Extremism on Social Media: Lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana

Poster · December 2022

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Extremism on Social Media: Lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana

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***Abstract*—Extremist content on social media platforms has led to tragic acts of violence. A context-aware extremist content framework is the need of the hour to ensure the detection and mitigation of this type of content. This work provides an outline of our recently launched initiative to develop a context-aware framework. We also present the rudimentary results of the lynching of "Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana" to illustrate the impact of online extremist propaganda on social media platforms. Our results indicate that nearly 25% of the total population included in the gathered data have a negative sentiment toward the lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana, demonstrating how extreme hate-mongering extremist narratives are affecting social media users.**

***Keywords*—Extremism, Social media platforms, Twitter, Lynching**

I. Introduction

Extremism is becoming a daunting problem in the modern world. The attacks on Mosques in Christchurch, gun violence in schools in the US, the terrorism wave in Canada and the middle east, religious and racial violence episodes in Europe, riots, and lynching in India and Pakistan, the genocide in Rohingya, etc., are a few of the horrific examples, where extremist ideologies on social media have resulted into real-world tragedies. Governments and social media giants are trying to deal with this issue but unfortunately, there hasn't been any notable success. Extremism is a subjective term; identifying and quantifying it is an open area of research because of its connections with various cultural, religious, political, and technological aspects. Extremist content is an amalgamation of fake news, misinterpreted religious literature, mis/dis-information, out-of-context video/audio clips, hateful blogs, search engine optimized hashtags, propaganda videos/literature, deepfakes, and abuse. All online extremist ideas begin in the offline world (schools, theological seminaries, literature, ideas of revenge and supremacy, etc.), and the butterfly effect of social media and content optimization algorithms makes it viral. This availability and virality of extremist content increase online extremism and, in many cases into real-world extremism episodes. Identifying and moderating social media content while preserving free speech and privacy is a challenging task. Solving this problem requires content moderation techniques and platform-level policies. The lack of an extremism detection and prevention framework, notably in India and Pakistan, is leading in the continual distribution of extremist content via social media apps. This work outlines a framework for extremist content identification and mitigation. The project has only recently begun (the complete summary of the project is depicted in figure 1), and in this poster, we discuss preliminary results using the horrific lynching incident of "Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana" as a use case.

IEEE/ACM ASONAM 2022, November 10-13, 2022
978-1-6654-5661-6/22/$31.00 © 2022 IEEE

II. Related Work

In recent years, social media applications have emerged as the most powerful tool for inciting extremism and distributing hate/fake news. Extremism, hate speech, and fake/misinformation on social media are used to form opinions, cause controversies, induce antagonism and social divide, curtail free speech, troll opponents, deteriorate history, name-calling, killing and rape threats, and violence to achieve political, religious, or economic goals in third-world democracies (Pakistan, India, etc.) [1], [2], [3], [4]. Dash et al. [5] studied the extremism and whataboutism against the Muslim population in Bangalore India, using Twitter data and showed how a derogatory Facebook post by an extremist turned the whole city into a war zone. Stahel et al. [6] stated that integrating online and behavioral data can aid in capturing the relationship between online and offline extremism. Biswas et al. [7] used Granger Causality Test, Z-score, sentiment analysis, and other NLP techniques to measure sinophobia on Twitter. Niu et al. [7] suggested how a hate indicator can be developed for YouTube. Simon et al. [7] shed light on the importance of making the data and tools open-sourced to help develop better content moderation platforms to deal with online extremism. To date, this effort can be seen in a few cherry-picked cases but a larger consensus is still missing [7]. In this poster, we intend to show the initial bits of the understanding of the extremist content on Twitter in the Pakistani context through a case study of the horrific lynching incident of "Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana" in Pakistan.

III. Use-case: Lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana

On December 3, 2021, a mob killed and burnt Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana, a Srilankan citizen working as a factory manager in Sialkot, Pakistan, on the allegation of blasphemy. The event is thought to be the work of the TLP, an extreme right-wing group. In footage published on social media, the culprits can be seen yelling TLP slogans. Six criminals were condemned to death when these allegations were found to be false in court. Extremist information on social media applications inspired the criminals. We have considered this horrible incident as a case study to demonstrate how extremist ideas had infiltrated Pakistani Twitter. We scraped Twitter for December 2021 and retrieved 1800 unique tweets using Twint[1](a Twitter intelligence tool) and

