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Locked in echoes: unveiling the dynamics of social media echo chambers and Hindu radicalization targeting Muslim youth in Delhi

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The concept of a social media echo chamber is when someone is exposed to biased and personal media that ignores diverse viewpoints and opposing viewpoints. There are many underlying causes for the radicalization of Hindu youth in Delhi, and the problem is complex. An in-depth examination of Hindu nationalism, a political ideology that promotes the creation of a Hindu Rashtra predominantly focused on the supremacy of the upper caste, especially Brahmin principles, is imperative within the realm of development studies. The repercussions of the radicalization of Hindu youth in Delhi are particularly significant as a result of the aggressive actions against Muslims that have resulted from this ideology, which have induced a climate of dread and disquiet. Extremist organizations use echo chambers as a propaganda tool to indoctrinate youth. These virtual worlds reinforce pre-existing convictions by providing information that supports their ideology. This research investigates the subtleties of social media echo chambers to evaluate the radicalization of Hindus and its repercussions on the experiences of Muslim youth in Delhi. The goal of this study is to pinpoint the underlying mechanisms by which social media echo chambers facilitate the radicalization of Hindus and the targeting of Muslim youth.

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Introduction

Social media's widespread use, particularly among younger generations, has made it an effective instrument in the radicalization process (Lavenne-Collot et al. 2022). Extremist organizations use these venues to establish "echo chambers," where they stifle dissenting opinions and reinforce their ideologies. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of extremism, notably impacting Delhi's Muslim youth. Specifically, the problem at stake is the part that social media plays in the radicalization of Hindu extremists who are aiming their attacks at Muslim youths in Delhi. Previous research has shed light on the overall influence that social media has on radicalization; however, it has not adequately addressed the specific mechanisms and repercussions that are associated with this environment (Vergani et al. 2020).

Echo chambers, as understood in the context of social media, represent digital environments where users are largely exposed to information and opinions that correspond with their established beliefs, thereby restricting their access to various viewpoints and reinforcing particular ideologies (Terren and Borge-Bravo, 2021). Radicalization is defined as the process by which individuals or groups embrace extreme beliefs or ideologies that significantly deviate from accepted societal standards. In the scope of this research, we concentrate on the radicalization of Hindu groups that specifically target Muslim youth in Delhi, a process facilitated by social media echo chambers (Mirchandani 2018). Extremism, a concept intimately associated with radicalization, entails the adoption of radical perspectives often coupled with a readiness to employ violence in pursuit of ideological goals (Jensen et al. 2020).

Therefore, there is a pressing need for a targeted inquiry into the ways in which social media echo chambers encourage radicalization among Hindu extremists and the ways in which this, in turn, impacts Muslim youth in Delhi.

Objectives and Research Questions

This investigation aims to comprehend the intricacies of social media echo chambers and their impact on the indoctrination of Hindu extremities that are directed toward the Muslim youth in Delhi. Social media has completely transformed how information is disseminated and comprehended in recent years, marking a significant shift. This inquiry endeavors to illuminate the influence of social media platforms, particularly echo chambers, on the radicalization of Hindu individuals whose focus is specifically on the Muslim youth residing in Delhi. The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To explore how social media echo chambers contribute to the radicalization of Hindu extremists.
2. To understand the specific effects of this radicalization on the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by the Muslim youth in Delhi.

In line with these objectives, the research will address the following questions:

1. What role do social media echo chambers play in the dissemination and reinforcement of extremist ideologies among Hindu groups?
2. How does the radicalization of Hindu extremists through social media influence the perceptions, behaviors, and experiences of Muslim youth in Delhi?

The significance of this research is found in its attention to the relationship between social media dynamics and intercommunity interactions in a particular metropolitan setting. This study seeks to provide sophisticated knowledge of how online platforms, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, affect real-world conflicts and the radicalization process by looking at the role of social media in promoting extremist ideology and its consequent effect on targeted populations. Data collected through interviews with academics and students who have personally suffered harassment at the hands of these radical groups will form the basis of the conclusions. This qualitative methodology will offer a deep understanding of the lived experiences of people impacted and the wider societal ramifications of radicalization fueled by social media. The study attempts to clarify the crucial topic of social media's contribution to Hindu extremist radicalization and its significant consequences on Delhi's Muslim youth. This way, it hopes to add to the larger conversation on social media, extremism, and relationships across communities. The research interviews were conducted in 2023, focusing on central universities such as Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi.

Literature review

Several essential aspects affect how the material is shared on social media networks. Social media platforms are vulnerable to spreading false information due to algorithms that curate content based on user's preferences, which can contribute to online polarization and echo chambers (Berman and Katona 2020). Likewise, an echo chamber can operate as a tool to strengthen an already existing perspective among a particular group, leading to a radical shift towards more extreme positions among the entire group. Through an extensive analysis of relevant research and scholarly literature, the review intends to clarify the factors that drive echo chambers and the methods by which radicalization is sustained. This review aims to clarify the components that drive echo chambers and perpetuate radicalization by delving into pertinent scholarly literature and research.

