

## Exploring Representation of the Christian community on Electronic and Social Media in Pakistan: A Critical Discourse Analysis

**Abstract:** *This paper aims to explore the representation of Christians on electronic and social media in Pakistan. The study is based on the qualitative research method using Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model. The research results indicate that Pakistani electronic media is more concerned about market dynamics and power structures than constitutional narratives. Only the elite segment of the population, particularly politicians and business tycoons, can access electronic media. Another theme is the poor portrait of the Christian community, which is persecuted without adequate redressal. Moreover, access to social media is a great source for Christians to get coverage about the issue of forced conversions and marriages. In conclusion, this research suggests that the government must revise the PEMRA laws to ensure pluralism, freedom of speech and diversity. It is also argued that students should equip with tools like this research employed to analyze dominant discourses.*

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**Key Words:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology, Media Discourse.

### Introduction

The analysis of words is used in discourse studies to expose power abuse, dominance, inequality, and bias. It also explores how these discs begin, retains, reproduce, and change within particular social, economic, political, and historical contexts. It is known as critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1988 as cited in Sheyholislami, 2001). So, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research focuses on how language is used in institutional and political discourses. It also studies specific

discourses on class and gender to discover overt and covert inequities in social connections.

According to Taiwo (2007), CDA is a valuable method to uncover how discourses are employed in everyday life for meaning, power relations, and the emergence of new knowledge. Therefore, CDA is the best tool for assessing media discourse which has become a crucial part of our life. Moreover, media discourse works not only for what people believe or think but also expresses, redefines, manipulates, and reproduces ideologies, particularly in power abuse,

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dominance, and inequality ([Rahimi & Riasati, 2011](#)). Concerning the mass media, [Fairclough \(1996\)](#) asserts that several political, social, economic, and cultural structures are controlled and governed by certain institutions with political, cultural, and economic power.

In addition, media has a role in determining what information the public has just been given and influences public perceptions, opinions, and behaviour (Karlan & Bergan, 2007, as cited in Shojae, Youssefi, & Hosseini, 2013). According to [Van Dijk \(1996b\)](#), media power is usually symbolic and persuasive because media can influence the minds of readers or viewers to a certain extent, but not their actions directly.

In the light of the above view, this research used CDA to explore the representation of the Christian minority on electronic and social media. This representation involves the issue of forced conversions and marriages of minor Christian girls in Punjab. Firstly, the selection of media discourse is to study the coverage issue of the Christian community on electronic media. Secondly, media is considered the fourth pillar of the state to bring awareness among the people and change opinions about any issue of the state. The problem is still not limited to the media; it has been seen that members of the religious minorities, in most cases, belong to poor backgrounds. They require support and protection from state institutions to get justice (South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, 2015). Therefore, this study also focuses on the problem of minorities' access to the government and other institutions to get protection and justice under national and international laws. This study tries to answer the following questions:

- How much coverage is given to the Christian community on electronic and social media?
- What are stakeholders' obligations to protect the Christian community's religious freedom?

## **Literature Review**

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Discourse is considered a social practice by critical discourse analysts ([Fairclough, 1995](#); [Van Dijk, 2001](#); [Wodak, 2013](#)). Language is a vital component of society that has a performative

purpose. This viewpoint on the link between linguistic and social structures demonstrates how language connects with reality's social components.

According to Van Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis involves precise description, justification, and analysis of dominant discourses and how they indirectly influence socially shared knowledge, ideologies, and attitudes, primarily by their role in constructing the concrete models ([Van Dijk, 1993](#)). As a result, language is the most concerning area of CDA, which critically examines the structural relationships of domination, power, control, and discrimination.

The political goal of CDA is to analyze how media portray and represent the world, which indirectly affects the audience's thinking. [Wodak \(2001\)](#) identified CDA as a tool that critically examines social inequality, communicated, indicated, constituted, and legitimized through language use.

According to [Taiwo \(2007\)](#), CDA helps understand how discourses are used to enhance power relations and promote new knowledge. In this way, CDA can see the power relations of the language used in mass media. Language is central in expressing, changing, and reproducing ideologies in media discourse ([Rahimi & Riasati, 2011](#)). Studying media discourse is highly motivated because media language influences and expresses the ideology and social context of a particular speech community.

