

Anti-Hindu Disinformation: A Case Study of Hinduphobia on Social Media

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FOREWORD: AN OLD HATRED FINDS A NEW PLAYBOOK

Early in my tenure as a federal prosecutor, I was exposed to the ugliness, bigotry and violence of anti-Hindu hatred. A series of violent attacks on Hindus in Jersey City was followed by the publication of a letter to the Jersey Journal in 1987 that amounted to a manifesto of hate:

"I'm writing about your article during July about the abuse of Indian People. Well I'm here to state the other side. I hate them. ... We are an organization called dot busters. ... We will go to any extreme to get Indians to move out of Jersey City. If I'm walking down the street and I see a Hindu and the setting is right, I will hit him or her. We plan some of our most extreme attacks such as breaking windows, breaking car windows, and crashing family parties. ... They will never do anything. They are a weak race physically and mentally. We are going to continue our way. We will never be stopped."

The so-called "dot busters," a largely white, largely young gang had indeed embarked on a campaign of vandalism, violence, and murder designed to terrorize Jersey City's Hindu population and to drive them out of the city. An Indian man, although not Hindu, was beaten to death while walking home from Hoboken; his white friend was left unharmed. Another person, a physician, was beaten into a comatose state with baseball bats as he left his office in Jersey City Heights; still another was beaten with a metal pipe while in his apartment, and a New York cab driver was killed on a Jersey City street.

The Indian community rallied to protect itself, and New Jersey's hate crime statute was strengthened as a result; the prosecution of the dot busters for beating the physician (they were acquitted when he couldn't identify his assailants) galvanized federal law enforcement.

So there is, unfortunately, nothing new to the bigotry and violence faced by the Hindu population. Indeed, as this report outlines, in a manner similar to Antisemitism, today's Hinduphobia exploits tropes that are centuries old to re-ignite hatred. What is new, however, and cause for alarm and the issuance of this report, is the deployment of those tropes over social media in what amounts to a new playbook for rekindling an old hatred.

We at the Rutgers Miller Center and Center for Critical Intelligence Studies, and our colleagues at the Network Contagion Research Institute, have seen this new playbook at work before. Our prior reports have highlighted the deployment of antisemitic and anti-Asian tropes on social media in fueling spikes in the intensity and volume of hate messaging. Time and again, when the intensity and volume of hate messaging has reached a fever pitch, violence has erupted. The clearest example of this phenomenon was the slaughter at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, but it can also be seen in attacks ranging from New Zealand to Atlanta to Buffalo.

That is why the issuance of this report is so timely, for we highlight both the deployment of Hinduphobic tropes on social media and the growing intensity of the hate messaging, fueled in part, as in other forms of hate messaging, by state-sponsored trolls, notably of Iranian origin, posing as victims. Our prior work leads us to believe that this activity correlates to eventual violence. Just as in the 1980s and 1990s, therefore, the Hindu population, other vulnerable populations, and law enforcement must unite to counter the hate messaging before it leads to real-world acts of violence.

We believe that the NC Lab at Rutgers can play an essential role in that effort in two respects. First, by identifying messaging over social media that poses a threat to a given population, we can assist that population in preparing to meet the threat. Second, by training cohorts of students to be able to identify through open-source analysis emerging threats over social media, the NC Lab at Rutgers is empowering the next generation with the tools to abate those threats. In this case, Rutgers students worked with high school students from the New Jersey Governors' STEM program in assembling and analyzing the data. Their efforts were essential to this report, and will prove indispensable to ensuring a safe and hate-free future.

As our reports on Antisemitism and, now, Hinduphobia have shown, hate has a long memory. While hate speech -- and the acts of violence it spawns -- may wane and lie dormant, it never entirely disappears. The "dot busters" may no longer be active in New Jersey, but their ideology surfaced as recently as 2021 in Atlanta².

The essential first step in combating hate speech is to call it out. We hope and trust that this report serves that role in combating Hinduphobia.

- John Farmer, Former Attorney General of NJ and Director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

¹ www.northjersey.com/story/news/new-jersey/2022/01/26/indians-jersey-city-nj-attacks-1980-s/6397092001/

² <https://nripulse.com/no-dots-racist-signs-in-atlanta-suburb-brings-back-memories-of-dotbusters/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hinduphobic tropes (Appendix A) – such as the portrayal of Hindus as fundamentally heretical evil, dirty, tyrannical, genocidal, irredeemable or disloyal³ – are prominent across the ideological spectrum and are being deployed by fringe web communities and state actors alike. Despite violent and genocidal⁴ implications of Hinduphobia, it has largely been understudied, dismissed, or even denied in the public sphere. This report applies large scale quantitative methods to examine the spread of anti-Hindu disinformation within a wide variety of social media platforms and showcases an explosion of anti-Hindu tropes. Though confined largely to street-level groups and enthusiasts in the recent past, Hinduphobia is now exploding across entire Web communities across millions of comments, interactions and impressions in both mainstream and extremist platforms.

BLUF AND KEY FINDINGS

- NCRI detected recent surges in derogatory posts toward Hindus present in subcultural social media platforms including 4chan, Telegram and Gab. We found anti-Hindu memes, hashtags and slogans growing prolifically across these fringe online platforms as well as Twitter.
- NCRI's previous analysis shows that extremist content targeting specific vulnerable communities on social media are upstream predictors of real world violence against those communities.
- State actors use Hinduphobic tropes as part of large scale information operations. NCRI examined more than 1 million tweets and found evidence that Iranian trolls disseminated anti-Hindu stereotypes to inflame division as part of a covert influence campaign to accuse Hindus of perpetrating a genocide against minorities in India.

INTRODUCTION

Platforms, civil society organizations, and media are largely unfamiliar with Hinduphobia.⁵ This paper seeks to rectify this state of affairs and deploys a data-driven approach, consisting of large-scale quantitative and machine learning analysis of a wide variety of social media data, to understand anti-Hindu disinformation and propaganda, which drives Hinduphobic discourse.

This approach is warranted because, with the advent of social media, early qualitative analysis suggests that anti-Hindu disinformation and propaganda in the form of memes and hashtags is currently growing prolifically on online platforms.⁶ Such activity often heralds ethnic violence.⁷ These developments thus underscore that both qualitative and quantitative analyses of anti-Hindu disinformation are critically important for purposes of both scholarship and for protecting vulnerable communities.

Our analysis demonstrates that there is an alarming, recent rise in the use of key terms— particularly, anti-Hindu slurs and slogans— that both connote and disseminate Hinduphobia on popular social media platforms. Accompanying this increase is the proliferation of anti-Hindu genocidal memes in Islamist, white nationalist, and other extremist sub-networks online. While such developments are often mistakenly categorized as anti-Indian xenophobia, we show that the specific content of these memes, hashtags, and derogatory messages very clearly targets decidedly Hindu symbols, practices, and livelihoods. In so doing, these online communities are adapting a pre-existing, albeit understudied, playbook of Hinduphobic tropes to a new sphere of communication.

