

Analyzing the Correlation between Identity Issues and Sources of Dissatisfaction amongst the Youth in a Radicalized Environment in Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

The proposed research work being undertaken is an effort to study the application of strategic communication and its impact on countering radicalization and violent extremism in Kashmir valley. This beautiful Kashmir valley in Northern India has long been marred by intricate identity dynamics and pervasive dissatisfaction, making it a critical focal point in the broader context of regional stability and conflict resolution. Understanding these nuanced identity issues is crucial for devising effective strategies for countering violent extremism. This paper embarks on a comprehensive exploration of how identity perceptions and sources of discontent intertwine in this sensitive region, influencing the intricate web of socio-political complexities that characterize Kashmir. In the context of this study, the research explores the correlation between identity perceptions and sources of dissatisfaction amongst the youth in Kashmir. Notably, there is a weak correlation between identity and dissatisfaction, highlighting the importance of addressing a broad spectrum of grievances. The sources of dissatisfaction are multifaceted, with unemployment and uncertainty about the future being significant concerns also found as major reasons for the same. This study emphasizes the need for comprehensive, data-driven policies and strategic communication approaches that consider the complex interplay of identity, governance, and socio-economic conditions to foster stability and counter violent extremism in the region.

Keywords: Kashmir Valley, identity, dissatisfaction, violent extremism, strategic communication, governance, radicalization, political instability.

INTRODUCTION

The Kashmir Valley, nestled amidst the breathtaking Himalayan landscape, has long been a focal point of political turmoil and conflict. A region marked by its intricate history and a unique blend of cultures, it has experienced decades of unrest, with violent extremism casting a shadow over the lives of its residents. The situation tripped from staged protests, insurgency, terrorism, and now obsessive religious radicalization of the younger generation (Singh 2019). It is largely believed that the native version of Islam, mystical 'Sufism', and better known as 'Kashmiriyat' is essentially syncretic and liberal is now facing an existential threat from the Saudi sponsored Wahhabism, popular in the shape of the Ahl-i-Hadith sect in Kashmir (Pandya 2020). Apart from this, the idea of more political Islam organizations such as pro - Pakistan extremist organization, 'Jamaat-i-Islami (JeI)' and even 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)' have too made inroads in Kashmir (Pandya 2019). Some new terrorist outfits, such as 'ISIS Jammu Kashmir' and 'Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind' aligned to the ISIS and Al Qaeda beliefs, have also burgeoned in the past few years (Singh, D. 2019). The rising level of radicalisation has resulted in increasing number of young people taking to arms. In 2019, 119 locals joined terrorism in Kashmir. In 2020 the number jumped to 167. It was 128 in 2021 and 100 in 2022 (Zulfikar 2023). Over 60% of Kashmiri population is below 30 years of age and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation by radical groups active in Kashmir. The challenge of countering violent extremism in this region necessitates a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to unrest and the strategies employed to mitigate it. Pandya (2019b) in his study has listed multiple factors for disenchantment among the Kashmiri youth. Moreover, the sources of dissatisfaction in the Kashmir Valley are multifaceted and rooted in socio-economic, political, religious and security-related concerns. Unemployment, uncertainty about the future, and the

region's complex political situation are just a few of the factors that contribute to the discontent within the population (Gupta 2015).

This rise in radical beliefs has also given rise to identity politics based on geographic location, religion, language and culture in the state of Jammu and Kashmir since its integration with India. This lack of identity or identity crisis can further lead to a sense of confusion and alienation among the population (Chowdhary 2015). Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the relationship between identity perceptions and sources of dissatisfaction in the Kashmir Valley, with a focus on informing policies for countering violent extremism.

Earlier Work and Motivation for Current Study

A body of prior research has shed light on the complexities of the Kashmir conflict and the various factors influencing violent extremism. Gabel, Reichert, and Reuter (2022) analyzed the historical and political context of the Kashmir conflict, highlighting the role of competing nationalisms, narratives and territorial disputes. Smith's work underscores the long-standing nature of the conflict, which has contributed to the emergence of violent extremist groups. Furthermore, research by Khan explored the impact of identity dynamics in the context of violent extremism (Khan 2015). Borum (2004) argued that individuals' identities, particularly how they perceive themselves in relation to the state, play a pivotal role in their susceptibility to extremist ideologies. Underlying the identity crisis is a sense of not being accepted or belonging to society (Choudhury 2007). Therefore, understanding the diversity of identity perceptions is crucial for effective intervention and communication strategies (de Jong et al. 2008). The study presents valuable insights into the Kashmir conflict and the perception of identity crises amongst youth. However, the specific role of communication strategies in addressing these dynamics remains underexplored (Bazarkina 2020). In the context of countering violent extremism, it can be a powerful tool for influencing perceptions and behaviors especially those still struggling with identity crises.