[Van Dijk \(1998\)](#) also explained media study as a source to identify ideologies. For him, nowadays, elite groups can continue their power relations not by force or any economic control but with the implicit use of persuasion in media discourse. So, media is a way to analyze social meanings and stereotypes involved in language and communication to reflect and represent the formation of social life, culture, and politics of a particular context ([Bell & Garrett](#)). This is how dominant ideologies identify one group over another and emphasize group identification which involves in-group and out-group members of society.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

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The presence of ideology in texts is one of the

most promising areas in Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Linguistics has a rich history that focuses on ideology. According to [Fairclough \(1995\)](#), ideology deals with meanings in relation to power. Ideologies, which originate in texts as implicit assumptions, result in the production or reproduction of unfair power and domination relations. [Van Dijk \(1988\)](#) was among the first and most renowned practitioners of textual grammar, but as his academic career progressed, he began to apply his discourse analysis theory to media texts. His focus was primarily on representing ethnic groups and minorities, starting with media news analysis. His numerous research studies in multiple disciplines have led him to believe that elites, in many ways preformulate and hence cause massive prejudice in society with the help of media discourse ([Wodak 2006](#)). Van Dijk has centred his studies on bigotry and racism in the media and parliamentary debates.

Ideology has a social dimension ([Van Dijk, 1998](#)). According to the definition of ideology, these beliefs are gained, maintained, and changed in social contexts and are founded on the social interests of groups and social interactions between groups in complex social systems (Ibid: 135). This section looks at how these phenomena play a role in constructing and reproducing ideologies in Pakistani media discourse. So, in the social analysis, the main concern is about power relations in electronic media regarding coverage of minority issues, particularly the issue of forced conversions and marriages.

### Power and Control

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Power includes control by members of one group over members of another group ([Van Dijk, 1993: 254](#)). Furtherly, persuasive authority indirectly controls the mind, such as attitude, beliefs, and knowledge. What makes such power different from other forms of power is the term 'dominance' in discourse analysis which this study is concerned with. The possession and exercise of more power of one group cause limitation of freedom for the other group ([Van Dijk, 1998: 151](#)). In fact, with the help of coercion, control can be achieved ([Van Dijk, 1996](#)). Therefore, the ultimate aim of such power is to serve the interest of a particular group in society.

### Access

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According to [Van Dijk \(1993\)](#), the concept of access is that the elite community gets more attention and access than other communities. Those groups with more power and control ultimately get greater access to public media. Powerful social actors and institutions influence society's awareness through media access.

### Institutions

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Ultimately, ideologies have an institutional and organizational dimension contributing to reproducing them. These sorts of institutionalization may perform a significant role in recruiting new members, setting goals, formulating norms and, more importantly, coordinating and effectively implementing actions that accomplish the aim of the unified group ([Van Dijk, 1998:137](#)). Therefore, the government, police, and court work as an institution in society and all members spend a large part of their lives in such institutions. So, this section investigates stakeholders' role in protecting the Christian community from forced conversion and marriages.

To conclude, the central ideology in the social context is power and excess, which views the socio-political context of Pakistan with a focus on the legal and political manifestations of electronic media and the role of such representations in the reproduction of dominated ideology of electronic media. Therefore, the selection of Van Dijk's approach of social analysis to media discourse is to see how power and domination involve control, namely by members of the elite and political group, particularly the majority, over another group, mainly the minority (Christians) in Pakistan, in getting excess of electronic media. It also deals with the role of social activists and civil societies in gaining access to social media. Lastly, this research also investigates the national and international obligations of the state towards marginalized communities.

