Role of Religion in Group Polarization

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Abstract— **This research paper explores the influence of different levels of religion on group polarization, focusing on responses from individuals with various educational backgrounds and religious affiliations. The study employs chi-square (χ²) analysis as the primary statistical technique to assess the significance of these factors on group polarization. Data was collected through a standardized Group Polarization Scale and analyzed using frequency and percentage calculations alongside chi-square tests. The results indicate that religion indeed plays a significant role in shaping opinions on various aspects of group polarization, including attitudes towards neighbors, travel, social tension, religious festivals, job help, community friends, marriage, educational programs, and social work.**

Introduction

Group polarization is a common socio-psychological phenomenon encountered in all societies and nations. It is needless to point out that diametrically opposed opinions and attitudes are expressed about several issues such as, reservation of posts for various classes of people in institutions of higher education, the concept of social justice, privatization of the means of production etc. Group polarization, as a social psychological phenomenon, was empirically discovered and investigated in USA. The present investigation is concerned with an empirical study of group polarization in Indian context and in its cultural perspective.

Group Polarization:

Group polarization as an empirical phenomenon was discovered about three decades back in the contest of extensive researches on the nature of decisions taken in choice-dilemma situations. James Stoner (1961) while engaged in his Ph.D. research on decision making found that almost invariably the group choice was more risky than the average of the individual choices.

This phenomenon was called risky-shift. James Stoner (1961) while engaged in his Ph.D. research on decision making found that almost invariably the group choice was more risky than the average of the individual choices. In the sixties of this century it was shown that the risky shift is not limited to business and management students, but is found both in men and women undergraduates (Wllach, Kogan & Bern, 1962) among grade student boys and grills (Kogan & Carlson, 1959), and also in various national groups, such as, British (Tateson, 1966), Confidants (Vidmar, 1970), Israelis (Rim, 1965), Germans (Lomm & Kogan, 1970)

This literature review explores the concept of group polarization, a phenomenon wherein group decisions tend to be more extreme than the individual preferences of group members. Drawing upon foundational research and contemporary studies, this paper examines the key theories explaining group polarization, such as social identity theory, informational influence, and social comparison theory. It also discusses the implications of group polarization in various contexts, including political behavior, online environments, and decision-making. Additionally, strategies to mitigate group polarization are reviewed. The findings of

Dr. Ravindra Prasad et al. [Subject: Psychology] [I.F. 5.761] International Journal of Research in Humanities & Soc. Sciences

Vol. 12, Issue 05, May: 2024
ISSN(P) 2347-5404 ISSN(O)2320 771X

this review highlight the multifaceted nature of group polarization and its significance in understanding social dynamics.

Group polarization, first conceptualized by James Stoner in 1961, is a well-studied phenomenon in social psychology. It refers to the tendency of groups to make decisions that are more extreme or polarized than the individual preferences of their members. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the key theories and empirical findings related to group polarization, with a focus on its implications in various domains.

Theoretical Framework:

Social Identity Theory: Henri Tajfel's social identity theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, leading to in-group favoritism and polarization. Informational Influence: Group polarization often occurs due to informational influence, where group members reinforce each other's views through the exchange of information and arguments.

Social Comparison Theory: Leon Festinger's theory suggests that people evaluate their own opinions and abilities by comparing them to others, and this comparison can lead to more extreme positions.

Empirical Studies:

Risky Shift Phenomenon: Early research, as exemplified by James Stoner, demonstrated the risky shift phenomenon, where groups tend to make riskier decisions than individuals. Online Environments: Group polarization has been observed in digital spaces, where likeminded individuals gather, leading to echo chambers and the reinforcement of extreme views. Political Polarization: The phenomenon has significant implications in political behavior, contributing to the widening of political divides and difficulty in reaching compromises.

Objectives of the study:

The main objective of the present study is:

To study the significance of differences in group polarization among Hindu, Muslim and Christian students.

Method

Design of the Study: the study was planned in a two way (2x3) between group factorial design with two levels of sex, (male and female) and, three levels of religion (Hindu, Muslim and Christian).

Sample:

In the present study, a sample size of 270 male and female students has been taken. The data was collected with the help of convenience sampling and schedule was taken as the measure social polarization, various social/ cultural backgrounds were administered on various religion Hindu, Muslim and Christian students.