Echo chambers and radicalization. The emergence of echo chambers can result in a setting favorable to radicalization. This occurs when individuals are presented with solely those ideas and viewpoints that validate their pre-existing convictions, which can strengthen extremist doctrines. In Delhi, these echo chambers may function as breeding grounds for Hindu radicalization that is aimed at Muslim youth, thereby intensifying pre-existing societal divisions and conflicts. It is highly improbable that establishing such a setting could have negligible ramifications for the community and require prompt consideration and involvement. The "Echo chamber" phenomenon is rooted in the potential adverse effects of self-selection. Users actively search for ideologically congruent content and affiliations, forming insular and homogeneous networks. Such networks operate as "Echo chambers" by promoting opinion extremism through mutual reinforcement and segregating themselves from ideologically incongruent individuals and ideas (Sunstein 2009). Our investigation stresses the importance of the online network structure as a predictor of extreme attitudes and a new way to understand the echo chamber phenomenon. We aim to explore the interactive impacts of these echo chambers and radicalization, which represents a new direction for future studies.

The role of social media in echo chambers. Social media platforms have become prevalent sites for developing echo chambers in recent years. Using algorithms and customized content suggestions by social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to amplify users' pre-existing convictions by advertising content that conforms with their preferences is extensively recorded. The research indicates that this phenomenon is a critical factor in the growing polarization and the

establishment of ideological differences within society. Hence, the societal impact of this trend and its prospective trajectory cannot be exaggerated. According to recent Twitter research, the dissemination of false news is reportedly more widespread than reliable news (Vosoughi et al. 2018). A heterogeneous group of individuals and organizations affect the distribution of information on social media platforms. The proliferation of false information may be facilitated by online polarization (Vicario et al. 2019). Despite the abundance of information, our attention span remains limited, and feed algorithms may constrain our choices by recommending content similar to our customary exposure (Bakshy et al. 2015). According to Sunstein, an echo chamber can serve as a mechanism for strengthening a pre-existing viewpoint within a group, thereby propelling the entire Social Media group towards more radical stances (Sunstein 1999). According to Tokita et al. (2021), people immersed in echo chambers may find it harder to receive information, even from sources they would ordinarily trust. Individuals demonstrating heightened responsiveness to socially shared information in environments characterized by high information polarization are more likely than their less responsive counterparts to cultivate politically homogeneous information environments, resulting in a decrease in information diffusion to avoid overreactions to news items they consider unimportant (Tokita et al. 2021). This leads to an increased probability of individuals developing extreme opinions and overestimating their level of information (Tokita et al. 2021). The creation and maintenance of echo chambers within social media platforms constitute a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors, including echo chambers, algorithmic biases, and the inherent tendency of individuals with analogous perspectives to assemble (Wolfowicz et al. 2023). A comprehensive examination of the interrelations and dynamics among these components —echo chambers, algorithms, and social group behavior is crucial for a more profound comprehension of the matter. Additionally, investigating the mechanisms of Hindu radicalization aimed at Muslim youth within these echo chambers can yield valuable insights regarding the wider societal ramifications. By recognizing these contributory elements, including algorithmic filtering and group polarization, we can formulate approaches to alleviate the repercussions of echo chambers and foster a richer diversity of perspectives and comprehension.

Amplification of extremist content. Social media platforms have amassed significant examination lately for their role in aiding the spread of extremist content, including falsified news and hateful language (Singer and Brooking, 2018). The circulation of such content within insulated echo chambers can further strengthen radical ideologies and deepen societal divides. For this reason, it is necessary to scrutinize the obligations of social media firms in preventing the distribution of extremist materials and mitigating radicalization. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of these duties is crucial in mitigating the adverse effects of online radicalism. Mel and Frank have categorized a webpage into four sentiment-based classes, namely pro-extremist, anti-extremist, neutral, and irrelevant. They have proposed a web crawler capable of crawling webpages exhibiting pro-extremist sentiment and attaining an accuracy rate of 80% (Mei and Frank 2015). The study examines the distinctive characteristics that set apart websites promoting terrorist agendas from those advocating the fight against terrorism. Additionally, an automated web crawler is presented that conducts Internet searches for extremist content by utilizing these unique features (Bouchard et al. 2014).