We also show that the percolation of Hinduphobia into general online discourse is used by a variety of both established and emergent actors for political purposes. In particular, we show that state actors within Iran often weaponize this discourse to ignite conflict between India and Pakistan. The weaponization of Hinduphobia for facially political aims in the real world poses a tangible threat to ratchet anti-Hindu violence.

³ Viswanathan, Indu, et al. "Working Definition of Hinduphobia." <https://understandinghinduphobia.org/working-definition/>

⁴ Rummel, R.J. *Death by Government*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1994. Print.

⁵ Viswanathan, Indu, et al. "Working Definition of Hinduphobia." <https://understandinghinduphobia.org/working-definition/>

⁶ Balaji, Murali, and Sachi Edwards. "#Hinduphobia Hate Speech, Bigotry, and Oppression of Hindus through the Internet." *Digital Hinduism Dharma and Discourse in the Age of New Media*, Lexington Book, Lanham, 2017, pp. 111–125.

⁷ Chunara, et al. "Hate Speech on Twitter Predicts Frequency of Real-life Hate Crimes." *ArXiv*. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1902.00119>.

Organized non-state actors such as ISIS, are also expanding Hinduphobic attacks and propaganda. On June 19, 2022, ISIS-K terrorists attacked a Sikh Gurudwara in Afghanistan in "revenge" for allegedly blasphemous comments made by an Indian politician. Official ISIS-K propaganda outlets claimed that the terrorists "penetrated a temple for Hindu and Sikh polytheists in Kabul, after killing its guard, and opened fire on the pagans inside with [their] machine gun and hand grenades."⁸

As ethnic tensions and violence begin to mount in the subcontinent,⁹ knowledge of Hinduphobic tropes is now a critical asset for the media and platforms because anti-Hindu tropes are rapidly cycling from the cyber social sphere to the kinetic sphere in an atmosphere of populist violence. We therefore emphasize that this study is both timely and foundational: it exposes a growing spate of online hatred that has mushroomed in the dark; a hatred that increasingly portends real-world consequences.

SOURCES AND METHODS

In order to understand anti-Hindu disinformation along with its manifestations via modern-day memes, we utilized OSINT (open source intelligence) collection, machine learning, natural language processing, and time series analysis as a part of a broad toolkit of quantitative methods.

DATA AGGREGATION

Social Media Data

For our contemporary analysis, we collected anti-Hindu hashtags and comments from popular social networking and messaging platforms—Twitter, Tiktok, 4chan, Gab, and Telegram. Several open source Python scraping libraries and APIs were used to extract data from these social media platforms. For Twitter, we used sncrape to extract tweets with hashtags and keywords of interest. In addition, we examined state-sponsored trolls from Iran using the Twitter Information Operations Dataset.¹⁰ For more fringe communities such as 4Chan, Gab and Telegram, we used the Social Media Analysis Toolkit (SMAT) application's API, querying for keywords to receive all comments from 2019 - 2022.¹¹

DATA ANALYSIS

Time Series Analysis

Our data ranges from January 2019 to June 2022 for comments in our social media community sample, and until March 2022 for more fringe web communities. From this data, we examined the usage of these terms over time on a time series graph.

Hashtag Frequency and Ranking

For the tweets examined, we ranked the top hashtags associated with the ethnic slurs and anti-Hindu terms identified from the OSINT collection.

Word2Vec Models and Topic Networks

From the scraped data, we used Spacy to tokenize the sentences to remove stop words (e.g., prepositions, articles, pronouns: words which do not add value to our analysis) and also lemmatize— group together— words based on their roots. This was then trained on Word2Vec : artificial neural networks which identify contextual word associations by scoring their vector destinations in linguistic space. Contextual proximity is scored by the calculated cosine similarity value in the model between words. Using the trained Word2vec model, we developed topic networks which use clustering algorithms to group like terms. The size of a term indicates its volume.

Vector Subtraction

In order to uncover underlying anti-Hindu themes, we leveraged vector theme subtraction.¹³ Typically, extremists use memes, codewords, and dog whistles to convey anti-Hindu messaging. To understand whether or not the messages were tagged to Hindus, we used theme subtraction— a methodology in computational linguistics to remove related semantic components and return the result. A simple example is "king - man = ruler."¹⁴

⁸ www.ndtv.com/world-news/islamic-state-claims-kabul-gurdwara-attack-cites-insult-to-prophet-3080345

⁹ www.memri.org/tv/aqsa-mosque-anti-india-rally-muhammad-controversy-jihad-infidels-in-line-eradicate-the-filthy-hindus

¹⁰ <https://transparency.twitter.com/en/reports/information-operations.html>

¹¹ <https://www.smat-app.com/>

¹² Zannettou, S. Finkelstein, J., Bradlyn, B. and Blackburn, J., 2018. A quantitative approach to understanding online antisemitism. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1809.01644*

¹³ Take and Took, Gaggly and Goose, Book and Read: Evaluating the Utility of Vector Differences for Lexical Relation Learning (Vylomova et al., ACL 2016)

¹⁴ <https://www.technologyreview.com/2015/09/17/166211/king-man-woman-queen-the-marvelous-mathematics-of-computational-linguistics/>

In topic networks, we conducted vector subtractions by removing the “Hindu” component and examining the impact on the content of the topic network. In particular, when vector subtracting “Hindu” from these networks, we would expect the remainder to have weak hateful information content if the underlying (coded) animosity in the language was directed at Hindus.

Contemporary Anti-Hindu Disinformation

How are modern manifestations of anti-Hindu disinformation adopted by fringe web communities and state actors in the current day? We qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed content from 4Chan, Gab, and Telegram.

4Chan

4Chan is an anonymous message board that serves as a vanguard of new memes and subcultural elements, with over 7 million users and substantial influence on emerging memes and language.¹⁵ 4chan is known for its radicalizing influence, having inspired a significant number of mass shooters (Christchurch, El Paso, and more) and is often referred to as a cheering section for violence.

Gab

Gab is a social media platform, similar to Twitter, known for its right-leaning user base which frequently attracts online users who have been banned from mainstream platforms. The site received scrutiny following the Tree of Life shooting after it was discovered the shooter had posted a message on Gab indicating his intent to cause harm.¹⁶

Telegram

Telegram is an encrypted messaging platform with nearly 500 million monthly active users. While a majority of users do not engage in hateful or illegal activities, it has been known for attracting a number of fringe groups across the ideological spectrum, as there is little to no content moderation on the platform.

Anti-Hindu Disinformation is masked through the use of ethnic pejoratives, slurs and coded language

Figure 1 shows the Hindu version of the Happy Merchant meme; typically, the happy merchant meme is an emblem of antisemitism, but has also been repurposed in creating other anti-Asian memes. The Happy Merchant became popularized by white supremacists and far right communities to disseminate Antisemitic speech online.¹⁷

Figure 1: The Hindu version of the Happy Merchant Meme¹⁸ titled “Poo in the Loo”

First seen on 4Chan,¹⁹ The term “pajeet” is an ethnic slur, coined as a derisive imitation of Indian names. Typically, *pajeet* is used to describe Indians on the Internet²⁰ – and, by default – Hindus. John Earnest, the white supremacist shooter of the Chabad Synagogue in San Diego, 2019, had referenced “pajeets”²¹ in this manifesto. This slur has also been used by white supremacists in white nationalist podcasts in reference to violent, murderous fantasies about Indians.²²



¹⁵ Hine, Gabriel Emile, et al. “Kek, cucks, and god emperor trump: A measurement study of 4chan’s politically incorrect forum and its effects on the web.” Eleventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media. 2017.