### Method

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This research used a qualitative research method to study the coverage issue of the Christian minority in electronic media. This research has

used purposive sampling, conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with the selected participants online. The prime questions of this research were: What is your opinion about the representation of the Christian community on Pakistani electronic media? Would you please share your experience and knowledge of Pakistani media houses? Being a lawyer, what is your experience with the cases of forced

conversions and marriages of Christian minor-aged girls? Being a social activist, what is your opinion about the representation of the Christian community on Pakistani social media? How do you utilize social media about the Christian minorities' issue of forced conversions and marriages? Can you share your experience when you approach relevant departments for the legal protection of your missing daughter?

**Table 1.**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Participant Recruitment</b>
Media Experts	3	Ten years of experience in journalism 1: Member of the National Commission for Justice & Peace
Social Activists	3	2: Chairman National Minorities Alliance of Pakistan 3: Director of Center for Social Justice
Lawyer	2	1: Lawyer of Maria Shahbaz case and Sunaina James Masih case 2: Advocate High Court & Human Rights Defender
Politician	1	Member of National Assembly (Minority)
Parents	1	Sunaina James Masih case, Gujranwala

This study includes online semi-structured interviews to study the coverage issue of the Christian minority on electronic media. For this, the data is collected from 10 participants because they have extensive knowledge and experience about the concerned issue of this study. All the participants were interviewed individually through online call recording. Each interview lasted about 15-20 minutes. The data gained from the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and then classified according to thematic categories found relevant to the research objectives. After selecting desired data, the research used Van Dijk's model as a framework to study the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power in Pakistani electronic media.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Social Context Analysis**

The third dimension of Van Dijk's model is the social context. Due to the advancement of the internet, now media is viewed as the most influential pillar of the state and have the power

to spread awareness and shape the opinions of the public about any privileged issue. So, to analyze the ideology of Pakistani media, this study investigates the representation of the Christian minority on electronic and social media. Online semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants as a major research instrument to gather data to cater to this need.

The first section involves online interviews about the representation of the Christian minority on electronic media, particularly the issue of forced conversions and marriages. Three media experts who have extensive knowledge about their field and shared their opinions were selected. The second section involves online interviews about the representation of Christian minorities on social media about forced conversions and marriages. Three social activists were selected with ten years of experience as social activists from a marginalized community. The last section contains online interviews about stakeholders' role in protecting religious minorities. For this purpose, the participants were two lawyers who handled the cases of forced conversions and marriages, one Member of the

national assembly from minorities, and the parents of a victim belonging to Gujranwala were selected. All the participants were interviewed individually through online call recording. All relevant themes related to the coverage issue of the Christian minority on electronic media were identified. In addition, participants' comments concerning their knowledge and experience were also reported.

## Analysis and Results

### Representation of the Christian Minority in Electronic Media

Several themes are generated after online semi-structured interviews with political analysts and media development experts about the coverage issue of the Christian minority in Pakistani electronic media. These themes explore various factors of missing representation of the Christian minority in electronic media.

### Media Monopoly

The first theme explored from the research findings was media monopoly. In Pakistan, mass media, particularly electronic media, is directly connected with the state and works under the state's designed structures. Firstly, Electronic media needs a license from the PEMRA, which works as a moderator and is registered as a company with the required capital. Therefore, strong background and revenue are a must for getting the license. Secondly, the eligibility criteria of the PEMRA code of conduct are very restricted for getting excess. Approximately 15 intelligence agencies and government departments scrutinize applications for media licenses. They also follow the rules and conditions mentioned in the PEMRA. The authorities exclude many citizens, communities, and marginalized groups from owning media and ensure only an exclusive group can get excess in media. So, only limited companies, business groups, and political leaders have the power and capital to afford these licenses. Moreover, in Pakistan law, cross-media ownership allows existing media groups, prominent business groups and political interest groups to hold partnerships. As a result, these policies discouraged civil rights-based organizations and citizen groups from owning media. Similarly, for

a minority group, revoking a license is a possibility because they are prohibited from talking openly about religious

conflict, as mentioned in the PEMRA code of conduct. Therefore, forced conversions and marriages are a religious issue between the majority and minority in Pakistan. So, marginalized groups remained voiceless on electronic media. This is how media monopoly is structured in traditional Pakistani media, and representation of the Christian minority remains disadvantaged and missing.

