as the epistemological stance for studying religious vandalism in social media offers a framework for exploring the subjective meanings, interpretations, and experiences of individuals and communities within their social and cultural contexts. By recognizing the subjective nature of reality, focusing on meaning-making and sense-making processes, employing qualitative inquiry methods, practicing reflexivity and positionality, and embracing multiple realities and interpretations, researchers can approach the study of religious vandalism in social media with nuance, empathy, and sensitivity to the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals and communities.

3.3 Research approach

Research approach is the overall plan or set of methods used to conduct a study. There are two types of research approaches: inductive and deductive approach. When a researcher follows an

inductive approach, the researcher starts the research or study with specific facts or observations and then draws broad conclusions or theories from them (Eisend and Fuss, 2019). It also encourages exploration of the key discussion, models and themes which helps the researcher find new patterns and insights in the data. The deductive research approach, on the other hand, starts with broad theories or hypotheses and compares them to specific facts or data underlying the study. It is organised and based on hypotheses and the goal of study with a deductive approach is to prove or disprove any theory or hypothesis by observing and analysing real-world data and empirical observation (Dubey and Kothari, 2022). Most of the time, inductive reasoning is used in qualitative research and deductive reasoning is more popular in quantitative research.

Justification for choosing the inductive research approach

The choice of the inductive research approach for this study is justified as the research is exploratory. The inductive approach is well-suited to gaining new insights and perceiving the dimensions of religious vandalism in social media. By using inductive reasoning, the researcher can find inherent patterns and themes in data, information and insights and can also draw general conclusions from specific observations. In this study's context, the inductive approach can allow the researcher to examine secondary data on religious vandalism.

The choice of an inductive research approach can let the researcher explore key themes and patterns within the research process. Academic literature and other sources have a lot of different kinds of information that the researcher can use to really understand the event and complexities regarding religious vandalism. The researcher can take this approach to encourage being open and flexible to unexpected results. This helps the researcher learn more about the internal factors that lead to religious vandalism online and guides future research in this field. Religious vandalism in social media is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has yet to be fully understood. Adopting an inductive approach allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in an open-ended and exploratory manner, without preconceived hypotheses or assumptions. By starting with specific observations and instances of religious vandalism in social media, researchers can systematically gather data, identify patterns, and generate insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Inductive research is well-suited for analyzing qualitative data, such as interviews, focus groups, and content analysis, which provide rich, detailed insights into individuals' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, qualitative data allows researchers to capture the nuances and complexities of online interactions and behaviors related to religion.

By immersing themselves in the data and allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically, researchers can uncover the underlying dynamics and motivations driving religious vandalism in social media, generating new hypotheses and research questions. Inductive research offers flexibility and adaptability, allowing researchers to adjust their methods and approaches based on emerging findings and insights. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, where the landscape is constantly evolving and changing, this flexibility is crucial for capturing the dynamic nature of online behaviors and interactions. Researchers adopting an inductive approach can iteratively refine their research questions, sampling strategies, and data collection methods in response to new information and emerging patterns, ensuring that their research remains relevant and responsive to the complexities of the phenomenon.

Inductive research prioritizes contextual understanding, allowing researchers to explore how social, cultural, and technological factors shape individuals' behaviors and interactions in specific contexts. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, understanding the context in which online interactions occur is essential for interpreting the meaning and significance of observed behaviors. By collecting rich, contextual data from diverse sources and perspectives, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and technological factors that contribute to religious vandalism in social media, informing the development of theories and frameworks that capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Inductive research is conducive to theory generation and grounded theory development, allowing researchers to develop theories and conceptual frameworks based on empirical evidence and observed patterns. In the study of religious vandalism in social media, where existing theories may be limited or inadequate, this approach allows researchers to develop new theoretical insights that capture the intricacies of online behaviors and interactions related to religion. By systematically analyzing data, identifying themes and patterns, and iteratively refining their theoretical frameworks, researchers can generate new knowledge and insights that contribute to the advancement of theory in the field of religious vandalism in social media.

Adopting the inductive research approach for studying religious vandalism in social media offers several advantages, including its exploratory nature, suitability for analyzing qualitative data, flexibility and adaptability, emphasis on contextual understanding, and potential for theory generation and grounded theory development. By starting with specific observations and instances of the phenomenon and allowing patterns and themes to emerge organically from the data, researchers can develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of religious vandalism in social media and generate new knowledge and insights that contribute to theory and practice in the field.

3.4 Research Strategy

In the context of this research, the data collection strategy is based on secondary data. This is the strategy of finding out and bringing in insights and information from the already existing materials. Sources such as journals, articles, books, and other publications, are some of the examples of secondary data and insights (Bairagi and Munot, 2019). On the one hand, the systematic approach of secondary data collection lacks direct interaction with the primary respondents, but on the other hand, it can also provide a chance to concentrate deeply on various scholarly literature and knowledge base to address the proposed research question or study objectives. Secondary data collection in general is not only cost-effective but also a time-saver. The researcher can engage in secondary data collection to allow for a thorough investigation of the subject of religious vandalism. Thus, the researcher has a chance to consider the existing knowledge and conduct a detailed investigation along with the central topic of the study. The researcher has drawn upon reliable findings and insights from past studies and secondary peer-reviewed articles or publications. In this way, the researcher can achieve validity, replicability and reliability in their research outcomes. The outcome can be more robust as secondary data, information and insights are easily attainable and verifiable. Besides, secondary data can serve as a rich and comprehensive source of information as it facilitates a more detailed, rigorous and multidimensional understanding of the proposed research topic and contributes to the development of effective solutions to the research questions.

3.5 Data collection details and analysis

In this study, a qualitative analytical approach will be followed and employed to focus on the depth of key information, findings, evaluations, and opinions. These details are found in relevant academic literature regarding religious vandalism in social media. The primary objective of this qualitative analysis is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature and significance of qualitative data regarding religious vandalism. The qualitative analysis in this study has the focus to reveal fundamental issues, impacts and drivers of religious vandalism in the digital platform. The study can also consider its implications for religious communities and societal dynamics. After collecting secondary data, a thematic content analysis will be utilized to identify various types of recurring themes, dimensions, patterns, findings and underlying meanings within the selected peer-reviewed articles or literature (Singh, 2022). By employing thematic content analysis along with a systematic literature review, the study has the ability to capture and derive the multidimensional factors influencing religious vandalism

in the social media context. Thematic content analysis in this study can reveal diverse perspectives, scholarly insights and emerging trends regarding the religious vandalism phenomenon. Understanding multidimensional issues regarding religious vandalism, the study can address religious discourse and take action for societal harmony. This comprehensive analysis can also inform strategies for mitigating religious vandalism online. Moreover, the study outcome can promote respectful and collaborative engagement across diverse religious communities identifying the key causes, conflicts of interest and underlying backgrounds.