[1]https://github.com/twintproject/twint

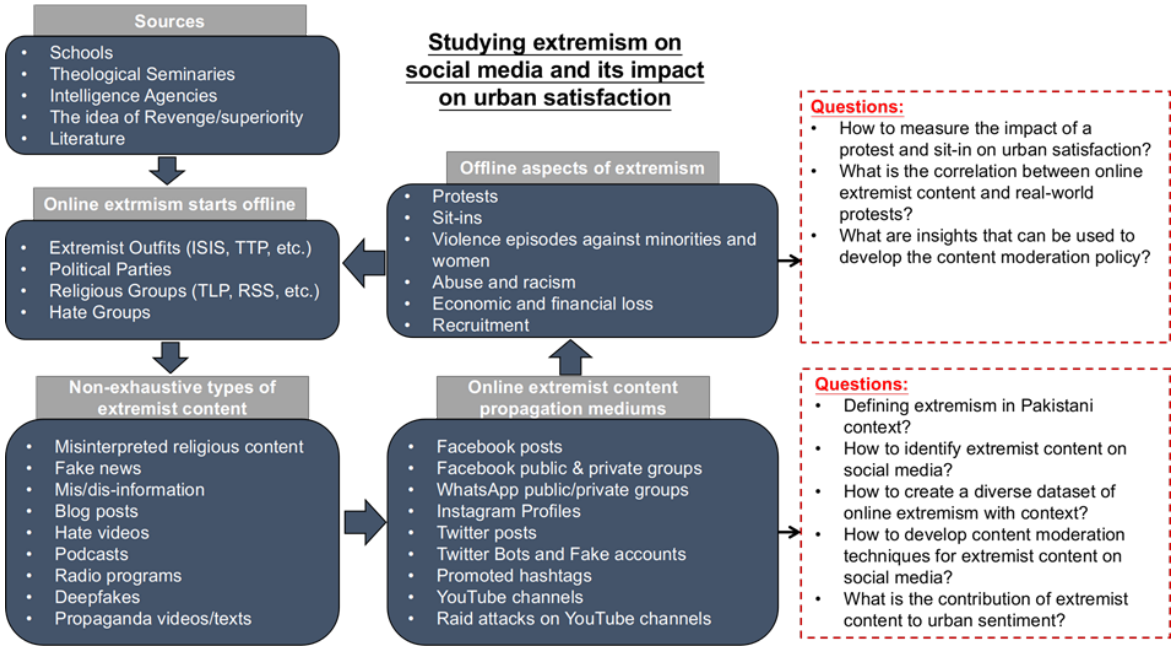

Figure 1: Outline of the proposed context-aware framework for studying extremism on social media and improving urban sentiment.

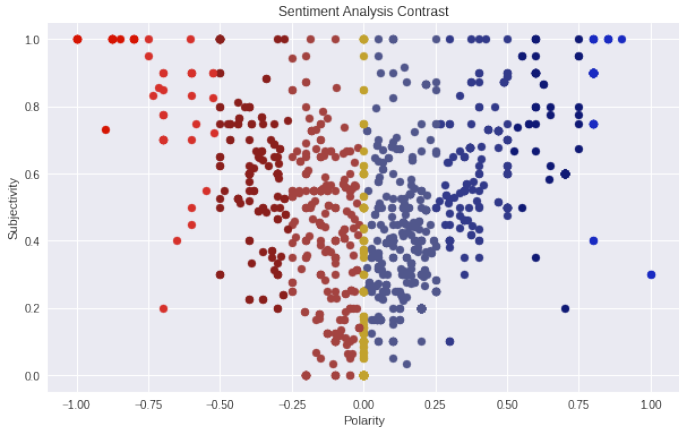

Figure 2: Polarity and subjectivity scores depicts that the negative and subjective narrative about the lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana has taken over the Pakistani Twitter feeds.

conducted a rudimentary data analysis.Few tweets retrieved during the data collection process are also included below:

1) *"Murders happen when emotions are high. Boys do things in passion. Even I can get excited and do wrong when it comes to religion. Don't blame the govt."*
2) *"TLP flag witnessed on a cart outside Rajco industries in Sialkot as the workers return to work after the brutal murder of SrilankanManager priyanthakumara on the pretence of blasphemy."*

The collected data was examined for polarity and subjectivity. The polarity of a statement indicates how much positive or negative commentary it includes. If the message is focused on one's emotions and ideas than on facts, it is deemed subjective. Polarity ranges between [-1,1], with -1 indicating negative sentiment and +1 indicating positive sentiment. Subjectivity spans from [0,1]. Figure 2 illustrates the sentiment analysis-assigned polarity and subjectivity scores. Nearly 25% of the total population included in the gathered data have a negative sentiment toward the lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana, demonstrating how extreme hate-mongering extremist narratives are affecting social media users.

IV. Conclusions

Online extremism is dividing communities, and fault lines are becoming more obvious by the day. We have provided an outline of a context-aware framework for identifying and mitigating online extremism, with the added benefit of enhanced urban satisfaction. According to our case study, negative sentiment is on the rise as a result of the propagation of extremist content via social media apps.

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