¹⁶ www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/10/28/how-gab-became-white-supremacist-sanctuary-before-it-was-linked-pittsburgh-suspect/

¹⁷ Zannettou, Savvas, et al. “On the origins of memes by means of fringe web communities.” Proceedings of the Internet Measurement Conference 2018.

¹⁸ Zannettou, S. Finkelstein, J., Bradlyn, B. and Blackburn, J., 2018. A quantitative approach to understanding online antisemitism. arXiv preprint arXiv:1809.01644.

¹⁹ “Pajeet.” Wiktionary, Wiktionary, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pajeet>.

²⁰ “Pajeet.” Urban Dictionary, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Pajeet>.

²¹ <https://bcsh.bard.edu/files/2019/06/Earnest-Manifesto-042719.pdf>

²² www.spicenter.org/hatewatch/2020/01/30/white-nationalist-state-department-official-still-active-hate-movement

Our qualitative analysis suggests that pajeet is used in reference to Hindus and Indians interchangeably, with the majority of derogatory characterizations targeted towards Hindus. In particular, distinctly Hindu symbols (swastika, tilaks,²³ etc.) are used persistently in memes referencing pajeet, while the analogue is not true for imagery specific to Islam, Christianity, or other religions within India.

Figure 10, 11, 12, 13: Anti-Hindu Genocidal Memes



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

²³ A tilak is a mark worn by Hindus on the forehead, either as a daily practice, or on specific religious occasions.

Islamist extremist and white supremacist communities regularly disseminate genocidal and violent propaganda and memes against Hindus. Through our open-source intelligence collection for comments and images related to *pajeet*, we found open calls for genocide disguised using coded language. We found that the messaging is not limited to Islamist extremists. In all figures here, extremists leverage “Pepe the Frog” – an emblem of white supremacy and the alt right²⁴ – within violent memes to enliven their genocidal fantasies.

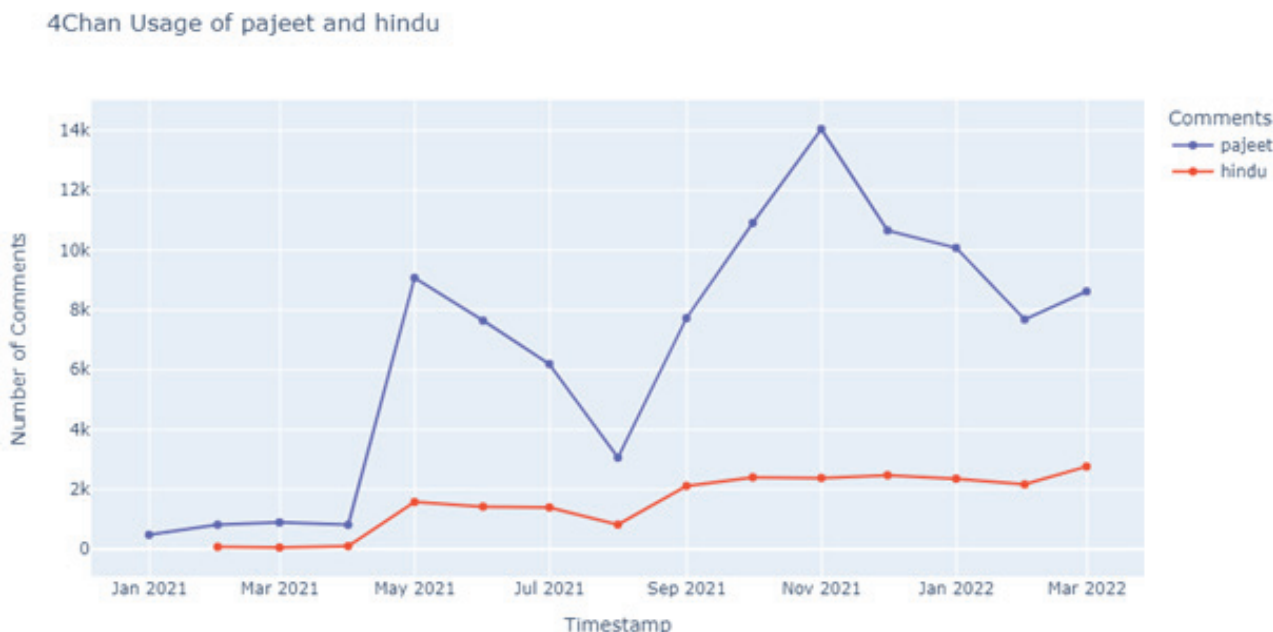
For instance, in Figure 10, self-identified Pakistani Islamist accounts mock the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai, in which 175 people were killed by Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists.²⁵ There is a clear demarcation between the terrorists (depicted as variants of “Pepe the Frog”) and the survivors/ victims, whose Hindu identity is particularly emphasized with brownface, saffron clothing, and tilaks. Hindu victims are shown crying, frustrated, and powerless, while Islamist terrorists are depicted as impervious and smug, reveling in the violence.

Islamists borrow genocidal motifs from well beyond India, including Nazi Germany and the contemporary United States. For example, in Figure 11, Islamists co-opt the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin to suggest the same dehumanizing treatment should be meted out to Hindus. Further memes illustrate Pepe the Frog (as an Islamist) enacting an ISIS-style beheading of Hindus foregrounded against a terror bombing (Figure 12); and the same character fashioned as an SS officer— clear from the Nazi flag and emblem on his arm— gassing a Hindu male, depicted with saffron and a swastika (Figure 13).

A rise in Anti-Hindu slurs on fringe web communities

Our quantitative analysis suggests that usage of *pajeet* in such contexts is growing prolifically on fringe platforms. Using data from the SMAT application, we conducted a time series analysis of the term “*pajeet*” and “Hindu” on 4Chan, Gab and Telegram.