Impacts on Muslim youth in Delhi. The current analysis focuses on the Muslim youth residing in Delhi, who might be vulnerable to the deliberate initiatives of Hindu radicalization within the parameters of social media echo chambers. It is crucial to understand the implications of these echo chambers on Muslim youth, encompassing the effects of Hindu radicalization endeavors aimed at them and the potential consequences for social cohesion to formulate effective counterstrategies. It is of utmost importance to comprehend the impact of echo chambers on Muslim youth for the development of efficacious measures to combat the peril of radicalization. Motivated by a combination of institutional, ideological, political, and religious animosity that manifests as both structural and cultural racism, there exists a targeting of the symbols and indicators of Muslim identity (Awan and Zempi 2020). The concept of Islamophobia has garnered significant attention in India owing to the perilous nature of its fatal manifestations under the guise of Hindu extremism (Kunnummal 2022). Paul Brass posits that a structured and systematic riot system is in place, which is perpetuated and managed by Hindu extremists. This system aims to solidify the Hindu vote bank during periods of political upheaval and anticipated challenges (Brass 2011).

Strategies for countering Hindu radicalization. To address the negative consequences of echo chambers and the targeting of Muslim youth by Hindu radicalization, a range of strategies can be implemented (Bhaduri 2019). These could involve enhancing media literacy, cultivating interfaith communication, encouraging various content on social media channels, and collaborating with communities influenced by radicalization (Bajpai 2021). It is of utmost importance to assess the efficacy of these techniques and pinpoint the most prosperous approaches toward enhancing results. Therefore, establishing best practices is of utmost importance.

Theoretical Framework
The "spiral of silence" posits that individuals are more reticent to express their viewpoints when they perceive themselves as in the minority out of apprehension regarding potential social repercussions or exclusion (Noelle-Neumann 1974). Consequently, the minority opinion is stifled, and the majority opinion gains strength, resulting in a downward spiral in which the majority opinion becomes more vocal, and the minority opinion remains mute. This phenomenon can substantially influence societal decision-making processes and public discourse. According to the theory, this leads to a vicious cycle of silence in which marginalized voices progressively fade into the background. Aiming to appropriate the experiences and circumstances of Delhi's Muslim minority, the "spiral of silence" theory explores the relationship between religion and political information on social media and the youth of Delhi. This hypothesis should pique your interest if you are interested in how social media platforms undermine societal cohesion and instrumentalize religion. To be more precise, the theory suggests that young people are less likely to share their religious views on social media if they think they are in the minority and more likely to share them if they think they are in the majority.

When people utilize social media, they may create "echo chambers" where they only see content confirming their beliefs and worldview. This phenomenon can be better understood through the "spiral of silence" theory. This trend toward reiterating preexisting beliefs and avoiding engagement with dissenting perspectives in online religious discourse could impact how young people in Delhi see religion. To study how the "spiral of silence" theory affects the perception of religious organizations among Delhi's youth, this research will gather qualitative data
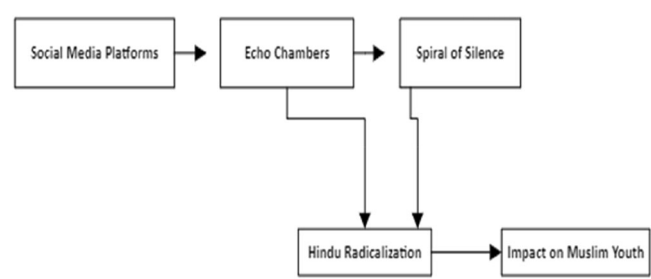
Fig. 1 This diagram provides a clear, structured way to understand the dynamics of social media echo chambers and their impact on radicalization.

Table 1 Overview of Participants with Codes – The table presents a list of participants involved in the study.

Participant Code	Role
A1	Academic
A2	Academic
A3	Academic
A4	Academic
A5	Academic
S1	Student
S2	Student
S3	Student
S4	Student
S5	Student
S6	Student
S7	Student
S8	Student
S9	Student
S10	Student
S11	Student
S12	Student
S13	Student
S14	Student
S15	Student

"A" represents Academicians, and "S" represents Students.

using semi-structured interviews. Based on the "spiral of silence" theory, this study will examine the influence of social media echo chambers on the radicalization process among Muslim youth residing in Delhi, with a specific emphasis on the intricacies of Hindu radicalization that specifically target the Muslim population.

Integration of spiral of silence theory with research. Social media platforms frequently foster echo chambers, wherein individuals engage solely with content that affirms their pre-existing beliefs while excluding material that challenges these convictions. Within the framework of young Muslim individuals residing in Delhi, this occurrence exacerbates the prevalence of Hindu extremist ideologies, rendering them seemingly more socially accepted and pervasive. This prevailing perception further marginalizes Muslim voices, thereby reinforcing the spiral of silence —a theoretical framework positing that individuals are less inclined to articulate dissenting opinions when they believe their perspectives are in the minority (see Fig. 1).