Measuring Tools:

Personal Data Sheet: To find the background information PDS was used for the present study.

Group Polarization Scale: Dr. Satyaprakash, & Ravindra Prasad developed this tool to measure Group polarization about the members of social community. It contains 20 items.

Results

In the present study the participants responses were obtained in the form of frequencies thus chi- square (χ^2) analysis (test of independent) was considered as most suitable statistical technique there for the scores were obtained an analyzed on the basis of responses given by people of different educational groups (Junior high school Students, Intermediate Students, and Graduate Students) and religious groups (Hindu, Muslim, Christian) on the standardized group polarization scale. The statistical treatments of data

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Vol. 12, Issue 05, May: 2024
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were done in terms of frequency, percentage and chi- square analyze.

The impact of type of religion on Group Polarization

Opinion of Group Polarization in three type of Education, Chi -Square Test was applied. Frequencies, percentage and chi square value is given in Table 1 to Table 3 and Figure 1 to Figure 3.

Table 1 Chi-squire ($^{\chi^2}$) value showing the significance level on responses of group polarization for Business Partner belonging to various religious groups.

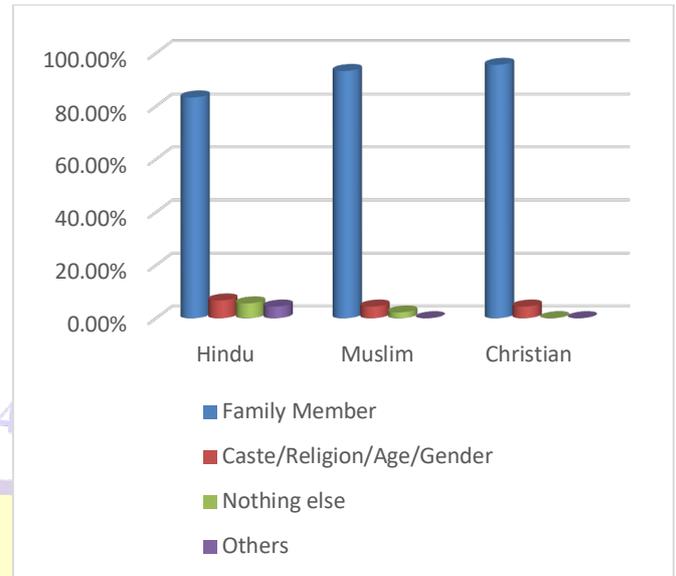| Opinion / Religion/Community	Family Member	Caste/Religion related/Age/Gender	Nothing else	Others	Total	Chi-Square ($^{\chi^2}$)
Hindu	75 (83.3%) [30.6%]	6 (6.7%) [42.86%]	5 (5.6%) [71.42%]	4 (4.4%) [100%]	90	
Muslim	84 (93.3%) [34.3%]	4 (4.4%) [28.57%]	2 (2.2%) [28.57%]	0 (0%) [0%]	90	14.841*
Christian	86 (95.6%) [35.1%]	4 (4,4%) [28.57%]	0 (0%) [0%]	0 0% [0%]	90	
Total	245	14	7	4	270	

N = 270, * = *p<.05,* ** = *p<.01*

Fig. 1: **Percentage of Group Polarization (Business Partner) in different community**

Table 1 and Figure 1 display frequencies and percentage of Group polarization, responded by participants belonging to different groups. Results show that responses of Group polarization varied across different groups of people. Chi-Square results revealed that respondents differed significantly on g group polarization. Group polarization towards Business partner was significantly influenced by Religion (χ^2 ('6) = 14.84, P < .05). On family member opinion, Christian reported maximum polarization (95.6%) than Muslim (93.3%) and Hindu (83.3%). On second option of group polarization (Caste/Religion related/Age/Gender) Hindu polarized maximum at (6.7%) than Muslim (4.4%) and Christian (4.4%).On nothing else alternative Hindu polarization maximum at (5.6%) than Muslim (2.2%) and on others alternative group polarization was found 4.4% in Hindu.