### Portrait of the Christian Minority

The second theme was that history shows the position of minorities in Pakistan that they have always been persecuted. Many blasphemy allegations are particularly associated with the Christian community as the cases of Asia Bibi, and Tabeeta Gill are highly targeted by mod and faced death sentences, so these religious conflicts remain a challenge for minorities to speak for their rights. Even news reporters do not cover minority issues because of majoritarian pressure and threats. In the same way, forced conversions and marriages are also a religious conflict between the majority and minority in Pakistan. This is how the image of the Christian community is framed in Pakistan.

Quoted from an interview with the media development expert:

*"I believe the main problem marginalized communities face in Pakistan is coverage on electronic media. It is not easy to get a partnership with Pakistani electronic media; one needs the PEMRA license with capital and has a strict eligible criterion that follows the rules and regulations to run a news channel. Due to cross-media membership, state policies prioritized exclusive groups to get the excess of electronic media and excluded smaller groups and civil rights organizations. The negative image of the Christian minority is also another reason for less coverage on electronic media. Many cases of blasphemy in Pakistan are particularly associated with the Christian community, which frames a challenging image of the Christian community in Pakistan. You also know about the case of Asia Bibi and Tabeeta Gill. That is why news reporters*

*cannot risk giving coverage to Christian minorities' problems due to pressure and threats. Even low-ranked channels give coverage when Christian become victims before they do not get a chance to participate in the daily routine talk on news channels".* (Participant 1).

### **Dominant Mainstream**

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The third emerging theme was dominant mainstream in Pakistan because the media target is a large population segment. Currently, in Pakistan, approximately 30 plus news channels are running. Still, only those groups are dominated, which target a large audience of the country, for example, GEO News, ARY New and SAMA News, etc. These news channels are highly dominated because they share specific knowledge that hits the interest of a large audience that involves most politicians, elite groups, and business groups. This creates a barrier for smaller groups to access electronic media because small groups are structured for particular communities' concerns, interests, attitudes, norms, and values. That is why marginalized communities which are smaller in number don't get access.

### **State Driven Information**

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The other theme from the interview was that the state and mainstream media are interlinked because access to electronic media depends on the required desires of the PEMRA, which create access between corporate sectors and the state. How much space media gives minorities depends on how much permission the state gives minorities in the political and national discourse. The motive behind this is the state is responsible for following the words of national leader Quid-e-Azam who provides freedom of religion to all non-Muslims belonging to any religion, caste, or creed. According to this, it is the state's responsibility to ensure that religious minorities are equal citizens and have the right to live life according to their religion and norms. Moreover, Pakistan is a signatory of the International Human Rights Declaration. But in reality, the state discouraged diversity and pluralism. So, if the issue of forced marriages and conversions of Christian minorities gets coverage on electronic media, it questions the state's responsibility to

protect religious minorities and freedom of expression. Therefore, dominated news channels on electronic media run only preferred government narratives.

As the words are quoted from the interview with a media expert:

*"The other problem is that the target of mainstream media is a large audience that is obviously powerful groups, business groups, and majority politicians. Also, smaller groups target local communities, so marginalized communities, particularly Christian ones, don't get access to electronic media. Even though electronic media always preferred narratives of the government and coverage of minorities issues depends on the state's permission to the media, e.g., you can see Geo news gives a highlight of churches celebration every Christmas and Easter. Another concern is the state's obligations to tackle the issue of forced conversions and marriages because the state will be questioned to follow Jinnah's words and international consideration to protect religious minorities in the country".* (Participant 3)

### **Media: A Leading Way of Business**

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Another striking theme was that both state and electronic media have mutual interests because media get access to public sectors advertisement, and the state receives supportive media. So, media is primarily concerned with the business as large business groups have adopted media, e.g., the Jang group of Pakistan has the largest cross-media ownership in media housing due to the exclusive excess of Macdonald's franchises. In the same way, the Dunia Group has owned over two thousand colleges. Therefore, its main business is the educational sector. Consequently, they own media as additional excess and view the majority as a larger audience to promote business revenue and political traffic. This results in missing the Christian community's representation on electronic media. In addition, due to market dynamics, power structures, and state policies, the coverage of minority issues has become apparent ignorance.