In these echo chambers, Hindu radicals predominantly steer the discourse, persistently validating their beliefs and imparting an impression of societal endorsement. The absence of counter-narratives from Muslim youth further stifles opposition, allowing extremist ideologies to gain increased traction. As Muslim youth perceive themselves as silenced and marginalized from the dialogue, this sense of alienation may result in reactive radicalization, wherein they seek community and support through alternative avenues, potentially including radical groups.

Methodology
This study employed an interview method to gather data. The researcher set up twenty in-depth qualitative conversations (Table 1). The interviews were conducted with students and experts selected for their contributions to media studies from central universities in Delhi, such as Delhi University, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Jawaharlal Nehru University. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 30. Most of the academicians and students lived in Delhi. Interviews with youth in Delhi were used in this study paper. The Zoom app was used to connect the participants. The interview asked how the people who filled it out use social media, how often they see religious material on social media, and how they feel about religion. The interviewed people were found on social media sites and chosen based on how they answered the poll. The poll was conducted on a social media site, through which we found participants, and it included fundamental questions regarding social media and religion. People who participated in the interviews were asked about their religious beliefs, how often they saw religious material on social media, and how they felt about religion. The intricate relationship between social media echo chambers and the alarming trend of Hindu radicalization, which mainly targets Muslim youth in Delhi, was

investigated by the researchers using one-on-one interviews. Before the interviews started, participants indicated their willingness to participate in this vital research endeavor by providing informed consent.

Each participant received an individual interview from the researchers, allowing for lengthy, in-depth discussions. Inferring that there may have been a series of questions in advance, it is likely that the interviews had a somewhat planned framework. The researchers were granted the latitude to investigate emerging themes and meticulously analyze areas of interest, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dynamics between social media echo chambers and the radicalization of the Hindu community. Acknowledging that the supplementary data derives from the researchers' comprehension and assumptions regarding qualitative research methodologies is essential. It is imperative to emphasize that qualitative methodologies, such as the comprehensive interviews conducted in this investigation, can be validated. The methodological framework utilized for the data analysis in this context is discourse analysis, which provides a structured approach for interpreting the findings. Consequently, the methodology remains sound and dependable even without direct access to the primary research.

Qualitative inquiry frequently centers on verbal expressions of individuals, whether in interviews, focus groups, personal journals, social media, or written works. Qualitative researchers endeavor to comprehend the world through attentive listening to people's communication. As a communicative medium, discourse transcends the confines of a solitary sentence and encompasses verbal and written exchanges. It is crucial to remember that discourse is not limited to language alone, as "language" encompasses many linguistic and symbolic units, including road signs. Language study can be concerned with the meanings attributed to individual words, whereas discourse analysis explores the broader implications of language usage within its appropriate context. In this regard, "context" refers to the social, cultural, political, and historical backdrop against which the discourse occurs, and it is imperative to consider this broader framework to decipher the underlying meanings conveyed through language (Van Dijk 2009).

According to Baker et al. 2008 discourse analysis presents a comprehensive outline for social research oriented toward addressing problems. Essentially, discourse analysis is utilized to research the use of language in context in a diverse range of social predicaments (*concerns within society that harm individuals*).

Ethical considerations. Throughout the study, participants' names will be kept strictly secret in accordance with ethical standards designed to protect their privacy and anonymity. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, they will be given pseudonyms that will be used whenever the study results are reported. In addition, a clear set of ethical standards will be followed throughout the study. One of the most important ethical issues is getting participants' informed consent before conducting interviews. Participants in a study must give their informed consent after receiving a thorough description of the study's goals, the processes for protecting their personal information, and the scope of their rights. By strictly following these ethical guidelines, the study's researchers want to guarantee that participants are well-informed and at ease with their involvement. The author (s) declared that all research was performed under guidelines/regulations applicable when human participants are involved. An academic research Ethics committee approved the questionnaire and methodology for this study. The committee concluded that it aligns with the guidelines governing protecting participants' rights.

Findings

The scholars meticulously analyzed the data using discourse analysis and obtained significant findings. Figure 2 present study depicts the comprehensive word cloud of the declaration, wherein the frequency of specific vocabularies employed by the far-right Hindu fundamentalists on social media to refer to Islam and Muslims is discernible. The discernment of the pattern of loathe and anti-Muslim slogans as chosen by the far-right Hindu fundamentalists is conspicuous, as they have substantively expatiated on both Islam and Muslims, both overtly and covertly, in their statements. The researcher uncovered many recurring themes while conducting qualitative analysis and interviews with academics and students from various Delhi public universities.