The motivation for the current study lies in the need to bridge this gap in the literature. By examining the relationship between identity, sources of dissatisfaction, and the effectiveness of strategic communication in Kashmir, this study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how to address violent extremism in a conflict-ridden region. In essence, the study builds upon the foundation of past research that has highlighted the historical and identity-related dimensions of the Kashmir conflict, while simultaneously exploring a novel avenue—strategic communication—as a potential means of mitigating violent extremism in the region.

The objective of the study

To examine the relationship between identity perceptions and sources of dissatisfaction amongst youth in the Kashmir Valley.

Hypothesis

The younger generation Kashmiri youth who have identity issues are more likely to be disenchanted with their lives and therefore vulnerable to being radicalized.

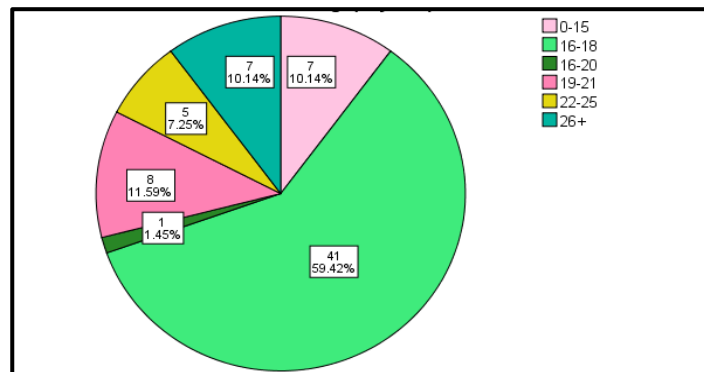
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was done as part of a larger study on role of strategic communication in countering violence extremism in Kashmir Valley. Further, this study employed a quantitative approach, involving a structured survey conducted across 10 districts in Kashmir Valley. The survey was carried out through an online questionnaire to assess the psychosocial parameters of the target audience with an aim of identifying the push and pull factors of radicalization and the best practices to counter these. The questionnaire was prepared on a Google form with drop down menu options and was served through selected high schools and colleges in Kashmir Valley.

The survey questionnaire collected data from a representative sample of the region's population, addressing a total of 63 questions including those respondents' identity perceptions and sources of dissatisfaction. Informed consent was taken and participants were made aware of the nature of the questions that could

possibly cause some discomfort, given the theme of the study. Due to security constraints, snowball sampling was also utilized to reach hard-to-access individuals, ensuring diverse representation. Although the intended sample size was 200, the final dataset comprises 69 valid participants. The sample size was restricted as there was a challenge of lack of cooperation from some of the respondents to provide information since they do not like to openly discuss matters pertaining to radicalization and Government actions against the same. The age profile of the respondents in years is given in the pie chart below:

Figure 1: Age profile of respondents



Among the respondents, over 59% belonged to the age group of 16-18 years highlighting the participation of youth in impressionable age. The collected data underwent statistical analysis, primarily correlation analysis, using Pearson Correlation coefficients to explore the relationships between identity perceptions and sources of dissatisfaction. Additionally, a comprehensive literature review contextualized the findings. The ultimate objective of this research is to provide valuable insights about the perception of identification and dissatisfaction of people in the landscape of the Kashmir Valley.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The below analysis is based on descriptive analysis and correlation analysis in which the respondent's view towards their identity as Indian is analyzed. In addition, to their responses following table shows the percentage of people who consider themselves Indian.