3.6 Ethical consideration

The researcher has ensured ethical integrity which is paramount throughout the study to maintain continuous honesty, representation, and reliability of the research method. Data integrity is also crucial which requires the researcher to source additional data from reputable and reliable sources to ensure its authenticity, contemporaneity, and trustworthiness (Ragab and Arisha, 2018). The researcher further complied with ethical norms and worked with correct, authentic, and high-quality data. The researcher conducted extensive and original research to strive for uniqueness in this secondary research. The researcher also cited the original authors as this also shows respecting the intellectual property rights and contributions of the original authors within the field of the study. The researcher proposed that data ownership and copyright regulations are essential mechanisms to safeguard the rights of data subjects. The researcher also upheld data ownership and copyright regulations as vital to safeguard the rights of data sources, necessitating meticulous citation and adherence to copyright regulations when utilizing secondary data within the thematic content analysis and findings extraction. Furthermore, privacy concerns, particularly regarding individual religious group-wide sentiments, opinions, and connections with society have been meticulously considered within the study. Any personally identifiable information utilized in the secondary study has been put to be anonymized by the researcher to protect individuals' privacy rights and confidentiality. In this way, the researcher tried to maintain the maximum possible academic integrity and preserve the rights of data sources.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis & Discussion

4.1 Data analysis and interpretation

4.1.1 Description of structural analysis

The goal of the descriptive/structural analysis is to focus on the specific research methods, chronological structure and themes covered or used within the studies by the authors. A summary of the research context is given in this part such as the chosen research methods, time of publication and thematic areas that were covered matching with the subject matter of the study. By giving this information, the readers can get a full picture of the research methods used within the studies and reviewed papers. The likely outcome or generalized idea about the possible outcome of the study can also be perceived and understood by the readers in this context. This section also makes it easier for the researcher to understand the important scholarly contributions in the field and explore possible scopes of improvement within the relevant subject matter of the study. The chosen papers reviewed within the study are given at the end of the study in Appendix A.

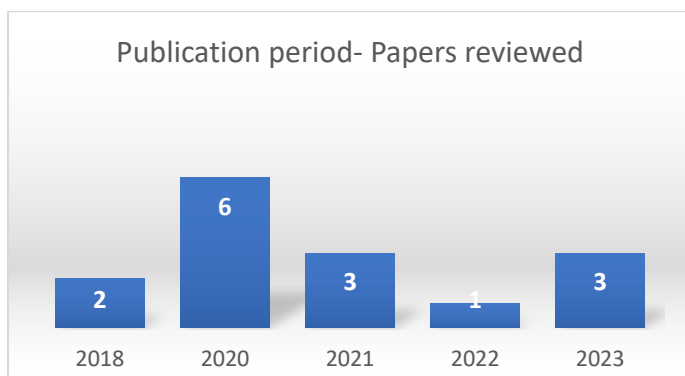


Figure 3: Publication Period- Papers Reviewed (Source- Author)

The number of papers reviewed for the proposed study is 15 in total. Most of the reviewed papers came out after 2019, specifically in 2020. This can show period mischief and trends of religious vandalism in the social media context. There are only 2 articles before 2019, specifically in 2018. However, 2020 is the year when the integration of social media and usage of social media has increased a lot in the post-pandemic world. People were more active in digital platforms and used to interact in virtual platforms. The study captured scenarios and themes both from before the relocation period and after the relocation period perceiving 2019 as the middle time. The study looks at detailed and rigorous insights showing how religious vandalism has become so prevalent in the digital age of social connectivity and interaction.

This type of chronological order of the reviewed papers might enable the researcher to identify key time-specific trends, issues or shifts in the digital world paradigm showing how religious vandalism dimensions change and create an impact on social entities, groups or communities.

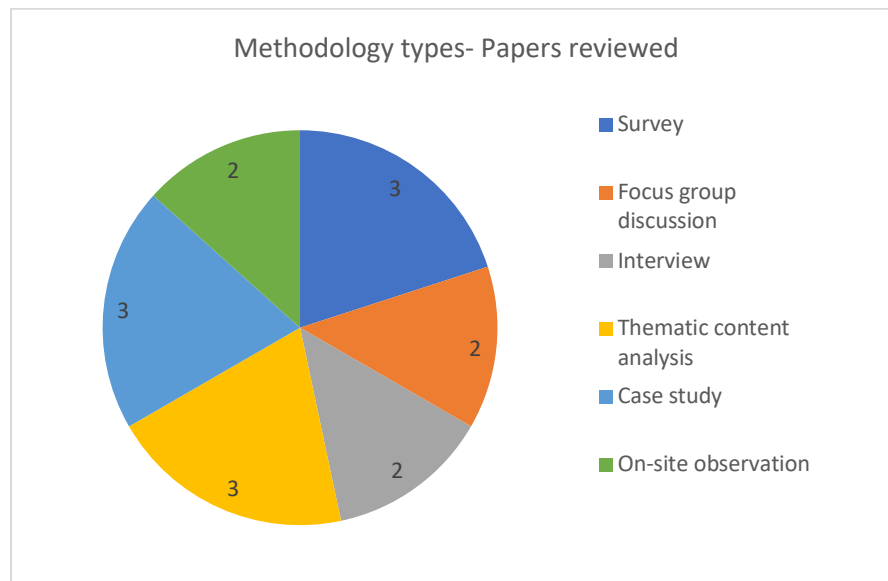


Figure 4: Methodology Employed- Papers Reviewed (Source- Author)

Reviewed papers with different types of research methods were used to look into different parts of the studies in the chosen 15 papers. Three papers used thematic content analysis as their method of its analysis which is part of qualitative data analysis. It was evident that most of the data analysis was conducted on qualitative data, information and insight as the evaluation of religious vandalism in social media is a sensitive topic to undertake and it becomes effective and accessible while employing qualitative and secondary methods of data analysis within the research process. Thematic content analysis along with systematic literature review helps researchers find, analyse and make sensible patterns in qualitative data in a planned way.