Table 2: **Chi-squire ($^{\chi^2}$) value showing the significance level on responses of group polarization for good neighbour belonging to various religious groups.**

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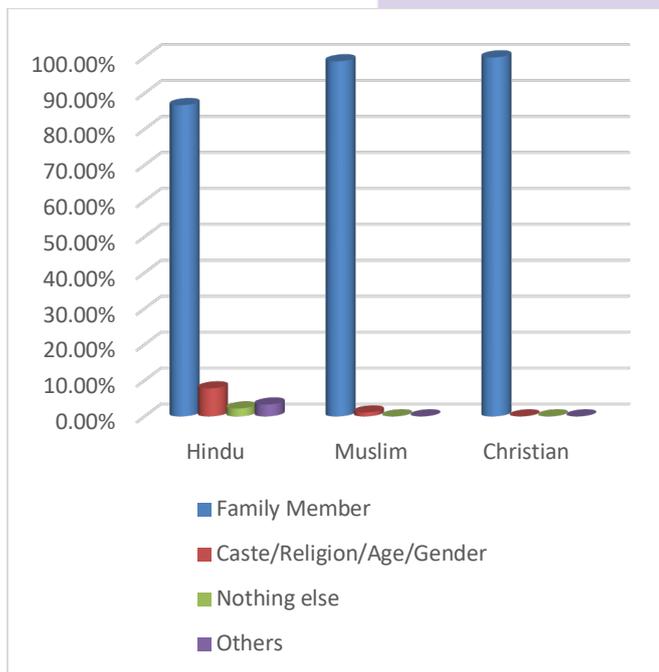| Opinion / Religion/Community	Family Member	Caste/Religion related/Age/Gender	Nothing else	Others	Total	Chi-Square (x^2)
Hindu	78 (86.7%) [30%]	7 (7.8%) [87.5%]	2 (2.2%) [100%]	3 (3.3%) [100%]	90	
Muslim	89 (98.9%) [34.6%]	1 (1.1%) [12.5]	0 (0%) [0%]	0 (0) [0%]	90	21.78**
Christian	90 (100%) [35%]	00 (0%) [0]	0 (0%) [0%]	0 (0%) [0%]	90	
Total	257	8	2	2	270	

N = 270, * = *p<.05,* ** = *p<.01*

Fig. 2: **Percentage of Group Polarization (Good Neighbor) in different community**

Results displayed in Table 2 shows that on group polarization for good neighbor, effect for religion was found significant ($x^2(6)$ = 21.78 P < .01), which revealed that on family member opinion , Christian is greater (100%) than Muslim (98.6%) and Hindu (86.7%). On second option of group polarization (Caste/Religion related/Age/Gender) 7.8% Hindu maximum polarized than Muslim (1.1%). On nothing else alternative Hindu reported 2.2% and on others 3.3% Hindu was agreed for polarization (Figure 2).

Table 3: **Chi-squire (x^2) value showing the significance level on responses of group polarization for community program belonging to various religious groups.**

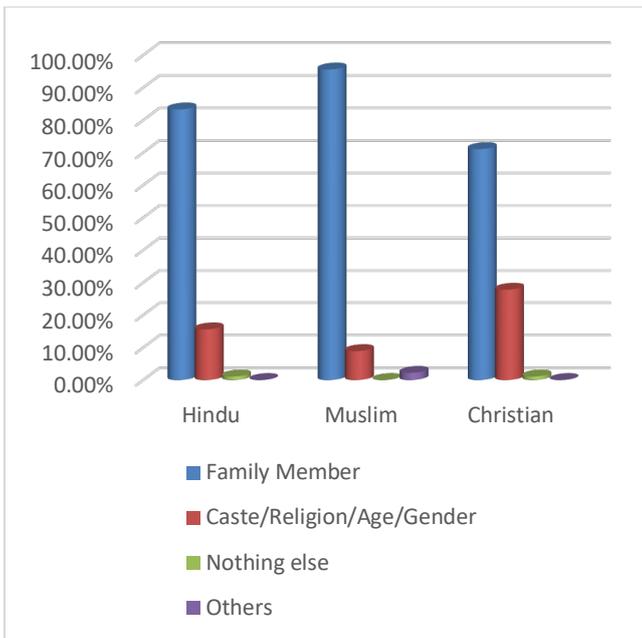| Opinion / Religion/Community	Family Member	Caste/Religion related/Age/Gender	Nothing else	Others	Total	Chi-Square (x^2)
Hindu	75 (83.3%) [34.2%]	14 (15.6%) [29.8%]	1 (1.1%) [50.0%]	0 (.0%) [.0%]	90	
Muslim	80 (95.6%) [36.5%]	8 (8.9%) [17.0%]	0 (.0%) [0%]	2 (2.2%) [100%]	90	19.635**
Christian	64 (71.1%) [29.2%]	25 (27.8%) [53.2%]	1 (1.1%) [50.0%]	0 (0%) [0%]	90	
Total	219	47	2	2	270	