Table 1: Do you consider yourself to be an Indian?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Can't say	9	13.0	13.0	13.0
	No	8	11.6	11.6	24.6
	Yes	52	75.4	75.4	100.0
	Total	69	100.0	100.0	

From the above analysis it can be seen that a significant majority, 75.4%, expressed a clear affiliation with the Indian identity, responding with a definitive "Yes." This finding highlights the presence of a substantial segment of the Kashmiri population who identify themselves as Indians. This perception of being Indian can be seen as a vital aspect of their overall identity and can have implications for their views on governance and regional dynamics. In contrast, a notable proportion of respondents, 11.6%, answered "No" when asked whether they consider themselves to be Indian. This group represents a significant minority that does not identify with the Indian identity. This response reflects a complex aspect of the Kashmir valley's socio-political landscape, where some individuals may associate more closely with regional or other identities rather than identifying as Indian. Understanding the perspectives and concerns of this group is crucial in comprehending the diversity of opinions and sentiments within the region. Interestingly, 13% of the respondents chose "Can't

say" in response to the question about their Indian identity. This category represents individuals who may have uncertain or ambivalent feelings about their identity, potentially influenced by the complex and often contentious political and historical circumstances in the region. These individuals could be viewed as a group with more nuanced and evolving identity perceptions. In summary, the data underscores the diversity of identity perceptions within the Kashmir Valley. The majority of respondents consider themselves Indian, but a significant minority does not, and a smaller portion remains uncertain about their identity. Christmann (2012) argues that this uncertainty can be intensified by perceptions or experiences of discrimination, a sense of blocked social mobility, and a lack of confidence in the political system, thus leaving a person vulnerable to radicalizing influences or embracing religious fundamentalism

Therefore, these varying perspectives on identity are a crucial element in understanding the socio-political dynamics of the region, and they have implications for strategies aimed at countering violent extremism and promoting peace and stability. In order to understand the reasons of dissatisfaction among the youth of Kashmir valley, the target audience were asked to respond to the question, "What causes most dissatisfaction?" These are discussed below:

Table 2: What causes most dissatisfaction?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No comment	1	1.4	1.4	1.4
	Situational Factors like abrogation of article 370, media like newspaper and social media, discrimination and feeling neglected by government of India.	1	1.4	1.4	2.9
	Being forced to live under the rule of the Indian government	7	10.1	10.1	13.0
	Having life disrupted due to curfews and bandh calls	3	4.3	4.3	17.4
	Having proper resources but used by others and you can't do anything.	1	1.4	1.4	18.8
	I want some money for my bill, school fee etc	1	1.4	1.4	20.3
	No future	8	11.6	11.6	31.9
	No job	22	31.9	31.9	63.8
	Nothing	1	1.4	1.4	65.2
	There is no dissatisfaction	7	10.1	10.1	75.4
	Uncertainty about the future	17	24.6	24.6	100.0
	Total	69	100.0	100.0	

The data in Table 2 offers a comprehensive snapshot of the various factors causing dissatisfaction among respondents in the Kashmir Valley as there were some who did not consider themselves Indian due to dissatisfaction. With a total of 69 respondents, the most prominent source of dissatisfaction appears to be "No job," with a significant 31.9% of respondents selecting this option, highlighting the pressing issue of unemployment and its associated challenges in the region, such as economic instability and unmet

aspirations. Close behind, 24.6% of respondents identified "Uncertainty about the future" as a major source of discontent, signifying the burdensome concerns about the region's unpredictable political landscape and the lack of long-term stability. "No future" was chosen by 11.6% of respondents, reflecting a perceived lack of prospects and optimism. "Being forced to live under the rule of the Indian government" was mentioned by 10.1% of respondents, indicating the impact of governance and political control on the population's well-being. Intriguingly, another 10.1% of respondents stated that "There is no dissatisfaction," revealing a diversity of perspectives within the Kashmiri population. This data emphasizes the multifaceted nature of dissatisfaction in the Kashmir Valley, stemming from unemployment, uncertainty about the future, and the region's political dynamics. Understanding these sources of dissatisfaction is critical for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to address the root causes of unrest and work toward a more stable and prosperous future for the region.