### **Reproduction of the Ideology**

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The last theme from the interview was that the

The most sophisticated form of power is persuasion which is highly related to ideology. In Pakistan, elite and political groups have indirect coercion towards the audience. People's perception is highly motivated by how the media constructed the news and events of political transformation. Dominated groups only present the state's concerns and issues because they follow the traditional structure of news designed by the state. This leads to the continued development of the audience's lack of interest and awareness regarding minorities' conditions and representations. So, the lack of minority coverage, particularly forced conversions and marriages on electronic media, creates a bridge between minority and majority communities where people only know political agendas.

As the words are quoted from the interview with a media expert:

*"Media work as a business institution with the state as it gets excess of public advertisements and government receives supportive media. As Dunia Group, founded by a businessperson and politician, Mian Amer Mahmood, has a great revenue due to control of educational sectors. In the same way, the Jang group, founded by businessperson Mir Khalil ur Rehman is large cross-media ownership in Pakistan. So, it is evident that minorities already belong to local communities that cannot be their target audience, resulting in missing representation on electronic media. It is also noticeable that the Media play with the people's psyche. It always brings political transformations, and the public automatically considers the reality and necessity of what the media presents. That is a major issue that leads the majority community to be unaware of the social issues of marginalized communities as forced conversions and marriages lack electronic media coverage because of which majority people do not know about It".* (Participant 4).

### **Representation of the Christian Community on social media**

This research also brings another significant theme that explores social media as a source to incorporate a representation of the Christian community. This online semi-structured interview was taken with social activists about

the representation of the Christian community's issue of forced conversions and marriages on social media.

### **A Source of Awareness**

The results bring another critical theme about the representation of the Christian minority on social media. It was revealed that traditional media had disallowed the freedom of expression of marginalized groups due to state policies, elite groups, and political interests. Undoubtedly, the social media revolution is a great internet mechanism that provides people with a platform to interact and discuss information freely and share their views with freedom of expression. Now religious communities have easy access to social media, which is less dominated and more public-oriented, to democratize their conflicts and raise their voice against religious discrimination.

Nowadays, journalists, lawyers and social activists, civil societies, and NGOs work individually on forced conversions and marriages using social media. They arrange online meetings, conferences, and talk shows on Zoom App, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram to interact, discuss, and share their views freely. As Akmal Bhatti, lawyer and Chairman of Minorities Alliance Pakistan and Samson Salamat, social activist and chairman "Ravadari Tehreek", have protested several times against forced conversions and marriages while using Facebook live streaming to bring awareness among the society. To add more, NAYA DOOR Media, a formal media platform, is a public-oriented platform that works for minorities' freedom of expression. This formal media involves Muslim and Christian professional journalists and brings coverage to the stories of forced marriages and conversions. This channel has brought positivity and, in a try, increased majoritarian traffic to get in notice of the condition of religious minorities.

Social activist and the director of News Castle Christian Network summarized the following

aspects of social media:

*"I am running my own YouTube channel that talks about the Christian community's diverse*

cultural, educational, legal, and religious issues. My purpose in running this channel is to invite Christian religious scholars, lawyers, educationists, and social activists who do not get a platform to talk about their own rights because my channel is free from political groups or elite groups or any other religious, legal, and social influence that is why it gives a chance of freedom of expressions to every individual. Due to the excess of social media, you can see that every individual social activist, journalist, lawyer, and civil society is working on forced conversions and marriages. They arrange different online sessions on Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook etc. As Akmal Bhatti, lawyer and Chairman Minorities Alliance Pakistan and Samson Salamat, social activist and chairman "Ravadari Tehreek" and NAYA DOOR Media, a formal media, are also working to bring awareness to society. So, the Christian community is trying its best to raise our voices to protect our daughters". (participant 5)

### A Struggle for Religious Tolerance

It was also concluded that social media is another resort for the marginalized community to raise their voice against human rights violations. Therefore, in Faisalabad, different female activists, lawyers and educationists made a movement titled "beti bchao Tehreek" to save the lives of Christian minor-aged girls in the light of national and international laws in Pakistan. This movement has its Facebook account to bring its voice to the people. In the same way, another campaign in Faisalabad is titled "hmari betia, hmari izat", which is also working on the issue of forced conversions and marriages by civil society members. Due to social media technology, civil societies and individuals can debate and build upon thoughts and ideas to create a new generation of multi-religious societies that promotes diversity and pluralism in the community. All these struggles are for giving coverage to the voices of minorities and bringing awareness to society.