This gives them a lot of information about the themes and stories that surround the subject of interest. 3 papers used case studies to give in-depth looks at specific situations or instances linked to the phenomenon of religious vandalism on online platforms. In 2 papers, surveys and interviews were both used to get real-world information and ideas from people from different backgrounds, religious groups and communities. In 2 papers, focus group talks and on-site observations were used to help people interact and see dynamic behaviours relevant to the subject matter of this proposed study area. The reviewed papers have used a diversified range of methods to add to the rigorous and deep-level understanding of the phenomenon of interest by giving the audience new viewpoints and more insights or information before identifying the key themes or issues covered in secondary materials.

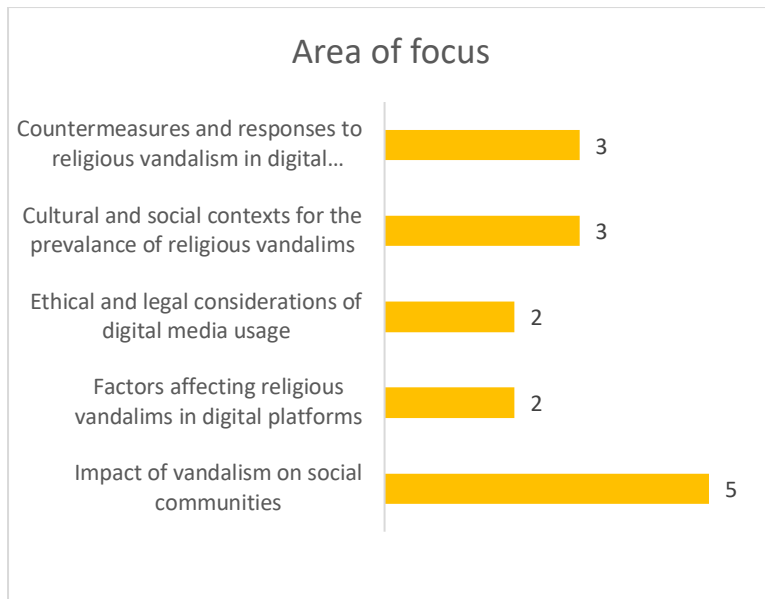


Figure 5: Area of Focus- Papers Reviewed (Source- Author)

The 15 papers covered a wide range of topics connected to religious vandalism on digital platforms before initiating the thematic content analysis within the research process. This shows how dynamic, emerging and complex the problem is and how it has a significant impact on different parts and parties of society or community. 5 of the papers, a large portion of the reviewed papers, examined the impact of religious vandalism on social communities. The range of topics under this category also focused on how it affects people, religious communities and societal dynamics as a whole. At the same time, 2 papers tried to figure out what causes religious vandalism or factors affecting or driving religious vandalism in the digital world or societies.

These papers are concentrated on the identification of key values, beliefs, motives and situations that lead to effective actions or countermeasures against the social stigma or issues. 2 papers talked about the moral and legal issues that come up when using digital media or platforms. These papers emphasised the importance of protecting minority or vulnerable communities free from hate or negative speech while also looking at how hate speech and religious hatred can hurt people, communities and nations in online platforms as a whole. In 3 papers, cultural and social situations are also discussed deeply and these papers explain how historical, cultural, and societal factors affect the frequency, forms, dimensions and types of religious vandalism in digital settings. Lastly, 3 more papers elaborated on ways to stop or mitigate religious vandalism and also suggested various types of effective strategies or recommendations to address different dimensions of religious vandalism. These papers might give ideas on critical issues and resolutions about how to make online interaction, observation,

commenting and discourse more respectful and bring successful strategies, interventions, and policy measures against social media-based religious vandalism. Collectively, these various topics helped the researcher to combine and generate insightful content or findings in the proposed study. It is critical and vital to understand religious vandalism in the digital age better to secure the privacy, protection and rights of various communities, social entities or groups. Moreover, it also promotes social cohesion and collaboration even across different parties while the effectiveness of the resolution or corrective actions is evaluated properly.

4.2 Thematic Content Analysis & Discussion

4.2.1 The Digital Landscape and Forms of Religious Vandalism

*Table 1: Reviewed Papers on The Digital Landscape and Forms of Religious Vandalism
(Source- Author)*

The Digital Landscape and Forms of Religious Vandalism	Number of papers where it was cited	References to the papers where the issues were cited.
Cyberbullying and extremism exacerbate the impact on targeted individuals and communities.	2	Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020); Brown et al. (2023)
Religious vandalism on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.	3	Bruce (2018); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021); Barre et al. (2023)
Religious vandalism in digital forums and chatrooms where anonymity may facilitate harmful behaviour.	2	Scheitle (2018); Schirch (2022)
Religious vandalism is in the form of defamatory content, hate speech, or misinformation on websites and blogs.	1	Fox (2020)
Religious vandalism issues private and group messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram.	2	Brown et al. (2023); Basedau et al. (2023)
Religious symbols and imagery are targeted and manipulated online to propagate vandalism	1	Ruland (2020)
Fake accounts and impersonation are used to amplify vandalism and spread disinformation online	2	Hedges (2021); Adams (2020)

Memes, infographics, and graphic design to perpetrate religious vandalism and spread harmful narratives.	3	Brown (2020); Fox (2020); Castaño-Pulgarín et al. (2021)
Videos containing religious vandalism, such as edited footage or inflammatory speeches	2	Phadke and Mitra (2020); Schirch (2022)
Derogatory language, hate speech, and false narratives aimed at religious groups or individuals.	1	Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020)

Religious vandalism has become the new form of discrimination and various types of digital and online platforms in the modern digital world are presenting serious challenges to individuals and communities all over the world. These are different kinds of actions that are done against religious beliefs, symbols, or practices, usually to hurt or anger people of specific communities or religious groups. Effective strategies to handle and lessen their impact must be developed by the relevant stakeholder group to get long-term social cohesion and collaboration amidst the diversity and presence of various religious groups. A big issue with digital religious vandalism is that it often involves cyberbullying and extremism towards certain religious groups or communities.

The spread of harmful content also targets specific communities and individuals based on their religious affiliations. However, it has been very common or severe due to the emergence and popularity of social media platforms. The emergence of social media and digital platforms also provided people with anonymity and less exposure even after spreading hate speech, hatred or bullying. Research by Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020) and Brown et al. (2023) showed the mechanism stating how cyberbullying and extremism amplify the negative impact on targeted individuals and communities. The consequence of religious vandalism makes vulnerable or victim groups even more alone and unsafe. Bruce (2018) stated that religious vandalism generally spreads on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, where offenders spread false information, hate speech, and content to cause vandalism or conflicts across communities or religious groups.