N = 270, * = *p<.05,* ** = *p<.01*

Fig. 3: **Percentage of Group Polarization (Community Programmed) in different community**

As is apparent from Table 3 type of community and various opinion alternative were found significant difference on Group polarization (Community Program) (χ^2 (6) = 19.64, P < .01). Based on row and column percentage, on family member opinion of group polarization Muslim is greater (95.6%) than Hindu (83.3%) and Christian (71.1%). On second option of group polarization (Caste/Religion related/Age/Gender) Christian polarized maximum at 27.8% than Hindu (15.6%) and Muslim (8.9%). Hindu show polarization on nothing else alternative and on others alternative group polarization score display in Muslim (2.2%).

Discussion

The results of this study, which investigates the influence of education on group polarization, align with both empirical findings and theoretical perspectives in the fields of psychology, sociology, and education. These findings shed light on the complex relationship between religion and group polarization, highlighting the multifaceted ways in which religion can impact individuals' attitudes and opinions in group settings.

The finding that Christian exhibits the highest level of polarization towards the concept of "good neighbors" is consistent with empirical studies on religion and worldview. Research has shown that higher education levels often lead to increased exposure to diverse ideas and cultures. As individuals progress through their education, they are more likely to engage with diverse communities, which can lead to the formation of more nuanced opinions about social issues, including neighborly relationships. The study's observation that Muslim religion students display the highest polarization during travel aligns with previous research on travel experiences. Travel can expose individuals to various cultures, worldviews, and lifestyles. Christian students, often having more opportunities for international travel or study abroad experiences, might develop a more cosmopolitan outlook, resulting in reduced polarization when discussing travel-related topics.

The differentiation in the impact of religion on attitudes towards social tension between family members and teachers resonates with sociological studies on the influence of primary socialization and secondary socialization. Family and immediate community environments largely contribute to primary socialization, shaping early attitudes and values. In contrast, educational institutions play a critical role in secondary socialization, where students are exposed to broader societal perspectives. Therefore, it is plausible that attitudes towards social tension within family circles are more influenced by Junior High School experiences, while teacher-related attitudes reflect the influence of Intermediate education.

The study's findings align with socialization theory, which posits that individuals acquire values, attitudes, and beliefs through the socialization processes they undergo. Education is a key agent of socialization, influencing individuals' worldviews. Higher education levels often provide more extensive exposure to diverse social contexts, thereby contributing to more comprehensive and less polarized perspectives.

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Vol. 12, Issue 05, May: 2024
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The Contact Hypothesis, a theoretical perspective from social psychology, suggests that increased contact between individuals from different backgrounds can reduce prejudice and polarization. Christians, with their potentially wider range of social contacts and experiences, may have more opportunities for meaningful interactions with individuals from diverse backgrounds, leading to a reduction in polarization.

In conclusion, this study's findings resonate with empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks in the fields of education, psychology, and sociology. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' attitudes and opinions, and this influence is particularly evident in group settings where polarization dynamics are at play. As education systems continue to evolve, it is crucial to consider how educational curricula and experiences can be designed to promote critical thinking, exposure to diverse perspectives, and the development of well-rounded, less polarized individuals capable of constructive engagement in group discussions and decision-making processes. Further research in this area can contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced relationship between religion and group polarization.

It is essential to acknowledge some limitations of this study. The research focused on a limited set of religion categories, and future studies may benefit from a more granular breakdown of educational levels. Additionally, the study did not explore the underlying mechanisms through which education influences group polarization, which could be a fruitful avenue for further investigation.

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