Quoted from an interview with social activist and Chairman National Minorities Alliance of Pakistan:

*"We are trying our best to raise minorities' voices and promote human rights. I have started a*

*movement, "beti bchao Tehreek", to bring awareness about the religious discrimination our Christian girls face due to forced marriages and conversions. In the same way, our female social activists, religious scholars, and educationists became united and started a movement, "hmari betia hmari izat Tehreek", to protect minor-aged girls and seek justice from the state. Another social activist Samson Salamat has also started a movement, "Ravadari Tehreek", for religious tolerance. However, the problem is that we have only access to social media to deliver our concerns to the people and raise awareness. We held different plenary meetings and press conferences in Lahore. The details of all these movements are available on our Facebook pages". (Participant 6)*

### A platform for NGOs and Social Activists

It is also stated that different NGOs in Pakistan are working on forced marriages and conversions of minor Christian girls due to easy access to the internet. Their main goal is to protect marginalized groups and enhance human rights to eradicate all forms of discrimination and religious violence. Concerning the issue of forced marriages and conversions, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan; Center for Social Justice; Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace; Center for Legal Aid Assistance and settlement; The Peoples Commission for Minorities Rights; Aurat Foundation is working to protect the religious minorities from the burning issue of forced conversions and marriages in Pakistan. These NGOs have different online sessions and discussion platforms due to social accounts to bring social awareness. Many social activists play their role by investigating the cases, facilitating legal aid, protection, and rehabilitation for the survivors of forced marriages and conversions; some of them are Lala Robin Daniel, Chairman of National Minorities Alliance of Pakistan, and Nisar James Bhatti, Member of the Centre for social justice has been working on different cases of forced marriages and conversions. Particularly the case of Farah Shaheen and Cashman is being investigated by Lala Robin, while Nisar James Bhatti investigated the case of Nayyab Gill and Sadaf Masih. So, due to an easy excess of social

media, many social activists are running Facebook groups and pages for minority communities to bring awareness and consideration to society regarding the issue of forced conversions and marriages.

Quoted from an interview with social activist and director of the Center for Social Justice:

*NGOs have a significant role in investigating case history and other considerations. Namely, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the Center for Social Justice; the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace; the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and settlement; The Peoples Commission for Minorities Rights; the Aurat Foundation are working on cases of forced conversions and marriages. Besides that, different social activists are also working to protect the survivors and bring awareness to the community. I know Lala Robin and Nisar James, who handled the cases of Nayab Gill, Farah Shahen, and Sadaf Masih. They provide legal aid, protection, and rehabilitation for forced conversions and marriage survivors. (Participant 7)*

### **Institutions (Police, Court, and the State)**

Ideologies are also related to groups, social movements, dominance, and struggle (Van Dijk, 2013:38). Therefore, this section of research involves larger social structures. This investigation requires a socio-political condition and the role of stakeholders in shaping and protecting issues of the Christian minority in Pakistan. The findings also bring remarkable themes after online semi-structured interviews with the lawyer, a member of the national assembly and parents about the state's role and stakeholders in the cases of forced conversions and marriages.