A lot of wicked people do things such as this, as DiPietro and Dickinson (2021) and Barre et al. (2023) showed that these actions hurt religious feelings and make society more divided rather than placing social cohesion and collaboration. Additionally, social media or digital

channels offer anonymity for which digital platforms and chatrooms might encourage individuals to act in a harmful approach. Scheitle (2018) and Schirch (2022) showed that this lack of accountability and facility of anonymous commenting or posts makes it difficult for people to avoid religious vandalism because they don't have to worry about the effects and exposures.

These types of social media groups, fascism or forums frequently become breeding grounds for intolerance and hate speech. Thus, religious vandalism is becoming a significant challenge as it hinders respectful discourse and understanding across various religious groups. The spread of hate speech, defamatory content and misinformation through websites, social media platforms and blogs is another terrifying driver example or facilitator of digital religious vandalism. Fox (2020) emphasised the negative impact of these actions by showing how they can reinforce stereotypes, incite violence and undermine faith in religious institutions. Platform providers, policymakers and members of the public and private bodies must work together to deal with this type of vandalism and to stop the spread of harmful content while protecting freedom of speech. Also, secret and group messaging apps such as Telegram and WhatsApp have become very dominant where religious vandalism happens and plans are made by wicked type of people. Basedau et al. (2023) and Brown et al. (2023) found that these platforms are used to spread harmful content that targets certain individuals or certain religious groups. Because these conversations are private, it's hard to find and track them and stop them.

Religious symbols and imagery are not respected by extremist people and these are not safe from vandalism in the digital world, rather, they are frequently targeted and changed to spread harmful narratives and stir up conflict. Ruland (2020) drew attention to this troubling trend by highlighting instances in which religious symbols and imagery are ostensibly changed to hurt or trigger certain religious groups. Such actions incite outrage and cause division within religious communities in addition to desecrating sacred symbols among various religious groups or communities.

Often wicked people create fake accounts and impersonate other people to do digital religious vandalism to spread harmful messages and false information. Hedges (2021) and Adams (2020) explained how wicked people use these wrong methods to make their narratives seem more real and take advantage of trust in online communities. They try to control public opinion, views and mindset and damage the integrity of religious debate by pretending to be religious leaders or reputable groups. Memes, infographics, and graphic design have become effective tools for spreading harmful narratives and committing religious vandalism.

Visual content is very destructive at spreading hateful messages and making people hate religious groups or individuals, as shown by Brown (2020), Fox (2020), and Castaño-Pulgarín et al. (2021). These visually appealing but devious works of art frequently use humour, comedy, or sensationalism to get attention and spread virally on social media platforms. The virality elements of the contents make it accessible to more people and influence society with more negative and pronounced adverse impacts. Often video comments spread religious vandalism showing insulting or triggering content targeted at certain religious groups or communities. Phadke and Mitra (2020) and Schirch (2022) mentioned that the use of edited video, inflammatory speeches and deep fake technology are quite frustrating innovations nowadays as they promote spreading false narratives and inciting violence against religious communities. Such videos can easily prompt strong emotional reactions and exacerbate existing tensions, making them effective tools in the hands of those who want to cause trouble and instability in communities. Also, online, there is still a proliferation of offensive language, hate speech, and false narratives directed at certain religious organisations or individuals. Tadjibaeva and Oblomurova (2020) showed a diversified range of harmful impacts of such rhetoric of religion-based vandalism across societies. The emergence of religious vandalism not only undermines religious tolerance but also spreads harmful prejudices and stereotypes across societies and communities. If these harmful narratives are not stopped right now, they can lead to discrimination, violence, and social unrest in the long run. As current issues and the emergence of religious vandalism present serious challenges, the initiatives have to be taken from the root level or the surface level managing people, processes, and policies simultaneously.

4.2.2 Underlying motivations and intentions driving individuals to engage in religious vandalism online

Table 2: Reviewed Papers on Underlying motivations and intentions driving individuals to engage in religious vandalism online (Source- Author)

Underlying motivations and intentions driving individuals to engage in religious vandalism online	Number of papers where it was cited	References to the papers where the issues were cited.
Religious bigotry and intolerance	2	Ruland (2020); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021)

Extremist ideologies and beliefs	2	Schirch (2022); Fox (2020)
Reduced level of inhibitions and accountability.	3	Bruce (2018); Barre et al. (2023); Hedges (2021)
Political ideologies or agendas	2	Phadke and Mitra (2020); Adams (2020)
Personal grievances or frustrations with specific religious groups or beliefs	1	Fox (2020)
Group dynamics and peer influence	1	Brown et al. (2023)
Attention-seeking behaviour, getting validation and notoriety in the digital world	2	Scheitle (2018); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021)
Psychological factors such as anger, resentment, or a desire for control	1	Basedau et al. (2023)
Societal norms, media representations, and cultural attitudes towards religion	2	Fox (2020); Ruland (2020)
The intention of elicit a reaction or response from religious communities or authorities.	3	Tadjibaeva and Oblomurova (2020); Ruland (2020); Castaño-Pulgarín et al. (2021)
Digital Anonymity and Deindividuation	2	Phadke and Mitra (2020); Schirch (2022)

Individuals who commit religious vandalism on different online platforms have a variety of reasons or underlying motivations for doing so. These reasons are frequently based on strong opinions, beliefs and personal grudges towards certain religious beliefs, communities or individuals. For successful strategies to stop and lessen the impact of such behaviour, it is essential to understand and perceive these underlying drivers' causes. According to Ruland (2020), many individuals are involved in online religious vandalism just because they have religious hatred and intolerance as their primary motivations behind such behaviour. People who are prejudiced against certain religious groups or beliefs might want to insult, make fun

of or damage and distort the symbols and customs of the targeted religious or community group in society. DiPietro and

Dickinson (2021) showed that this kind of prejudice can come from cultural biases, old grudges or seeing others as a threat to one's own religious identity even in the digital or social media platform. To demonstrate dominance, support their own beliefs and intimidate or marginalise religious minorities in digital or social media presence, offenders target symbols and imagery that are sacred to other religious groups. Fox (2020) stated that individuals are more likely to commit religious vandalism online when they are motivated by extremist ideas and beliefs. Extremists often see religious symbols and practices as incompatible with their own beliefs. Thus, they may try to get rid of or weaken them by defiling or distorting them. Besides, extremists try to spread fear, start conflicts and get people to support their radical ideas by destroying target religious imagery and using hateful language towards certain communities. Schirch (2022) also added that a sense of religious superiority and a sense of duty to purify or protect one's faith often drive people to act in this way.