After understanding the reasons for dissatisfaction then correlation was calculated between dissatisfaction and considering themselves Indian. The analysis is shown with the help of following table:

Table 3: Correlation between Identity and Dissatisfaction

		Do you consider yourself to be an Indian?	What causes most dissatisfaction?
Do you consider yourself to be an Indian?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.783
	N	69	69
What causes most dissatisfaction?	Pearson Correlation	-.034	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.783	
	N	69	69

The findings from Table 3, which indicate a notably weak and negative correlation between self-identification as Indian and the sources of dissatisfaction among respondents in the Kashmir Valley, have significant implications for government policy-making and the formulation of communication strategies in the region. This analysis underscores that the factors contributing to dissatisfaction are complex and multifaceted, and they are not predominantly influenced by how individuals perceive their identity as Indian. From a policy perspective, these results suggest that addressing the sources of dissatisfaction and working towards countering violent extremism in the Kashmir Valley requires a holistic approach. Policymakers should consider a range of factors beyond identity alone, including economic opportunities, governance, and socio-political conditions (Cornish, Lindley-French, and Yorke 2011).

By recognizing the diverse sources of dissatisfaction, government policies can be more effective in responding to the nuanced needs and concerns of the population. Narratives should be reinforced by constructive actions by the government. Moreover, the insights gained from this analysis can inform the development of strategic communication strategies. Recognizing that identity is not a primary driver of dissatisfaction, communication efforts should focus on addressing the actual issues that are causing discontent, such as unemployment, uncertainty about the future, and governance concerns. Therefore, government strategic communications should be aimed at clarifying government policies, stance, or actions towards an issue. It should also include public awareness activities, alternative and counter narratives, all moving in tandem (Speckhard, Shajkovci, and Ahmed 2018)

This analysis highlights the need for a comprehensive and data-driven approach in policy-making and strategic communication. By understanding the multifaceted sources of dissatisfaction, government policies and communication strategies can be better aligned with the real needs and concerns of the population in the Kashmir Valley, contributing to the potential reduction of violent extremism and the promotion of peace and stability in the region.

CONCLUSION

The Kashmir Valley remains a region fraught with complexities, where historical, political, and socio-economic factors interplay to shape identity perceptions and sources of dissatisfaction among its population. The survey data has revealed a predominant self-identification as Indian among respondents, indicative of the region's historical context, yet it also highlights the presence of a significant minority who do not consider themselves Indian. This diversity in identity perceptions is a testament to the intricate socio-political landscape of the valley. Furthermore, the analysis of the sources of dissatisfaction points to a myriad of challenges faced by the Kashmiri population. Unemployment and uncertainty about the future emerge as major drivers of discontent, reflecting the region's chronic economic challenges and political instability. These sources of dissatisfaction are not merely individual concerns but are deeply rooted in the broader context of governance and regional dynamics. Intriguingly, the data reveals a weak correlation between identity and dissatisfaction, emphasizing that identity, while significant, is not the sole or primary determinant of what dissatisfies individuals in the region. This underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted sources of discontent. In the realm of policy-making and strategic communication, these findings offer valuable guidance. Policymakers must consider the complex tapestry of grievances and tailor their approaches accordingly. Strategies aimed at countering violent extremism should encompass not only identity-related issues but also economic opportunities, political stability, and the promotion of long-term security and aspirations. It is recommended that strategic communication campaigns adopt a multifaceted approach to address the diverse challenges identified in this study. It will provide targeted information, viable solutions, and assurances related to the specific sources of dissatisfaction identified in the Kashmir Valley, such as unemployment and uncertainty about the future. Additionally, recognizing the multifaceted nature of these sources of discontent, it is advised that communication efforts be highly nuanced and customized to cater to the unique concerns and grievances of various segments within the population. This tailored approach will enhance the effectiveness of strategic communication initiatives in countering violent extremism and promoting regional stability. Further, social media channels can be used to engage significant youth celebrities in strategic communication. These icons can efficiently spread information, offer solutions, and provide guarantees, boosting strategic communication initiatives to handle Kashmir Valley's complex issues.

Overall, this study reaffirms the intricate nature of the Kashmir Valley's socio-political landscape. Understanding the complex interplay between identity and sources of dissatisfaction is vital for the development of effective policies and communication strategies that resonate with the real concerns of the population. By adopting a data-driven, holistic approach, policymakers can take meaningful steps towards fostering stability, addressing grievances, and working to counter violent extremism in the region and to create the sense of identity as Indian among the citizens of Kashmir Valley.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

The data are not publicly available due to privacy and security issues.

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Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare

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