The study reveals the challenge of social media echo chambers that continue negative assumptions and discrimination against the Muslim group, which is a primary anxiety in the treatment of Muslim youth in Delhi. Additionally, social media and

universities often become the breeding ground for harmful stereotypes and discrimination against Muslim youth, aggravating the situation. Hindu radicalization and the spread of fake news contribute to this issue, as does the violence and attacks carried out by cow vigilantes against Muslims. Online pages that promote Hindu nationalism and ethnic cleansing ideologies (Bell-Fialkoff 1993) also contribute to the mistreatment of Muslims. The prevalence of these echo chambers results in the mistreatment of Muslims, leading to their being regarded as second-class citizens. The existence of a brotherhood vacuum and anti-Muslim slogans only serves to worsen the situation (Fahad et al. 2023). The study emphasizes the critical need for state regulations to promote a culture of love and care rather than hate and abuse. Moreover, commonly employed terms give rise to distinct themes, facilitating understanding of the interplay between the words and their collocates. This underscores the significance of specific concepts and their ramifications, including animosity, hostility towards Muslims, and Muslims being treated as second-class citizens, as well as issues related to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) (Roy 2022). Furthermore, it underscores the significance of the contentious dichotomy of 'us versus them,' as delineated in Van Dijk 2009 "Ideological Square", a concept elucidating how in-group and out-group identities are shaped through discourse.

In the analysis stage, the researcher has conducted an analysis and discovered that several academicians have asserted that the information being fed to the Hindu population in Delhi through social media echo chambers creates an impression that someone is intentionally manipulating their minds and targeting a specific community (Participants A1, A3, A5, 2023). According to a scholar, this phenomenon did not emerge overnight but has been in the works for years to serve the purpose of vote bank politics (A4, 2023). This trend has surpassed its origins in social media and is now pervasive in universities. For instance, incidents such as the January 30, 2020, shooting at Jamia Millia Islamia University by a 17-year-old gunman or the targeted attacks on students associated with certain ideologies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on January 5, 2020, highlight the rising tensions in educational institutions where numerous students are injured, as well as various locations where Muslims are depicted negatively and their festivals are ridiculed, are all indicative of a growing divide within society (Gandbhir 2020). A scholar expressed deep concern that this influence is now infiltrating classrooms, where even teachers are paying particular attention to specific students and communities being targeted. This is a severe and worrisome issue. Social media echo chambers are creating divisions and exacerbating tensions in society. The dispersal of such aimed intel can constitute a substantial menace to the fabric of the entire community. Its impact has now been observed in universities where such incidents are occurring. It appears to be a long-prepared phenomenon in which vote bank politics is also implicated. Academicians are also apprehensive about the potential consequences and are now devoting greater attention to the safety of their students and communities. We must grasp and deal with these matters with the greatest urgency.

Throughout their research, the researchers had the chance to engage with students from various Delhi universities and were privy to numerous accounts. When a Muslim student voices their opinion, they are often told to "*Go to Pakistan,*" insinuating that they do not belong in the country. Some students divulged that social media platforms wield considerable power in delineating religious beliefs, a startling revelation. The apprehension of societal discord was palpable among certain students who expressed misgivings about their parents' disapproval of befriending Muslim peers. Others aver that this conflict has transcended political boundaries and permeated their domestic
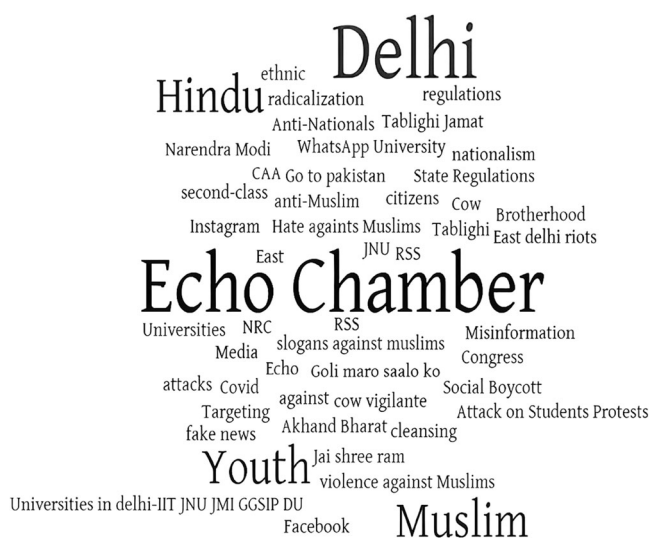

Fig. 2 Comprehensive word cloud of the Declaration.