### **Violation of National Laws**

Another emerging theme was the lack of implementation of national laws as the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendments) bill 2018, which was passed for the Punjab province and applied to all citizens of Pakistan, defines the age of the child if a male is under 18 years of age and if a female is, under 16 years of age. The Bill declared a minor as a person under eighteen and set a fine of Rs.0.2 million with three years'

imprisonment for marrying a minor. Therefore, a child is considered a minor below that age, so coming into marriage is against national law. The state must implement this law by investigating serious concerns about minor's ages to protect religious minorities from the curse of forced marriages and conversions. While under Criminal Law Amendment 2017 (IV), section 498-B to the Pakistan Penal Code of the amendment has added the punishment of five years of imprisonment with Rs.500,000 rupees fine for the abductor who forcefully married any minor or non-Muslim woman or girl, but unfortunately, the implementation of this law in the case of forced marriages and conversions of Christian minor-aged girls remains questionable.

Two advocates High Court and members of the Minority Rights Committee of Punjab Bar Council commented:

*"Every day, I handle such cases. The primary demand we ask from the court is the proper investigation of the cases under (the Child Restraint Act) because children under the age of 15 lack the capacity to change their religion and may have threats and pressure from abductors to show consent in the court. If a child cannot get a driving license and national identity card before 18 years of age, how can a minor-aged girl be able to decide her religion and husband? (Participant 8) You know Muhammad Yonus and a female political leader who changed their religion. We don't raise any action against them because they are mature and have the free will to change religion. But in the cases of minor-aged girls, we believe in mental maturity and rights of decision under national laws. Even parents provide required documents, but the court always follows the girls' consent in such cases. The Pakistan government is a very large legal regime, so the state is responsible for following national laws to protect Christian minor-aged girls from religious discrimination. Even Criminal Law Amendment 2017 (IV) punishes the abductor who married a minor or non-Muslim girl but implementing this law in case of forced conversions and marriages is a hope for the Christian community". (participant8)*

### **Violation of the Constitution of Pakistan**

It was stated that the Constitution of Pakistan is

based on independence, liberty, religious freedom, and equal respect for religious minorities in Pakistan. But there is a regular practice of violation of the constitution of Pakistan regarding human rights. Article 9 provides the security and liberty of every citizen, while Article 20 (a) provides equal religious freedom to all citizens to propagate their religious practices. In the same way, Article 25 promotes equality of citizens before the law and Article 35 safeguards the rights and interests of minorities. In this light, Christians have the right to practice their religion without any pressure. It is the state's responsibility to consider the freedom of the Christian minority, particularly in the case of sexual abuse, forced marriages and forced conversions.

### **Manipulation of International Human Rights Declarations**

It is also said that Pakistan is also a signatory of international treaties to protect religious minorities. According to Article 18 of UDHR, every citizen has religious freedom. At the same time, Article 18 (4) of the international covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that parents have the right to determine the child's religion when the child attains maturity. Moreover, Article 14(2) of the UN Convention on the child's rights declares the child's consent uninformed. However, the persistence of religious discrimination mainly belongs to ethnic minority groups. On the other hand, the state seems inactive in safeguarding and protecting minor Christian girls from forced marriages and conversions under national and international laws.

As the Member of the National Assembly from the Christian minority commented:

*"It makes me desperate when I see our community struggling on social media to raise their voice against the lives of minor-aged girls. Only social media is not an effective sept until the state gives constitutional rights to minorities. We cannot deny that the Constitution of Pakistan promotes equality of human rights and the protection of all citizens. Even Articles 9, 20, 25, and 35 provide liberty and freedom to every individual in society. Pakistan is also responsible for international law considerations. The judicial*

*system is legally responsible for protecting minority girls and women from sexual abuse and other discriminatory crimes. But the state is silent to save lives of Christian under-aged girls and provide justice to minority parents who lamentably seek justice from court and state".* (Participant 9)

### **Ineffective Police and the Court Representation**

In Pakistan, the Police system lacks training, intelligence capability, and a sense of accountability to investigate cases of forced marriages and conversions properly. The police, an overwhelming majority community, often refuse to record the file of parents and falsify recorded information. In most cases, victims belong to poor and disadvantaged families because they lack access to relevant legal protection and justice departments until they have strong support and reference. However, Pakistan's lower and higher courts lack proper procedures to investigate the victims' age and consent in forced marriages and conversions. In the case of Sunaina, who belongs to Gujranwala of Punjab, the girl's age was changed, showing the clerics' proper involvement in the NADRA office. But due to external pressure as such threats from extremists and personal religious beliefs, judicial officers showed bias and stereotyped behaviour in dealing with the cases. Therefore, the role of both police and court is highly influenced because of entrenched patriarchal societal and cultural norms in cases of forced marriages and conversions.