According to Bruce (2018), people become more aware of how they sacrifice their rationality while truth with their social identity for the sake of online popularity and virtual fame. Additionally, Hedges (2021) argued that online platforms' privacy and perceived distance or lack of exposure between individuals can create a serene and calm feeling that is favourable to us. They can tell whatever they feel, good or bad, whichever type of post it is. Therefore, official accountability for religious vandalism is scarce. In addition, Barre et al. (2023) have presented the opinion that it makes it possible for people not just to spread ideologies of hate or extremism, but also do so without the fear of suffering from legal considerations accordingly. Coordinated with the statements of Phadke and Mitra (2020), political ideas or aims are most likely to contribute to additional reasons. To fulfil political interests online or on social media, hundreds of people get involved in religious vandalism when this faith overlaps with large social and political confrontations or distribution of power. They can employ or twist religious narratives or symbols in their favour to find a solution to power struggles, intergroup violence or frictions within the communities.

Adams (2020) certified that political advantage is at stake without a change in social ties and power structure. Fox (2020) came up with the idea that individuals can also discharge their anger through acts of vandalism or defamation especially if they have in the process unresolved problems and issues with certain religious groups and faith, respectively. The internet offers users such a platform to stand up for their perceived harassment online, as well as to seek revenge or retribution for past conflicts and ideological differences which is also another reason

for religious vandalism or hate speech. Individuals start classifying each other into positive or negative groups and try to influence others by pointing out symbols. That type of action might depict their negative stereotypes and beliefs about each other.

Individuals committing religious vandalism are also driven by psychological urges, social dynamics and cultural views. It is crucial to perceive these underlying motives for effective intervention and impact reduction in the digital world. Brown et al. (2023) showed that what drives people to create religious vandalism online is due to their belonging to certain groups and peer pressure. The group process can create a feeling of unity and provide the members of the group with the feeling that they can commit such an aggressive act as vandalism. Apart from that, it has been identified to be a way through which the group identity is brought out. Peer pressure within online groups is another factor that could reinforce extremist views or make people's derogatory conduct to be acceptable.

Therefore, it may influence individuals to do harmful acts that would not have normally been done by the same individual without having group exposure or support. Those who wish to be admired and praised on social media tend to post regularly to catch the eye and gain popularity. Scheitle (2018) as well as DiPietro and Dickinson (2021) both mentioned the fact that people do such deeds on social media because they are motivated to make provocative or offensive remarks via the web. About this, what usually comes to mind is the need for attention and recognition. Criminals often make people enter into agreement with their worldview and sometimes even draw their attention to themselves. Sometimes it is an unavoidable price that has to be paid by the community at the expense of its religious abundance or social stability.

One more reason for religious aggression in social communication is quite often fuelled by psychological factors such as feelings of anger, resentment, or power control. According to Basedau et al. (2023), individuals might conduct acts of vandalism or defamatory content out of anger or resentment towards particular religious groups or beliefs. Moreover, individuals' tendency to commit acts of vandalism or hate speech on social media can be influenced by negative media exposure towards certain faiths, as explained by Fox (2020) and Ruland (2020). Cultural biases and stereotypes can make people dislike certain religious groups. It can make discriminatory behaviour acceptable in some online communities.

Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020), Ruland (2020) and Castaño-Pulgarín et al. (2021) focused rigorously on how people who do sinful things want to upset people, start religious conflicts or question religious leaders through their decisions or actions. Criminals try to change social norms, stand up for their own beliefs or show their wrongly perceived independence in the digital world. Schirch (2022) and Phadke and Mitra (2020) both also

focused on how the privacy that online platforms offer can make people less shy and less concerned with the results of their actions. The rise of religious vandalism in the digital world may be attributed to individuals feeling more comfortable doing things they wouldn't normally do in this situation.

4.2.3 Impact of religious vandalism

Table 3: Reviewed Papers on Impact of religious vandalism(Source- Author)

Impacts	Number of papers where it was cited	References to the papers where the issues were cited.
Amplifies intergroup tensions and exacerbates social divisions.	1	Fox (2020)
Perpetuates stereotypes and biases about religious groups.	3	Bruce (2018); Barre et al. (2023); Hedges (2021)
Undermines trust and cohesion within online communities.	2	Fox (2020); Ruland (2020)
Normalizes prejudice and hate speech in digital spaces.	2	Scheitle (2018); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021)
Contributes to the spread of misinformation and extremist ideologies.	2	Hedges (2021); Adams (2020)
Fuels online radicalization and recruitment efforts.	2	Ruland (2020); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021)
Increases the risk of real-world violence and hate crimes.	1	Schirch (2022)
Limits freedom of expression and religious freedoms online.	3	Brown (2020); Fox (2020); Castaño-Pulgarín et al. (2021)
Impacts mental health and emotional well-being of targeted individuals.	2	Phadke and Mitra (2020); Schirch (2022)

Raises ethical and moral concerns about online behavior and responsibility.	1	Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020)
Amplifies intergroup tensions and exacerbates social divisions.	1	Basedau et al. (2023)

Religious vandalism on social media often targets specific religious groups, amplifying existing intergroup tensions and exacerbating social divisions. When individuals encounter hate speech, discrimination, and derogatory content directed at their religious beliefs or practices online, it can create a sense of hostility and animosity towards members of other religious communities (Adams, 2020). The anonymity and immediacy of social media platforms can intensify conflicts between religious groups by providing a platform for individuals to express and disseminate inflammatory rhetoric without facing immediate consequences. As a result, online interactions can escalate into heated debates and conflicts that further polarize religious communities and undermine efforts towards dialogue and reconciliation. Religious vandalism in social media perpetuates stereotypes and biases about religious groups, reinforcing negative perceptions and stigmatizing entire communities based on the actions of a few individuals (Barre et al., 2023). When derogatory memes, images, and videos portraying religious symbols or practices in a negative light are shared and circulated online, they contribute to the dehumanization and marginalization of targeted religious groups (Basedau et al., 2023).

Stereotypical portrayals of religious minorities as extremists, terrorists, or fanatics can fuel prejudice and discrimination in both online and offline contexts, leading to social exclusion, hate crimes, and systemic discrimination. By perpetuating harmful stereotypes, religious vandalism in social media undermines efforts to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect among diverse religious communities (Basedau et al., 2023). Religious vandalism in social media undermines trust and cohesion within online communities by creating a hostile and toxic atmosphere that discourages constructive dialogue and engagement. When individuals are subjected to hate speech, harassment, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs or affiliations, it erodes their sense of safety and belonging in online spaces. Trust is essential for fostering meaningful interactions and collaboration in social media, but religious vandalism can erode trust between users, leading to increased polarization, isolation, and disengagement (Brown, 2020). As a result, online communities may become fragmented and divided along religious lines, hindering efforts to build inclusive and supportive digital environments.