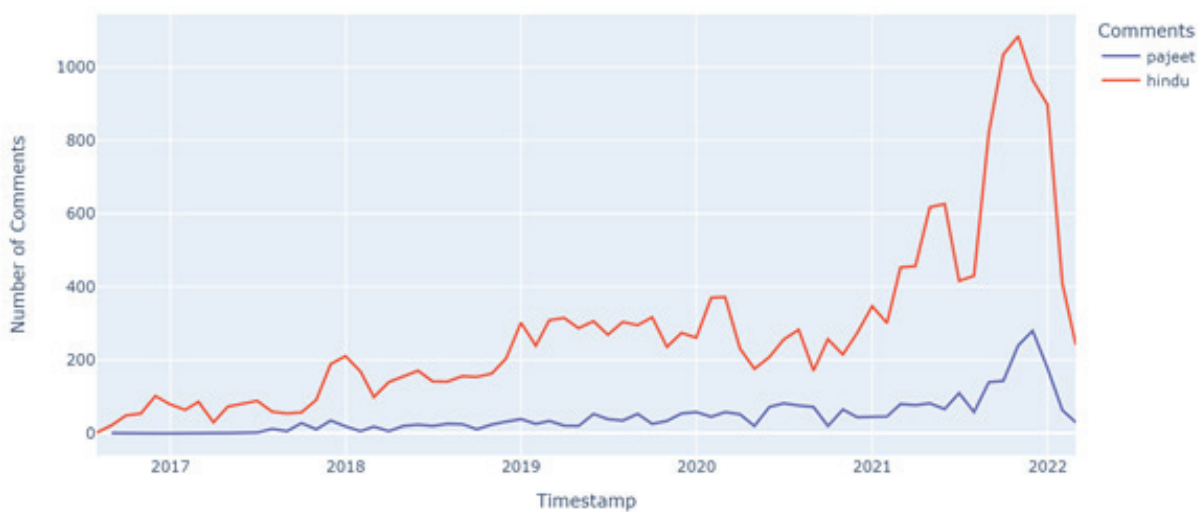
Figure 2: Time Series Analysis of “*pajeet*” on 4Chan, Gab and Telegram



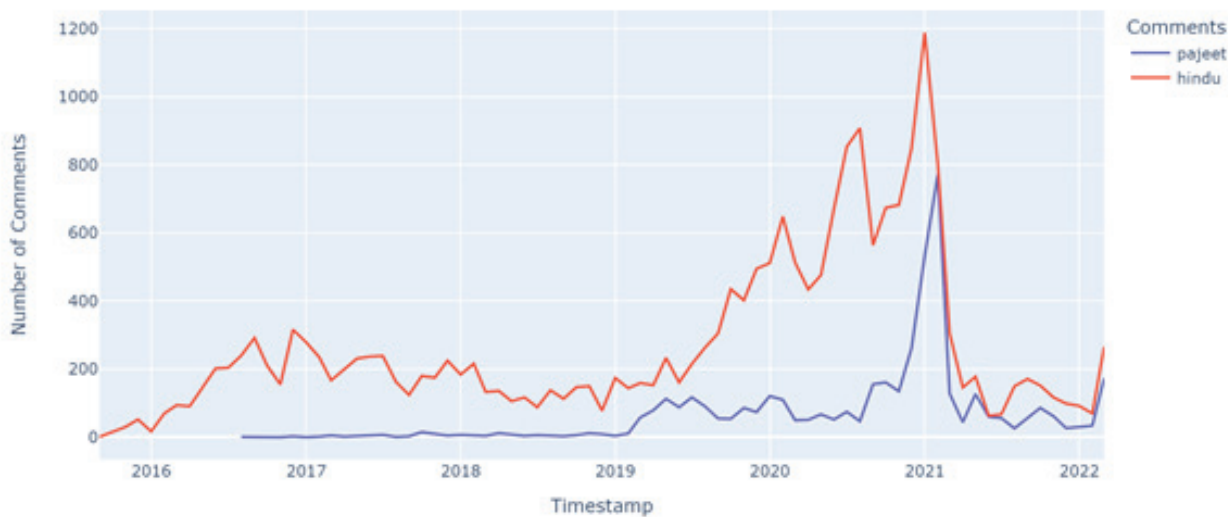
²⁴ Glitsos, Laura, and James Hall. "The Pepe the Frog meme: an examination of social, political, and cultural implications through the tradition of the Darwinian Absurd." *Journal for Cultural Research* 23.4 (2019): 381-395.

²⁵ Bhandarwar, Ajay H et al. "Mortality pattern of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks." *The journal of trauma and acute care surgery* vol. 72,5 (2012): 1329-34; discussion 1334. doi:10.1097/TA.0b013e31824da04f

Gab Usage of pajeet and hindu



Telegram Usage of pajeet and hindu



The use of “pajeet” is also growing on mainstream social media platforms, such as Twitter. Initially, this term hardly had any usage back in 2019 but picked up prominence in 2020 and is now being used more than 250 times a day.

Figure 5 (right): Note passing meme found on 4Chan titled "Indians will replace you"

The note passing meme depicts a white student trolling a hindu student (as shown with a bindi²⁸) by passing them toilet paper in the middle of class, causing the student to become outraged.

We also found that users commenting about "Pajeets," "Hindus" and "India" on 4Chan self reported their locations in the U.S, India, Canada, UK and Australia, with the overwhelming majority being located in the U.S.

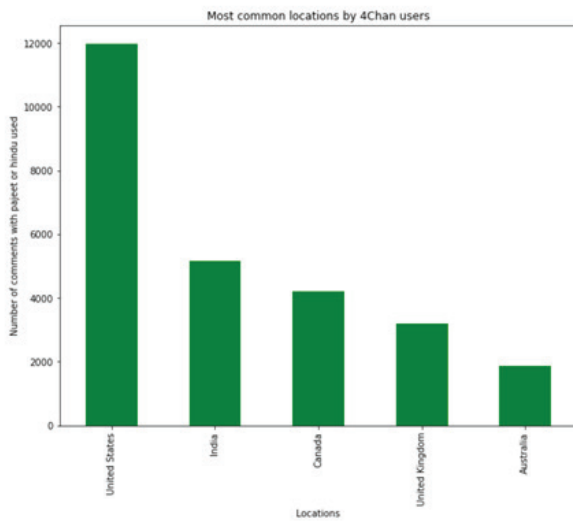
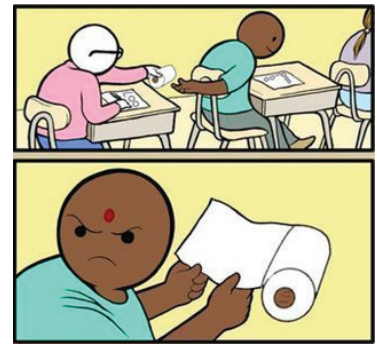