As parents of Sunaina commented:

*"We belong to a poor family; we do not know what is happening with us. We both are uneducated. We filed our complaint in Aroop police station district Gujranwala. But police did not take any action. Even we requested the police to take any action. My daughter provided a marriage certificate and a fake identity card in which her date of birth is mentioned as 01-01-2002 while our marriage date is 07-12-2003. We have told the court that our daughter is below 18, so she cannot take independent decisions. We also provided our marriage, church, and Sunaina's birth certificates. Still, the court followed Sunaina's statement without any*

*investigation of fake documents, accepted her marriage certificate, and allowed her to go with her husband". (Participant 10)*

## Discussion

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The findings of the social analysis bring some factors that Pakistani electronic media is ideologically influenced and highly dominated. The interest in electronic media is shifted towards market dynamics, power structures and state narratives. It is now being used as a source of business rather than bringing awareness about marginalized communities. Due to cross-media membership and a large segment of the population, only elite groups, a majority of politicians and business groups, get excess of Pakistani electronic media. Another factor is that electronic media can influence people's thoughts; therefore, it only promotes the state narratives to save the image of the state's obligations. Additionally, the Christian community in Pakistan is known for being persecuted, particularly blasphemy allegations. Therefore, reporters and journalists are afraid of pressure groups and death threats to take the side of minority issues. These are the major causes because the Christian community's narratives remain unvoiced on electronic media.

On the other hand, due to a lack of coverage on mainstream media and easy access to social media, different social activists, lawyers, educationalists, and civil societies are now working on forced conversions and marriages in Punjab to bring awareness to the society. Different platforms of the internet, particularly Facebook, Zoom app, WhatsApp groups, Google websites, and Twitter, are great sources for the Christian community to conduct online sessions, conferences, and meetings. Different social activists also started movements regarding the issue of forced conversions and marriages, e.g., *Beti Bchao Tehrik*, *Hmari Betia Hmari Izat Tehrik*, and *Ravadari Tehrik*. As a result, social media help the Christian community bring awareness of religious freedom in society and protect minorities from religious discrimination. Lastly, ideologies also involve the institutional dimension, which allows reproduction. Therefore, interviews with the lawyer and parents revealed the role of the institutions. The findings were that the state and other concerned

institutions failed to provide human rights and religious freedom to the Christian community under national, international, and constitutional rights.

## Limitation of the Study

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Due to the shortage of time and resources, only Punjab province is selected for data gathering and analysis. In this research, the writer only takes the Christian community as a minority group in Pakistan. There are many issues of marginalized communities, but this study only focuses on the coverage issue of the Christian minority in Pakistani electronic media. Therefore, cases of forced marriages and conversions are involved in exploring the representation of the Christian community on electronic and social media. The case selection criteria are limited to the Christian minor-aged girls who belong to district Punjab. Also, the year of reported cases is limited to 2018-2021. On the other hand, the selection criteria for electronic media are limited to the news updates on renowned channels such as SAMMA, ARY, and GEO news to explore the representation of the Christian community on electronic media. Lastly, great attention is given to specific platforms of social media, such as online news reports and Facebook, to explore the representation of the Christian community on social media.

## Implications for Future Research

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As with any study, this is also limited, and as a result, there is considerable potential for future research in this area. Based on the findings of this research, the writers hope this study can be a good reference for linguistics students and inspire them to carry out further analysis. The writers suggest further investigations of Pakistani media discourse reveal different and actual problems marginalized communities face in media. Other media platforms, such as hate speeches, books, advertisements, film transcripts, and others, can be used to see the power relations of the language in the mass media. This also involves the investigation of how media language influences and expresses ideology and attitudes of a particular speech community which consists of how language is used in media and represented in the social context of a speech community.

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