Religious vandalism in social media contributes to the normalization of prejudice and hate speech by desensitizing users to discriminatory rhetoric and dehumanizing imagery (Brown, 2020). When hate speech targeting religious groups becomes pervasive and normalized in online spaces, it can create an environment where discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are tacitly condoned and even celebrated. The normalization of prejudice and hate speech in digital spaces can have far-reaching consequences, perpetuating cycles of discrimination and violence against religious minorities. By normalizing hate speech, religious vandalism in social media undermines efforts to promote diversity, inclusion, and respect in online communities (Bruce, 2018). Religious vandalism in social media contributes to the spread of misinformation and extremist ideologies by amplifying divisive narratives and promoting conspiracy theories. When individuals are exposed to false or misleading information about religious groups, it can fuel paranoia, mistrust, and hostility towards members of those communities (Bruce, 2018). Extremist groups and individuals often exploit social media platforms to disseminate propaganda and recruit followers, exploiting vulnerabilities and grievances within targeted communities. Religious vandalism in social media provides a fertile ground for the spread of extremist ideologies, leading to radicalization and violence in some cases (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021).

The proliferation of misinformation and extremist content in social media undermines public discourse and democratic norms, posing significant challenges to efforts to promote peace, stability, and social cohesion in contemporary society. Religious vandalism in social media fuels online radicalization and recruitment efforts by exploiting vulnerabilities and grievances within targeted communities (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Extremist groups and individuals often use hate speech, propaganda, and incitement to violence to radicalize and recruit vulnerable individuals, capitalizing on their feelings of alienation, anger, and frustration. Social media platforms provide a powerful tool for extremist groups to reach and influence a wide audience, enabling them to disseminate their messages and recruit new followers with relative ease (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021). Religious vandalism in social media plays a central role in the radicalization process by promoting extremist narratives and legitimizing violence as a means of achieving ideological goals.

Efforts to combat online radicalization and recruitment must address the root causes of religious vandalism in social media, including the spread of hate speech, misinformation, and extremist propaganda (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021). By countering extremist narratives and promoting alternative perspectives, stakeholders can reduce the appeal of radical ideologies and mitigate the risk of online radicalization. Religious vandalism in social media increases the

risk of real-world violence and hate crimes by inflaming tensions and promoting hostility towards targeted religious groups (Fox, 2020). When individuals are exposed to hate speech and incitement to violence online, it can normalize and legitimize acts of discrimination and aggression in offline settings. Extremist ideologies propagated through social media platforms can inspire individuals to commit acts of terrorism, hate crimes, and violence against members of religious minorities. Religious vandalism in social media serves as a catalyst for radicalization and mobilization, facilitating the spread of extremist propaganda and inciting individuals to engage in violent acts (Fox, 2020).

The impact of religious vandalism on social media extends beyond digital spaces, with real-world consequences for individuals, families, and communities. Efforts to address religious vandalism in social media must prioritize the prevention of offline violence and hate crimes, including measures to counter extremist narratives and promote tolerance and understanding among diverse religious communities (Hedges, 2021). Religious vandalism in social media limits freedom of expression and religious freedoms online by silencing dissenting voices and marginalizing minority perspectives. When individuals are targeted or harassed online because of their religious beliefs or affiliations, it restricts their ability to freely express and practice their faith (Hedges, 2021). Censorship and online censorship targeting religious speech can inhibit dialogue and debate on important religious and social issues, limiting the diversity of perspectives and viewpoints that are represented in online spaces. Religious vandalism in social media undermines efforts to promote freedom of expression and religious freedoms online, creating a chilling effect that stifles dissent and diversity of thought (Phadke and Mitra, 2020). Efforts to combat religious vandalism in social media must uphold principles of free speech and religious freedom, ensuring that individuals are able to express themselves and engage in meaningful dialogue without fear of reprisal or censorship (Ruland, 2020). By promoting an open and inclusive online environment, stakeholders can foster constructive dialogue and understanding among diverse religious communities. Religious vandalism in social media impacts the mental health and emotional well-being of targeted individuals by subjecting them to harassment, discrimination, and online abuse (Ruland, 2020). When individuals are exposed to hate speech and derogatory content based on their religious beliefs or affiliations, it can have significant psychological effects, leading to feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression. Cyberbullying and online harassment targeting individuals because of their religious identity can have long-lasting effects on mental health, contributing to low self-esteem, social isolation, and even suicidal ideation in extreme cases. Religious vandalism in social media exacerbates

existing mental health challenges and creates additional barriers to seeking help and support (Scheitle, 2018).

Efforts to address religious vandalism in social media must prioritize the mental health and well-being of targeted individuals, providing resources and support services to help them cope with the psychological impact of online abuse. By raising awareness about the mental health effects of religious vandalism and promoting resilience-building strategies, stakeholders can mitigate the harmful effects of online harassment and discrimination (Scheitle, 2018).

Religious vandalism in social media raises ethical and moral concerns about online behavior and responsibility, highlighting the need for ethical guidelines and regulations to govern digital interactions (Schirch, 2022). When individuals engage in hate speech, harassment, and discrimination online, it raises questions about the ethical implications of their actions and the responsibilities of social media platforms to address harmful content (Schirch, 2022). The anonymity and pseudonymity afforded by social media platforms can create a sense of impunity among users, enabling them to engage in abusive behavior without facing immediate consequences. Religious vandalism in social media underscores the importance of holding individuals and platforms accountable for their online conduct, including measures to combat hate speech, misinformation, and extremist propaganda (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020). Efforts to promote ethical and responsible online behavior must emphasize the importance of empathy, respect, and civility in digital interactions, encouraging users to consider the impact of their words and actions on others. By fostering a culture of accountability and responsibility in social media, stakeholders can create a safer and more inclusive online environment that upholds fundamental principles of human dignity and rights (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020).

4.2.4 Effective strategies to combat religious vandalism in social media to develop and build a cohesive, collaborative and diversified social structure

Table 4: Reviewed Papers on Effective strategies to combat religious vandalism in social media (Source- Author)

Effective strategies	Number of papers where it was cited	References to the papers where the issues were cited.