lives, impacting their dining tables. The researchers also discovered that numerous Muslim children are reluctant to voice their opinions, fearing retribution and victimization. Just as fabricated news proliferates on social media, leading to the assault of individuals by so-called cow vigilantes, resulting in fatalities and injuries (Chand 2022), students are hesitant to express themselves due to the unresolved case of Najeeb, a JNU student (Singh 2017). The sense of democracy being in jeopardy is rife, and even the Constitution appears to be at risk. The Northeast Delhi students bore witness to the harrowing scenes of the 2020 Delhi riots (Ritumbra 2020), which they attribute to the phenomenon of echo chambers prevalent on social media. When discussing the Tablighi Jamaat (Sharma and Anand 2020), students initially held a negative view of them, only to realize that it was misinformation once the court's verdict was announced (Apoorvanand 2022). The study also divulged that the young populace of Delhi cannot authenticate information, unwittingly falling prey to the trap of echo chambers. They are inundated with misinformation through WhatsApp forwards and Instagram shares. A multitude of students expressed anxiety about being misled by erroneous information about the expulsion of Muslims and the concept of establishing an Akhand Bharat (*Undivided India*) (Midha 2023). The researchers inferred that this is engendering an atmosphere of ethnic cleansing through echo chambers. The students agreed that the government ought to conceive effective policies to furnish them with constructive and informative data, propelling Delhi towards a brighter future.

Discussion

The findings of the researcher's analysis indicate that social media language is desirable to a specific group, leading them to view another group as their enemy. This phenomenon has resulted in creating an echo chamber where a community is demonized and targeted. This pattern is being amplified on social media to create a false perception that Muslims have historically tortured and oppressed Hindus, as well as looted the country (Siddiqui 2009). This account is rapidly being distributed in Delhi, the capital of India, a city where people of all faiths have coexisted peacefully. The toxic narrative is being promoted to create a vote bank and portray a specific community as a threat. The strategy bears a resemblance to the British 'divide-and-rule' approach implemented during the governance of India (Stewart 1951); however, in the current scenario, this detrimental narrative is being disseminated through social media platforms to establish a voting bloc and to depict a particular community as a menace (Iyer 2024; Anil 2023).

The subsequent themes emerged from comprehensive interviews carried out with students and academicians in Delhi. These themes elucidate the effects of social media echo chambers, targeted harassment, and radicalization on the lives of young Muslims residing in the city. To further substantiate each theme, I have incorporated direct quotations from the interviews, providing firsthand perspectives on the participants' experiences.

Social media echo chambers against Muslim youth in Delhi. This theme prominently surfaced from discussions conducted with Muslim youth students and scholars in Delhi. Numerous respondents indicated that social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Instagram, are utilized to propagate detrimental stereotypes. A limited number of participants noted:

- " *All I see are comments saying Muslims are terrorists. It is all over my feed, and it just makes me feel unsafe like the whole world is against us.*" (S2, 2023)
- "*I am a professor, and sometimes, when I observe discussions in the students' WhatsApp groups, I realize how some of our*

students have been influenced negatively. They target individuals from a particular community with derogatory and disrespectful language. It pains me to see this. " (A1, 2023)
- "*This country, once known for speaking the language of Gandhi, now speaks the opposite. These words carry violence —"Go to Pakistan, you are Muslim, this country belongs to Hindus." Social media posts are filled with these messages, creating an atmosphere of fear.*" (S11, 2023)

This reflects how social media echo chambers reinforce negative perceptions of Muslims, as supported by prior research on digital hate speech.

Targeting Muslim youth on social media and in educational institutions. Interviewees consistently articulated their experiences of being singled out in both digital environments and educational settings. Students and Scholars conveyed:

- "*When Muslim students express their opinions on social media platforms or even in the classroom, they are often told not to speak here and to go to Pakistan. Are they not a part of this country? Seeing all this, I feel that the politics of our country has alienated its own people, and that is why Muslim students hesitate to speak up.* " (A3, 2023)
- "*Non-Muslim children from other communities make fun of our festivals, which hurts us. Even our classmates are against us, not just in class, but their reactions are the same on social media.* " (S4, 2023)
- "*Whenever there is a discussion about religion or culture in class, our classmates usually show strange behavior. Even though I am Hindu, I feel bad for my Muslim friends, as this issue is no longer limited to just social media.* " (S15, 2023)

This highlights the dual nature of discrimination, both in digital and physical settings, which aligns with previous studies on social media-driven harassment.

Hindu radicalization and fake news. Multiple participants noted that misinformation is fueling radical ideologies. Interviewee observed:

- "*In my neighborhood, people forward messages that say Muslims are trying to convert Hindus. It makes everyone suspicious of us.* " (S3, 2023)
- "*My family tells me to stay away from my Muslim friends and even advises against adding them on social media, saying that these people are not good and could harm me. However, I never felt that way about them.* " (S9, 2023)
- "*On social media, my parents often share Hindutva-related content with me, which mainly includes being proud of our religion and contains negative things about Muslims. However, my Muslim friends in Delhi have never shown me any behavior that would make me say that Muslims are bad people.* " (S7, 2023)

This reflects the role of social media in spreading fake news and radicalizing certain groups, as noted by earlier research.