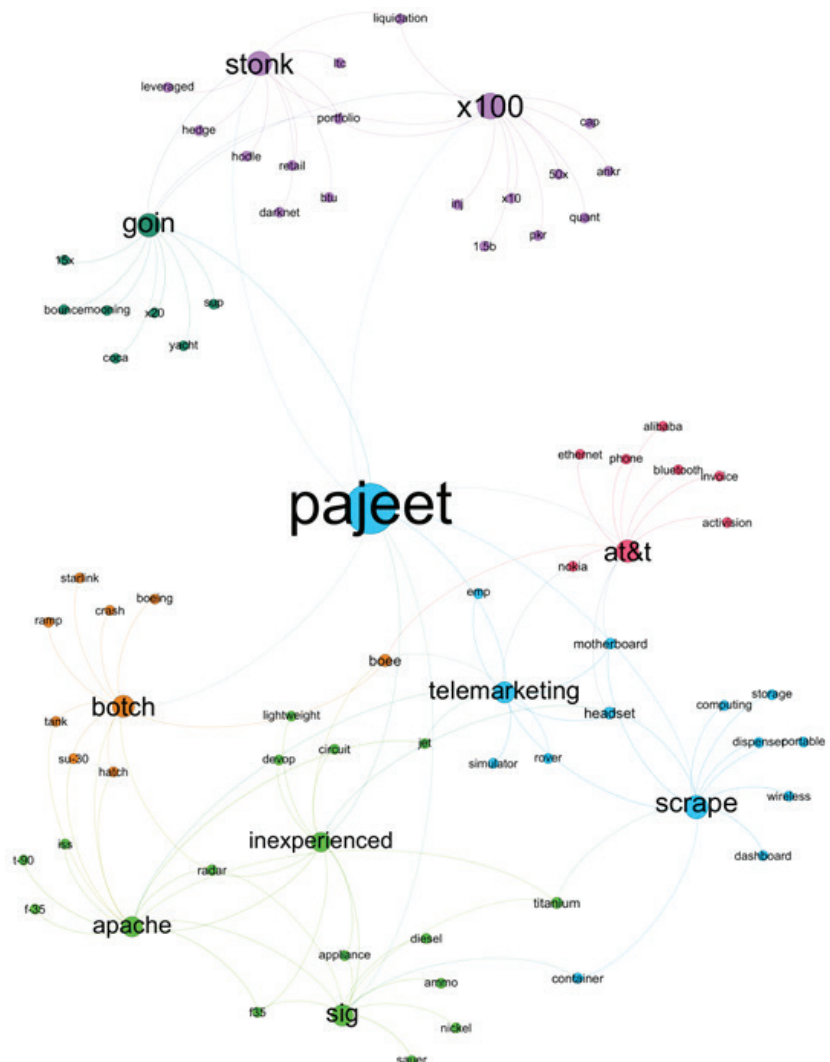
Figure 6 (left): Most common self reported locations by 4Chan users

To quantitatively understand whether the tropes were tied to Hindus, we performed a vector subtraction of "Hindu" from the topic network of "pajeet", removing the "Hindu" themed-components from the then examined the words remaining in the topic network.

What happens when you remove the Hindu component from "pajeet"?

Figure 7: Pajeet on 4chan minus Hindu (vector sub)

When removing all words associated with "Hindu," the themes of dehumanization, dirtiness and immorality immediately disappear. What remains is fluff terms with regards to economics and finance. This goes to show that the characterizations are not about "pajeets" per se, or other ethnicities - but the animosity is tied to the portrayal of Hindus.



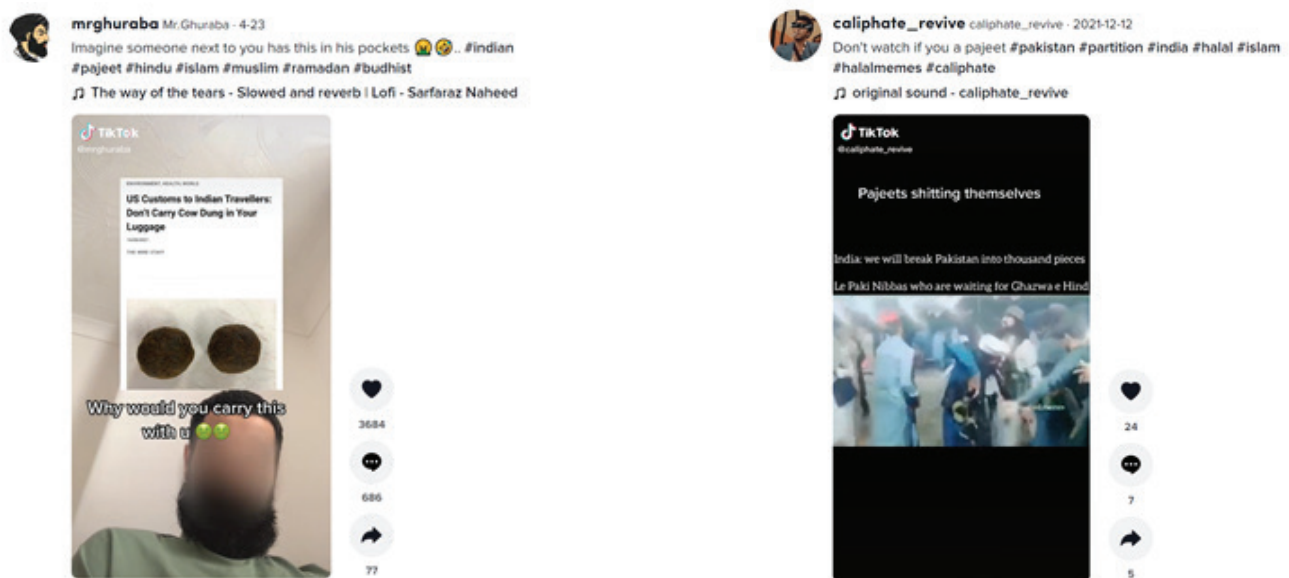
²⁸ Bindi: Mark worn by Hindu women on their forehead

LIVE STREAMING AND MEMEING HINDUPHOBIA:

Contemporary usage of Pajeet on Tiktok, Twitter and Reddit

On Tiktok, videos containing “pajeet” in the captions have amassed close to 2.9 Million²⁹ views. Such videos contain the same tropes as found in 4Chan (i.e. the idea of Hindus being dirty streetshitters), as well as open calls to violence and colonization of Hindus.

Figure 8: Tiktoks with “pajeet” in the captions



Accounts titled “Caliphate Revive” call for “Ghazwa-e-Hind,” a violent fantasy by Islamists to colonize India.³⁰ Similar calls to violence are echoed on Twitter.

Figure 9: Twitter memes with the same themes

Similar anti-Hindu themes are echoed by white supremacist communities; The idea that Hindus are “pajeets” who are dirty, backwards and perverted. After the appointment of Parag Agarwal as Twitter CEO, white supremacist accounts were quick to comment on the “pajeet purge” accusing Agarwal of deliberately mass censoring accounts. Furthermore, white supremacist communities borrow antisemitic tropes - such as the idea of a “Zionist Occupied Government,” a conspiracy theory used in several antisemitic manifestos which denote conspiracy theories about Jewish control over government and media - and use it against Hindus through the dog whistles of “Brahmin Occupied Government” relaying themes about Hindu dominance and control in places of power.



²⁹ <https://www.tiktok.com/discover/pajeet>

Figure 9: Twitter memes with same themes, continued from page 11



NOOOOO! Arabs kill 800 trillion Hindus. Muslims stole Hindu science. Taj Mahal invented by Hindus 9000 years ago. Islam forced on Bengalis. Real Bengalis not Muslim!



Pete D'Abrosca @pdabrosca

Good morning to everyone who survived the Pajeet Purge!

9:01 AM · Dec 3, 2021 · Twitter Web App

4 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 123 Likes

Tweet your reply

Pete D'Abrosca @pdabrosca · Dec 3, 2021

Replying to @pdabrosca

My lost followers are rising from the dead in batches of 100 or so... Interesting.