Strengthen content moderation and enforce strict policies against hate speech.	1	Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020)
Foster interfaith dialogue and understanding through online forums and events.	2	Phadke and Mitra (2020); Schirch (2022)
Empower community leaders and civil society organizations to counter religious vandalism.	2	Scheitle (2018); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021)
Promote digital literacy and critical thinking skills among social media users.	2	Scheitle (2018); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021)
Leverage technology to amplify positive messages and counter extremist narratives.	1	Basedau et al. (2023)
Advocate for legal measures to hold individuals and platforms accountable for hate speech.	2	Fox (2020); Ruland (2020)
Invest in education and awareness campaigns to combat religious discrimination online.	3	Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020); Ruland (2020); Castaño-Pulgarín et al. (2021)
Facilitate cross-sector collaboration between governments, tech companies, and civil society.	2	Phadke and Mitra (2020); Schirch (2022)
Encourage empathy, respect, and understanding among social media users.	2	Hedges (2021); Adams (2020)
Support initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance in online spaces.	2	Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova (2020); Brown et al. (2023)

Strengthen content moderation and enforce strict policies against hate speech.	3	Bruce (2018); DiPietro and Dickinson (2021); Barre et al. (2023)
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Content moderation plays a crucial role in combating religious vandalism in social media by removing harmful content that incites violence, discrimination, or hatred towards religious groups. Platforms need to implement clear and enforceable policies against hate speech and religious discrimination, with robust mechanisms for identifying and removing offending content (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020). Strict enforcement of these policies sends a clear message that religious vandalism will not be tolerated on social media platforms, helping to create a safer and more inclusive online environment for users of all religious backgrounds. Interfaith dialogue initiatives provide opportunities for individuals from different religious backgrounds to come together, engage in respectful conversation, and build mutual understanding and empathy (Tadjibaeva and Oblomuradova , 2020). Social media platforms can serve as powerful tools for facilitating interfaith dialogue by hosting online forums, webinars, and virtual events where participants can share their perspectives, experiences, and insights (Schirch, 2022).

By fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding in online spaces, social media platforms can help to break down stereotypes, dispel misconceptions, and promote respect and tolerance among diverse religious communities (Schirch, 2022). Community leaders and civil society organizations play a crucial role in combating religious vandalism by mobilizing grassroots efforts to promote tolerance, respect, and inclusivity online. Social media platforms can support these efforts by providing resources, training, and technical assistance to empower community leaders and organizations to effectively counter hate speech and discrimination (Scheitle, 2018). By empowering community leaders and civil society organizations, social media platforms can tap into the expertise and networks of local communities to develop targeted strategies for addressing religious vandalism and promoting positive social change (Scheitle, 2018).

Digital literacy and critical thinking skills are essential for navigating the complexities of online spaces and discerning between reliable information and misinformation (Barre et al., 2023). Social media platforms can play a role in promoting digital literacy by providing educational resources, tutorials, and interactive tools to help users develop the skills they need to critically evaluate content related to religion (Ruland, 2020). By promoting digital literacy and critical thinking skills among social media users, platforms can empower individuals to identify and

respond to religious vandalism, misinformation, and hate speech in their online communities, contributing to a more informed and responsible online discourse (Ruland, 2020).

Technology can be a powerful tool for amplifying positive messages and countering extremist narratives online. Social media platforms can leverage algorithms, AI, and data analytics to identify and promote content that fosters tolerance, understanding, and empathy among diverse religious communities (Phadke and Mitra, 2020). By strategically targeting and amplifying positive messages, social media platforms can help to drown out extremist voices and create a more balanced and inclusive online environment where diverse perspectives are valued and respected. (Phadke and Mitra, 2020) Legal measures play a critical role in holding individuals and platforms accountable for spreading hate speech and inciting violence or discrimination against religious groups. Governments can enact and enforce laws that prohibit hate speech and religious discrimination online, with penalties for individuals and platforms that violate these laws (Phadke and Mitra, 2020).

By advocating for legal measures to combat religious vandalism, social media platforms can demonstrate their commitment to promoting a safe and inclusive online environment for users of all religious backgrounds, while also protecting freedom of expression and upholding democratic values (Hedges, 2021). Education and awareness campaigns are essential for raising public awareness about the dangers of religious vandalism and promoting positive behaviors and attitudes online. Social media platforms can collaborate with governments, civil society organizations, and religious leaders to develop and implement targeted campaigns that educate users about the importance of respect, tolerance, and inclusivity in online spaces (Hedges, 2021). By investing in education and awareness campaigns, social media platforms can empower users to recognize and respond to religious vandalism, misinformation, and hate speech, contributing to a more respectful and harmonious online community (Fox, 2020).

Cross-sector collaboration is essential for developing holistic strategies to combat religious vandalism and promote a cohesive and collaborative online environment (Basedau et al., 2023). Governments, tech companies, civil society organizations, and religious leaders can work together to share resources, expertise, and best practices for addressing hate speech and discrimination online (Fox, 2020). By facilitating cross-sector collaboration, social media platforms can harness the collective efforts of stakeholders from different sectors to develop comprehensive and effective strategies for combating religious vandalism and promoting a diverse and inclusive online community (DiPietro and Dickinson, 2021). Empathy, respect, and understanding are foundational principles for fostering positive relationships and promoting tolerance and inclusivity online (Adams, 2020). Social media platforms can

encourage these values by promoting empathy-building exercises, dialogue facilitation techniques, and community-building initiatives that emphasize the importance of treating others with kindness, compassion, and respect. By encouraging empathy, respect, and understanding among social media users, platforms can create a more welcoming and supportive online environment where individuals feel valued, heard, and respected, regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliations (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021).

Initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance are essential for creating a cohesive and collaborative online community where individuals from all religious backgrounds feel welcome and valued (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021). Social media platforms can support these initiatives by providing funding, resources, and technical assistance to organizations and initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance in online spaces (Brown, 2020). By supporting initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance, social media platforms can demonstrate their commitment to creating a more equitable and respectful online environment where individuals from diverse religious backgrounds can come together to share ideas, engage in dialogue, and build connections based on mutual respect and understanding (Bruce, 2018).

Chapter 5: Conclusion & Recommendations

The digital landscape of social media provides a platform for individuals to express their beliefs, opinions, and ideologies to a global audience. However, it also serves as a fertile ground for various forms of religious vandalism, including hate speech, derogatory imagery, and targeted harassment. One of the key characteristics of religious vandalism in social media is its diversity, with manifestations ranging from subtle microaggressions to overt acts of discrimination and violence. Examples include derogatory memes, offensive comments, doxing, and the dissemination of extremist propaganda targeting specific religious groups. Religious vandalism can manifest through cyberbullying and harassment directed at individuals or communities based on their religious beliefs or practices. This can include targeted attacks, threats, and intimidation, which create a hostile online environment and undermine individuals' sense of safety and well-being. Individuals may engage in religious vandalism by manipulating or defacing religious symbols, icons, or sacred texts to convey derogatory or offensive messages.