Cow vigilante violence and attacks on Muslims. Although interviewees did not directly mention vigilante violence, the theme aligns with ongoing societal issues. Studies have shown that such violence has created a climate of fear among Muslim youth.

- "*When discussions move from social media to something as simple as a lunch box, it is clear that intolerance is increasing in the country. People assume that if someone is*

Muslim, they must be eating beef, even if they are vegetarian. " (S5, 2023)

- *"Such incidents keep happening in the country where cow vigilantes have killed Muslims, but not all Muslims are doing such things. Despite this, we also get abused on social media and are labeled as people who kill cows, even though we have nothing to do with it. "* (S1, 2023)

- *"On Eid ul-Azha, Muslims perform the sacrifice of a goat, but in our country, on social media, Muslims are abused and accused of sacrificing cows on Eid. In Delhi, I have not seen any Muslim youth who is happy about or supports the sacrifice of a cow. I feel bad for my Muslim brothers and sisters, who are wrongly targeted like this. "* (S12, 2023)

Online pages fostering Hindutva nationalists and ethnic cleansing ideologies. Some participants expressed concerns over extremist content on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Interviewee noted:

- *"I have seen so many posts about Hindutva, saying we (Muslims) need to be wiped out. It is terrifying. "* (S6, 2023)

- *"By showing false dreams of "Akhand Bharat" and strange ideologies, the majority of the community's children are being manipulated, with terms like "proud Hindu" being instilled in them. Meanwhile, other communities, especially Muslims, are being portrayed as enemies, as if this country belongs only to Hindus. "* (A5, 2023)

- *"In the politics of vote banks, from social media to the dining table, we have started speaking ill of Muslims, saying that they should be driven out of the country, that they are the reason for the deteriorating situation, or that they have more children to take over the country. These nonsensical ideas, which were once jokes, have now been implanted in people's minds as if they are the truth. "* (S12, 2023)

This aligns with studies on the spread of Hindutva nationalism via social media, which fosters an environment of exclusion and fear.

Muslims treated as second-class citizens due to social media echo chambers. The feeling of being treated as second-class citizens was a recurring theme. Respondents mentioned:

- *"It feels like the more these messages spread, the more people look at me differently, like I do not belong in this country. "* (S8, 2023)

- *"On social media, memes, and posts are shared that mock people of a particular religion, and our students seem to enjoy it as if the students from the other community are not even a part of society. "* (A2, 2023)

- *"Due to the echo chambers on social media, Muslims are made to feel like second-class citizens or as if they have come from another country and settled in India. However, this country belongs to Muslims just as much as it belongs to us. "* (S10, 2023)

This perception is consistent with the findings of previous studies on digital discrimination.

Brotherhood vacuum and anti-national slogans. Several interviewees mentioned the lack of unity between Hindu and Muslim communities. Many persons remarked:

- *"Even in university, you can tell there is a divide. Teachers focus more on students who support them, while we are ignored. "* (S13, 2023)

- *"It pains me deeply to say that an entire generation of Muslim youth is being suppressed, and as a result, their own community (Hindus) will not be able to progress with a positive mindset. The state should either impose restrictions on social media or start classes on responsible internet usage so the new generation can understand their responsibilities."* (A4, 2023)

- *"Now, unlike before, there is more hatred than love for one another on social media. Anti-Muslim slogans have now become a common occurrence."* (S14, 2023)

This lack of brotherhood contributes to the widening social gap, as supported by research from Fahad et al. (2023).

The need for state regulations to promote love and care instead of hate and abuse. Participants overwhelmingly felt that more robust government policies are needed. Interviewee suggested:

- *"If there were stricter laws against hate speech, things might change. However, right now, it feels like no one cares. "* (A2, 2023)

- *"The government and social media companies should take strong action against accounts that spread anti-Muslim or any form of religious hate, using AI or other means to detect and permanently ban such accounts. However, it seems that very little is being done in this regard at the moment. The enforcement of such measures is minimal and inconsistent."* (A4, 2023)

- *"It is the responsibility of the state to promote unity among people and encourage harmony, but here, the state itself seems to be anti-Muslim. I would say that the state should focus on its actual duty: spreading messages of love and understanding while concentrating on the country's progress."* (S1, 2023)

This highlights the demand for proactive policies, which could help mitigate the effects of social media-fueled violence and hatred.

The resurgence of Hindu fundamentalism on the extreme right is generating unease among the city's younger population. Ministers who are affiliated with the BJP administration, which the RSS governs, have been making provocative remarks that instigate violence against Muslims and further exacerbate societal tensions (Sharma 2023). Participants in the demonstrations against the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) were subjected to harassment, arrests, and incarceration at various points throughout the rallies. Some individuals, notably Jawaharlal Nehru University students Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, are still being held in captivity at this time (Express News Service 2022).