1 10

McCafferty's Bib @BibMcCafferty · Dec 3, 2021

Replying to @pdabrosca

Praise be to Shiva, I have woken up to smell the curry!

1 2

Static Age @TV_Casualty_

Mass bans, purge and restrictions under the new regime.
BOG (Brahmin occupied government) is punishing us for bob and vagene/street sh*tter jokes.
This is pajeets revenge.

6:55 AM · Dec 3, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

Anna Komnene @Baezantium · Dec 3, 2021

Brahmin Occupied Government

འཇུག་པོ་ཀུལེ @kunley_drukpa · Dec 3, 2021

"Namaste. Let the great anon Twitter slaughter begin"



³⁰ Singam, Kalicharan Veera. "The Islamic State's Reinvigorated and Evolved Propaganda Campaign in India." Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses 12.5 (2020): 16-20.

Our topic network showed that Iranian trolls disseminated anti-Hindu stereotypes, such as associating Hindus with extremists who perpetrated violence against minorities (Muslims, Christians), and inflaming caste divisions between communities.

Furthermore, our analysis suggests the use of covert influence in the Anti-Hindu disinformation used by Iranian state sponsored trolls, presumably as a tool for provoking political unrest. Our location analysis of Iranian trolls found that the self-reported location of such users tweeting about India or Hindus was highly clustered in Pakistan, with some anti-Hindu account locations in India as well. That they are Iranian state actors therefore indicates that these users were strategically falsifying their location. This suggests efforts by the Iranian regime to inflame ethnic tensions in both domestic and inter-state conflicts between Muslims and Hindus and showcases the use of Hinduphobic disinformation for geopolitical strategy.

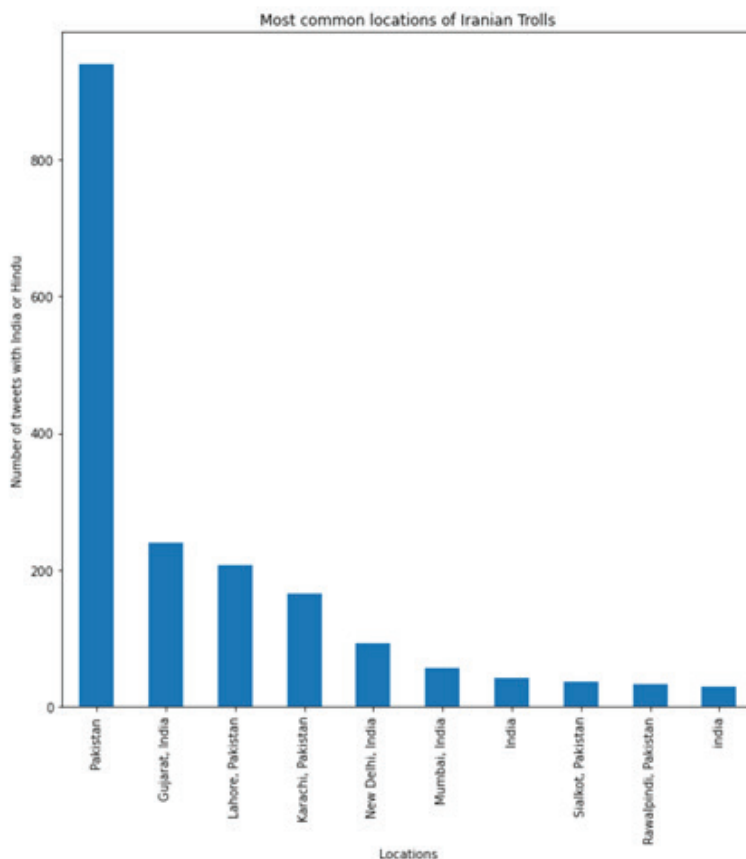
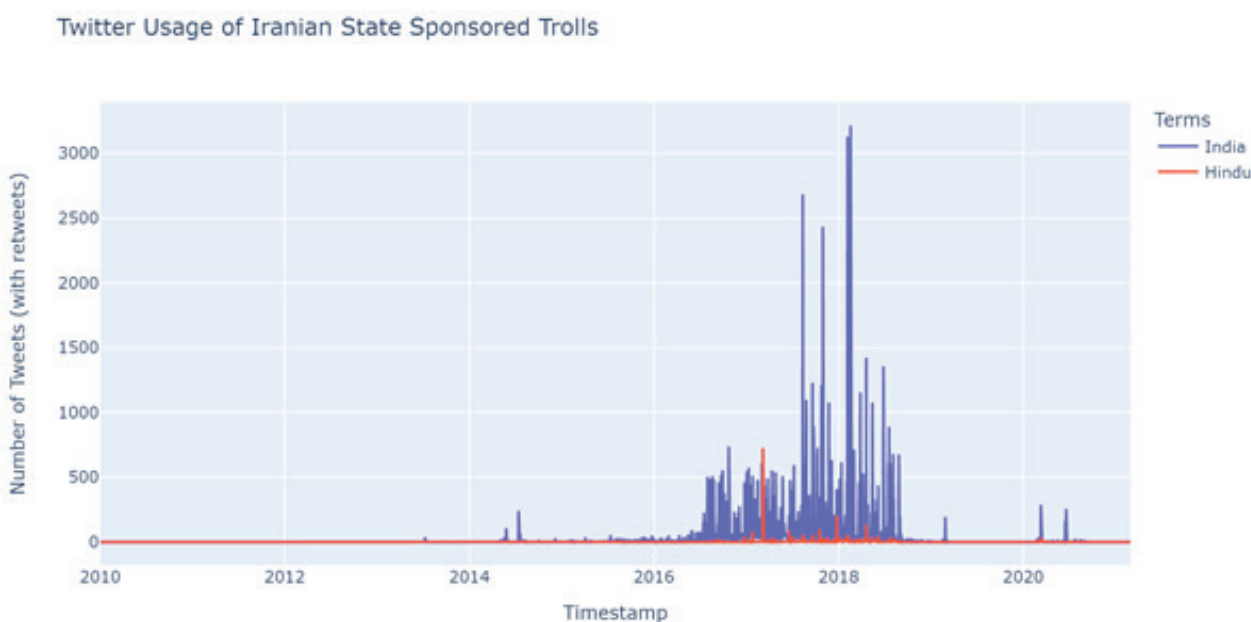


Figure 15 (right): Locations of Iranian State-Sponsored Trolls

In a predominant set of cases, these trolls specifically pretend to be Pakistani supporters of Imran Khan and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party. Left is a sample of the top user descriptions, each of which has the location set to Pakistan:

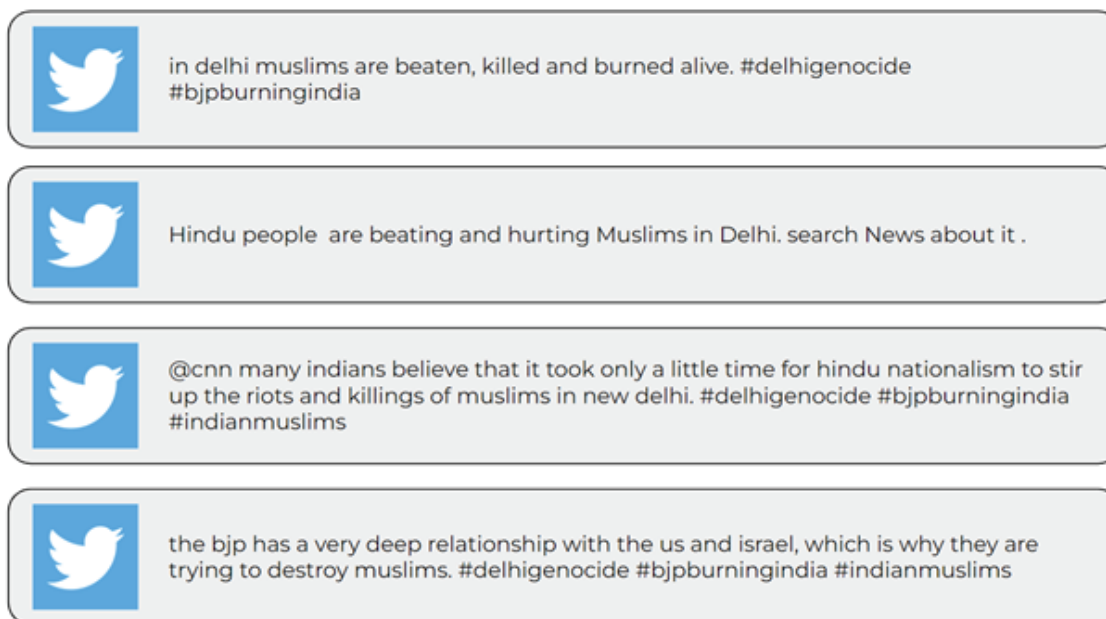
Figure 16 (below): Time Series Analysis of terms relating to Hindus and India



Iranian trolls tweet about India and Hindus during times of geopolitical conflict. For example, during the March 2017 Bhopal–Ujjain Passenger train bombing by ISIS, Iranian trolls, pretending to be Pakistani, attempted an influence operation and disinformation campaign to suggest that the attack was done by “Hindu Extremists,” and attempted to get it trending. In August 2017, Iranian trolls surged the hashtag #KashmirDeniesIndia during the time of unrest in the region following the death of Hizbul Mujahideen³¹ terrorist Burhan Wani. A subsequent spike in early 2018 predates the visit of Iranian President, Dr. Hassan Rouhani to India³². During his visit, Iranian trolls tweeted 1,053 times about human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir.



The information operation launched by Iranian trolls in the aftermath of the Delhi riots, which took place during former U.S. President Donald Trump’s visit to India’s capital in March 2020 is particularly illustrative of the ways in which anti-Hindu disinformation can be leveraged geostrategically. In this case, Iranian trolls proclaimed theories about Hindus murdering Muslims on the streets of Delhi in bloodthirsty, brutal ways. Below are sample tweets that adhere to the aforementioned messaging:



Iranian troll accounts masqueraded as human rights activists, journalists and “humanists” and tagged newspapers (@cnn, @msnbc), calling on them to condemn India for anti-Muslim violence. Iranian trolls deliberately suggested that Hindus were committing genocide against Muslims while unilaterally portraying Hindus with genocidal bloodlust. Iranian trolls thus use covert influence and hijack social justice rhetoric to promote anti-Hindu disinformation (Appendix B).

³¹ <https://in.usembassy.gov/state-department-terrorist-designation-hizbul-mujahideen/>

³² <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29495/indiairan+joint+statement+during+visit+of+the+president+of+iran+to+india+february+17+2018>

The same messaging is seen directly from the Supreme Leader of Iran:



It appears that Iranian state sponsored trolls use influence operations and social justice propaganda to create communal divides in India. Given that India has strengthened relations with Israel over the last several years, Iranian trolls have drawn parallels between Kashmir and Palestine.³³ As the connection between political events and the volume of Hinduphobic Iranian troll activity demonstrates, Anti-Hindu disinformation fluctuates with geopolitical incentives. Iran’s role as mediator between India and Pakistan becomes more substantial as conflict between the nations grows.

CONCLUSIONS

We conducted the largest quantitative analysis to our knowledge on the growth of modern day manifestations of online Hinduphobia. Our analysis combines the use of topic expertise and machine learning to deduce underlying anti-Hindu tropes. The analysis shows a systemic structure of consistent themes ranging from exoticizations, barbarism and heresy, as well genocidal and tyrannical evil. We found that demeaning Hinduphobic themes were often depicted alongside elevated depictions of in-group supremacy among the memes of the extremist groups disseminating them. Proliferating exponentially in the digital age, Hinduphobia appears to be reaching new audiences and fueling the group supremacy and feelings of ethnic superiority across the ideological and extremist religious spectrums. These large surges in ethnic antagonism online often presage violence against the targeted groups. Given recent inflammation of ethnic tensions,³⁴ web platforms, and actors in both government and civil society need to be especially alert for surging coded slurs and imagery associated with Hinduphobia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As paradigmatic and methods research in examining Hinduphobia quantitatively, this study aims to generate widespread awareness of disinformation regarding Hindus. Recognition of the real-world impacts of hinduphobia and disinformation– shown through correlating violence against Hindus– may prove an example to students and learners worldwide of the importance of media literacy and digital citizenship. Several key recommendations follow from our research:

- Platforms need to be made aware of this rise in Hinduphobic hate. We need digital ethnographic understanding of Hinduphobia and other hates to better support detection. Platforms need to take better measures to understand these threats.
- Given the historically murderous nature of Hinduphobia, the Hindu community should update security measures and better protect itself. It should also seek to partner with other vulnerable communities through interfaith organizations to address common security concerns and mediation. Growing community relationships and education for law enforcement, civil society and interfaith dialog can help raise awareness about the growing problem
- Understanding the entire dimensions of Hinduphobia from the entire ideological spectrum and from its history to present day is critical to understanding the current landscape of Hinduphobia on the cyber social domain

³³ <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/5446/Helping-Palestinians-and-solidarity-with-Kashmir-are-among-Muslims>

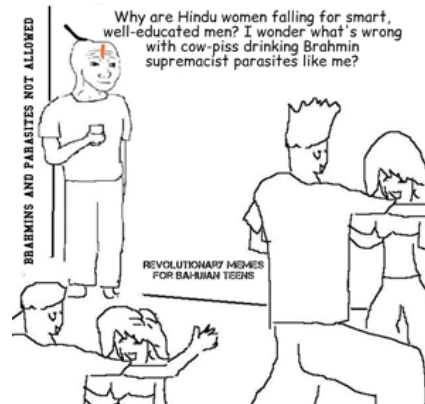
³⁴ <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/anger-erupts-in-bangladesh-india-over-comments-about-islam/>