This form of vandalism aims to provoke religious communities and instigate conflict by desecrating symbols that hold deep cultural and spiritual significance. Religious vandalism can involve the creation and spread of misinformation or false narratives about religious groups, beliefs, or practices. This can contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes, misconceptions, and conspiracy theories, which fuel prejudice and discrimination against targeted communities. Some individuals use social media platforms to incite violence and extremism against religious minorities, advocating for acts of terrorism, hate crimes, or genocide. This form of religious vandalism poses a significant threat to public safety and national security, requiring swift and decisive action from authorities. Religious vandalism may also involve doxing (the release of personal information) or online stalking targeting individuals based on their religious affiliation. This invasion of privacy can lead to real-world consequences, including harassment, intimidation, and physical violence.

Several underlying motivations and intentions drive individuals to engage in religious vandalism online. These may include ideological extremism, religious intolerance, social identity threats, and psychological factors such as anonymity and group conformity. Ideological extremists may use social media as a tool for spreading hate and inciting violence against religious minorities, motivated by a desire to promote their extremist agenda and recruit new followers. Religious intolerance, fueled by deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes, may lead individuals to engage in acts of vandalism to express their disdain for other religious

groups or assert their own religious superiority. Social identity threats, such as perceived threats to one's cultural or religious identity, may also drive individuals to engage in defensive behaviors, including vandalism, as a means of asserting their identity and defending their group against perceived threats.

Individuals driven by ideological extremism may engage in religious vandalism to promote their extremist beliefs and ideologies. This can include spreading hate-filled propaganda, glorifying acts of violence, and recruiting followers to their cause through social media platforms. Religious vandalism may stem from deep-seated religious intolerance and prejudice against specific religious groups or traditions. Individuals motivated by religious bigotry may seek to denigrate, marginalize, or exclude members of other faith communities through online acts of vandalism. Individuals experiencing social identity threats, such as perceived challenges to their religious identity or group status, may engage in defensive behaviors, including religious vandalism, to protect their sense of identity and belonging. This can lead to intergroup conflicts and tensions within online communities.

The anonymity afforded by social media platforms can embolden individuals to engage in religious vandalism without fear of accountability or consequences. Additionally, group conformity dynamics may influence individuals to conform to the norms and values of online communities that promote religious vandalism. Psychological factors, such as feelings of anger, resentment, or alienation, may drive individuals to lash out against religious minorities or express their frustrations through acts of vandalism in online spaces. These individuals may perceive religious vandalism as a means of exerting power or control in a virtual environment. The impact of religious vandalism in social media is multifaceted and far-reaching, with implications for intergroup relations, social cohesion, and individual well-being. At the interpersonal level, religious vandalism can lead to feelings of fear, anger, and insecurity among targeted individuals, undermining their sense of safety and belonging in online spaces. It can also perpetuate stereotypes, stigmatize entire religious communities, and contribute to the normalization of prejudice and discrimination. Moreover, religious vandalism can fuel intergroup tensions and exacerbate social divisions, leading to heightened levels of mistrust, animosity, and conflict between religious groups. In extreme cases, it may contribute to real-world violence and hate crimes, posing significant challenges to efforts to promote peace, stability, and social harmony.

Religious vandalism can have significant psychological impacts on targeted individuals, including feelings of fear, anxiety, and distress. Victims may experience emotional trauma and psychological distress as a result of online harassment, discrimination, or threats directed at

their religious identity. Religious vandalism contributes to social division and polarization by reinforcing existing stereotypes, prejudices, and divisions between religious communities. This can create a climate of distrust, animosity, and hostility between individuals of different religious backgrounds, undermining efforts to promote social cohesion and unity. The prevalence of religious vandalism in social media poses threats to freedom of expression and religious freedom, limiting individuals' ability to freely express their religious beliefs or engage in open dialogue about religious issues without fear of censorship or reprisal.

Religious vandalism undermines trust and cohesion within online communities by creating a toxic and hostile environment that discourages open dialogue and collaboration. Individuals may feel unsafe or unwelcome in online spaces where religious vandalism is prevalent, leading to disengagement and withdrawal from digital communities. Religious vandalism in social media can have real-world consequences, including hate crimes, acts of violence, and discrimination against religious minorities. Online rhetoric and propaganda promoting religious extremism and hatred can radicalize individuals and incite them to commit acts of violence or terrorism in the name of their beliefs.

Several effective strategies can be implemented to combat religious vandalism in social media and promote a more cohesive, collaborative, and diversified social structure. These include:

1. Strengthening content moderation and enforcing strict policies against hate speech and religious discrimination to create a safer and more inclusive online environment.
2. Fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding through online forums, events, and initiatives that promote mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation among diverse religious communities.
3. Empowering community leaders and civil society organizations to counter religious vandalism through grassroots efforts, education, and advocacy campaigns.
4. Promoting digital literacy and critical thinking skills among social media users to empower them to identify and respond to religious vandalism, misinformation, and extremist propaganda.
5. Leveraging technology to amplify positive messages and counter extremist narratives by promoting content that fosters tolerance, understanding, and respect among diverse religious communities.
6. Advocating for legal measures to hold individuals and platforms accountable for spreading hate speech and inciting violence or discrimination against religious groups.
7. Investing in education and awareness campaigns to raise public awareness about the dangers of religious vandalism and promote positive behaviors and attitudes online.

8. Facilitating cross-sector collaboration between governments, tech companies, civil society organizations, and religious leaders to develop comprehensive and effective strategies for combating religious vandalism.
9. Encouraging empathy, respect, and understanding among social media users by promoting values of kindness, compassion, and inclusivity in online interactions.
10. Supporting initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and tolerance in online spaces through funding, resources, and technical assistance.

Overall, combating religious vandalism in social media requires a coordinated and multi-faceted approach that addresses the underlying motivations and intentions driving individuals to engage in vandalism, while also promoting positive behaviors, attitudes, and values that foster a more inclusive, respectful, and harmonious online community. By implementing effective strategies and collaborating across different sectors, stakeholders can work together to create a digital landscape that promotes diversity, tolerance, and social cohesion, ultimately contributing to the development of a cohesive, collaborative, and diversified social structure in online spaces.

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