Those considered authorities in this area urge for the stringent execution of rules and regulations to end actions that cause division. They recommend punishments for people who engage in activities that promote division, including incarceration and fines. When Muslim youth in Delhi share their perspectives or make comments on social media, they are frequently subjected to a torrent of insults, which creates an environment in which they are reluctant to express themselves publicly (Roy 2017). The notion laid out in the spiral of silence hypothesis may be seen as an accurate representation of this circumstance. It is concerning that this poisonous narrative is being spread over social media, particularly in Delhi, which has a long tradition of harmonious coexistence between its many different cultures. This narrative establishes a political support base and depicts a particular group as a threat. Those goals are being accomplished by portraying the community as a threat.

The study's findings suggest that the language used on social media has a significant appeal to a specific group, prompting members of that group to regard members of another group as their foes. The impact of an echo chamber is strengthened as a result of this. The remarkable and unsettling similarity between this occurrence and the British "divide and rule" technique utilized during their administration of India is a cause for concern. It is depressing to observe individuals being targeted and attacked for expressing divergent ideas, reinforcing a trend that has continued in Delhi for several years and constitutes a threat to the democratic fabric of the state. The democratic fabric of the state is at risk as a result of these incidents.

Conclusion

The investigation that has been referenced brings attention to the argument that social media echo chambers function as a form of ghetto where different types of hate speech and superfluous information are disseminated, leading to the polarization of society with divisive language. The content on social media is being propelled by various IT cells that aim to create a robust vote bank by dividing society. As a result, such information targets defenseless people in real life as well as on social media, promoting prejudice. The language being employed, such as "*go to Pakistan*" or "*Goli Maaro Saalo ko*," exposes the intentional targeting of a specific community (Basu 2020). Moreover, the investigators have stumbled upon the fact that Muslim young people are especially vulnerable as they are highly represented on social media. Some people are trying to classify them as either nationalists or anti-nationalists. These echo chambers and misinformation are debilitating society psychologically. The government must enact stringent legislation to eliminate this environment. It can be observed that far-right Hindu fundamentalists in Delhi specifically target Muslim youth for the sake of a vote bank, with their agenda being the establishment of a United India "*Akhand Bharat*" (Kakar & Nundy, 2020) where only their community exists, excluding others. Such social media echo chambers threaten the unity, democracy, constitution, and liberal thinking of the country. This study exemplifies the dissemination of Islamophobia via social media in Delhi and the endeavor to promote a particular ideology.

Overall, the study shows that social media has changed the way young Delhiites think about religion, especially Islam. According to the research, anti-Muslim messaging on social platforms might make people more reluctant to express their views, which in turn can marginalize minority groups. In order to combat the proliferation of anti-Muslim propaganda online and foster more tolerance and understanding among Delhi's young, the interview findings highlight the need for this effort. Some possible approaches to this goal include raising public awareness and education, sharing positive narratives about the Muslim minority, and establishing neutral gathering places.

To address the issues identified in the study, the following *recommendations* are proposed:

Government Action: Government legislation prohibiting hate speech and misleading information on social media must be created. These laws should include severe punishments for those who sow discord, such as fines and jail time.

Promote Positive and Accurate Information: Government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to disseminate accurate information and positive stories on social media. As a result, people will become more understanding and compassionate, lessening the negative effects of hate speech.

Raise Awareness and Education: Schools and colleges should teach students to use social media responsibly and recognize misleading material. With this lesson, they can maintain social harmony and avoid falling for false information.

Social Media Platforms' Responsibility: Vigilant monitoring is necessary to quickly remove hate speech and incorrect material from social media platforms. They should develop tools and algorithms to make this process easier.

Neutral Gathering Spaces: Establish neutral, safe spaces where people may congregate and openly express their viewpoints. These locations would uphold societal harmony and foster compassion.

Support for Muslim Youth: Encourage and protect Muslim youth so they can freely express their beliefs. This may include specialized therapy sessions and support groups.

These recommendations aim to curb hate speech and disinformation on social media while fostering the development of a compassionate and cohesive community.

Data availability

The datasets analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Author contributions
The research idea, overall design, and analytical framework were primarily developed by AF. As the corresponding author, SEM contributed significantly to the design of the methodology and the study framework. AF wrote the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval
The questionnaire and methodology of this study were approved by the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) (UM.TNC2/UMREC_2502) on 17 April 2023. This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent
Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) Ethics approval Reference number: UM.TNC2/UMREC_2502 Informed consent was obtained from all participants for the publication of their analyses in this journal. The consent was secured in writing at the start of the interviews, with participants signing a consent form that clearly outlined the study's purpose and the use of their data in the publication. The consent was obtained on 5 May 2023. No photographs or images were taken from participants, as they were not necessary for this study.

Additional information
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