APPENDIX

Appendix A

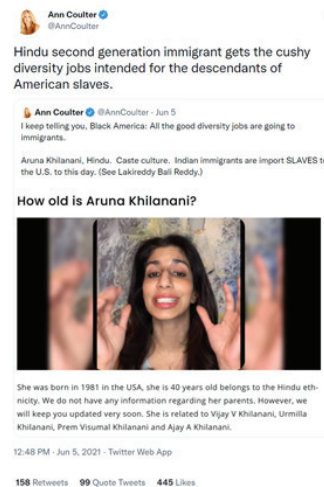
Taxonomy of Anti-Hindu tropes

Dehumanization



Dominance Displacement

- **Dotbusters:** Gutierrez, Elizabeth. THE -DOTBUSTER- ATTACKS: HATE CRIME AGAINST ASIAN INDIANS IN JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY. Middle States Geographer, 1996, 30-38, 1996, http://msaag.aag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/5_Gutierrez.pdf.
- Hindoo Invasion: <https://www.saada.org/item/20110719-241>
- Chalana, Manish. "Whither the 'Hindoo Invasion'? South Asians in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, 1907-1930." International Journal of Regional and Local History, vol. 16, no. 1, 2021, pp. 14-38., <https://doi.org/10.1080/20514530.2021.1908719>.



Heretical Evil/ Exoticization

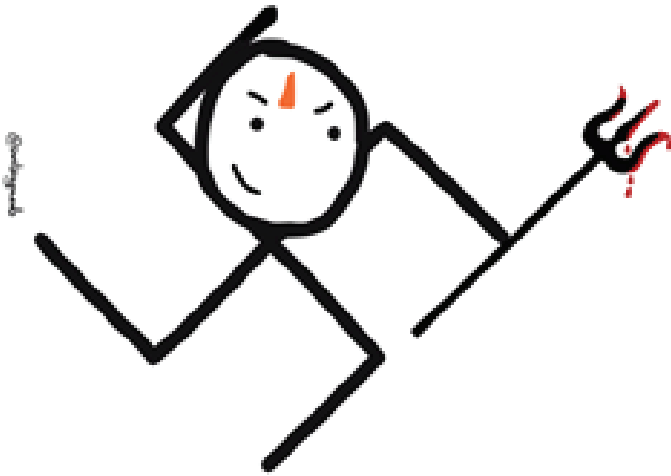


73y/o husband: *dies*

Society to 14 y/o wife:

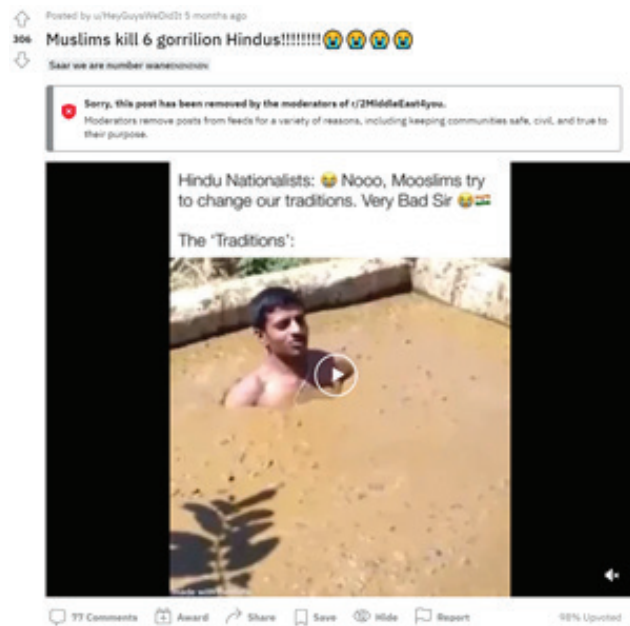


Bloodlust and Genocidal



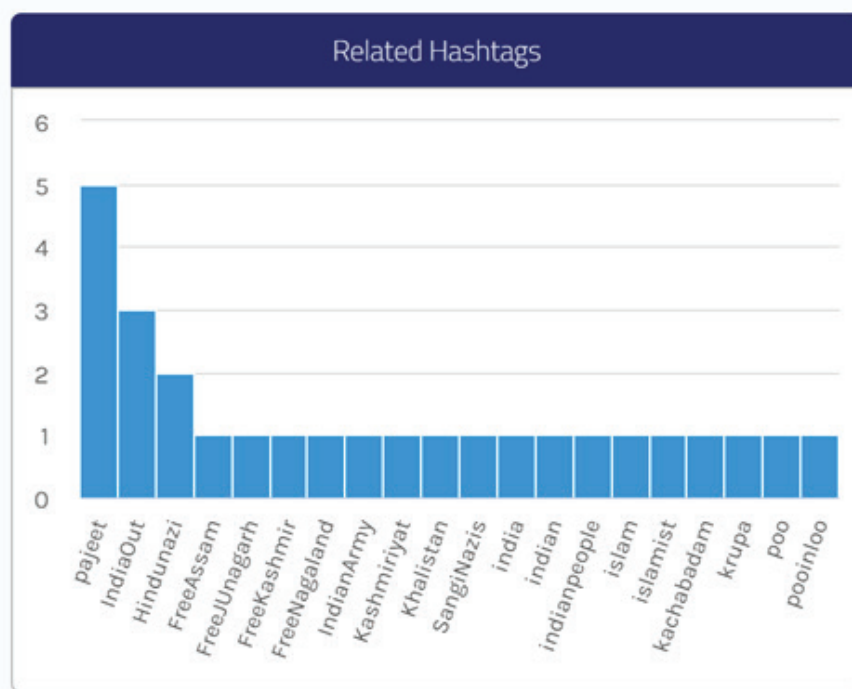
Dirtiness

P@jeets should remain quiet



Appendix B

The list of hashtags associated with “pajeet” on Twitter. We find that the top associations are with Hindus as Nazis, and “free[ing]” different Indian states.



Appendix C

Another cluster describing the Taj Mahal is shown with “savetajmahal” nodes. This is in reference to a remark made by the BJP politician who had called the Taj Mahal a “blot on Indian culture” and had claimed that “its [Taj Mahal’s] creators wanted to destroy Hindus”³⁵ in October 2017. Iranian trolls are seen amplifying these messages to stoken tensions between Hindus and Muslims, as well as tagging @bolnetwork, a Urdu language news network³⁶ based in Karachi, Pakistan. This rhetoric was picked up and amplified by self identified Pakistani social media activists.



Appendix D

Iranian trolls pretended to be left wing Human Rights Activists and hippies while tweeting about the 2020 Delhi Riots. Below are following user descriptions:

- *I try to live at the moment, neither past, nor future in a peaceful world, a real UTOPIA. I love babies too*
- *human rights activist daughter of amazing parents wife of a gentle man mother of 2 sweetheart employer of Human Rights Campaign Foundation #resist*

³⁵ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/bjp-sangeet-som-taj-mahal-indian-culture-asaduddin-owaisi-1065476-2017-10-16>

³⁶ <https://bolmediagroup.com/>