| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Political (In)correctness and the Cancel-Culture Attitude: The Case of Religious Sectarian Language After the Arab Spring

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| **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated political correctness/incorrectness and the cancel culture attitudes in relation to sectarian language that has been prevalent on Arabic media since the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, based on an examination of expressions describing religious sects such as Sunni, Shiites, Salafists, Muslim Brothers, Jihadists, Alawites, Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah and Wahabis; the new lexical coinages introduced by Arab media that reflect hate speech and hostile sentiments against the religious sects that users oppose; Arab college students and instructors' attitudes towards the different religious sects. The data analysis was based on a sample of sectarian expressions collected and surveys with a sample of students and faculty to find out their religious sectarian sentiments and whether they are tolerant or hostile. The data were analyzed according to the definition of "political correctness/incorrectness" and the "cancel culture" concept. Results showed political incorrectness in the language used by some mainstream media, and social media users, which offends particular religious sects in the Arab society, or treats them differently. The political incorrectness that has prevailed since the Arab Spring reflects discord, tensions, and internal divisions in some Arab societies. It is threatening equality, citizenship, and domestic peace. It is creating conflicts and friction among people supporting and those opposing them. The descriptions yielded by the sample of college students and faculty are characterized by prejudice, hatred, hostility, intolerance, and contempt of the religious sect(s) they oppose. The data collected from the media also shows cancel-culture attitudes as some members of certain religious sects, such as the Muslim Brothers, have been subject to detention, estrangement, animosity, banning from political activities, or forced displacement. Some have immigrated to other countries such as Turkey, Qatar, and Europe. Recommendations for abolishing political incorrectness and the cancel culture attitudes, creating conformity and carefully avoiding forms of expression or actions that exclude, marginalize, or insult people belonging to certain religious sects are given.

1. Introduction

Before the Arab Spring in 2011, people of different religious faiths such as *Sunnis, Salafis, Shiites, Muslim brothers, Wahhabis, Alawites,* and *Yezidis* were living together in harmony. Since the onset of Arab Spring in 2011, a plethora of religious sectarian expressions and hate speech such as *Sunnistan* (land of Sunnis), *Shiistan* (land of Shiites), *The Muslim sheep* i.e., *Muslims Brothers*, *the Party of Lat Idol*, i.e., *Hezbollah, the rejectionist, magus Shiites, the Alawi Nusayri sectarian regime, fundamental Salafists,* have been prevalent on social media, satellite T.V. and print media. Some Arab governments and mainstream T.V. stations support certain religious sects and others oppose them. For example, Al-Jazeera supports the Muslim Brothers, and some Egyptian mainstream media are against them. Some followers of the Muslim Brothers have been imprisoned; others have fled their countries. Hate and religious sectarian speech used by some preachers, political analysts, journalist and T.V. personalities, activists, mosque

sermons enkindle the friction among the different religious sects and even affect some common people. The young generation started to openly declare their negative, hostile, and intolerant attitudes towards some religious sects. They support some and oppose others.

Due to the prevalence of hate and sectarian speech and its negative impact on peace and solidarity and stability in the society, many researchers in many countries investigated sectarian language and ethnocentric hate speech on social media such as xenophobia, ultranationalism, and hate speech on the internet against Koreans and other ethnic minorities in Japan (Yamaguchi, 2013); the conceptualisation of the refugee crisis in online discourses in Cyprus and in Poland (Baider & Kopytowska, 2017); and the refugee crisis and anti-immigration online hate speech in Slovenia (Bajt, 2016; Bajt, 2019).

Another group of studies focused on hate speech and sectarian antisocial behaviour among students in foreign countries such as the high level of online ethnocentric hate speech among young Nigerian Twitter users (Egbunike & Ihebuzor, 2018); the personal, religious, theological, contextual and psychological factors that affect sectarian attitudes of 13-to-15-year-old Catholic adolescents in Scotland (McKinney, Francis & McKenna (2021); the role of family ethnic socialization and intergroup bias among youth in protracted intergroup conflict (Taylor & McKeown, 2019) and the impact of exposure to sectarian antisocial behaviours on adolescent emotional problems (Merrilees, Taylor, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, Cummings & Cairns, 2014).

In the Middle East, the issue of sectarian, hate speech and antisocial sectarian attitudes after the so-called Arab Spring have been the focus of numerous studies since 2011 as well, like speech acts and narratives leading to the construction of sectarianism as a security and existential threat in the Middle East and the securitisation of the Sunni–Shiite divide after 2011 as revealed in speech acts about the Syrian crisis (Darwich & Fakhoury, 2016); how the political elites created sectarian divides in the post-2011 era as shown in the speeches of Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian National Coalition and Hezbollah (Najy, 2020). Al-Assad frequently referred to the opposition as terrorists and linked those terrorists to Wahhabi Sunni countries. The Syrian National Coalition called for sectarian unity, but when they lost the strategic town of Al-Qusayr to Hezbollah, they abandoned the call for unity and started to expressed resentment and anger at the Shiite sect. Likewise, Hezbollah's language focused on the existential threat to Lebanon, the Shiite sect and Palestinians which created a large excuse for identity manipulation. Hezbollah declared that if the Takfiri opposition groups in Syria overthrow the regime, then Lebanon will be invaded by Israel. Such a claim created animosity against the opposition, in general, and the Sunni opposition, in particular (Najy, 2020).

A third group of studies explored hate speech and sectarian language in Arabic mainstream media, social media and some Arab people. A study by Isasi and Juanatey (2017) indicated that social media provide access to a broad spectrum of information sources that are not controlled by governments or major establishments, thus facilitate the creation and coordination of activist networks, and provide an unprecedented space for engagment in long exchanges of ideas. As an example, social media played a vital role in transforming resentment during the Arab Spring into action and lead to transformative and liberating movements by circulating messages that incited violence among the public.

Al-Rawi (2018) gave examples of different media strategies utilized by ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), particularly how an ISIS video game called *"Salil al-Sawarem صليل الصوارم" (The Clanging of the Swords)* was received by the online Arab public who made negative comments on the game and against ISIS. The sectarian aspect between Sunnis and Shiites was very clear and highly emphasized in online comments. YouTube is still an important social media site used by ISIS followers and supporters to promote the group and recruit other members.

The role played by the media in disseminating hate speech was investigated by the Conflict and Democratization (MeCoDEM) project, in which Elliott, Chuma, El Gendi, Marko and Patel (2016) analyzed the political and socio-economic context in Egypt, Kenya, South Africa and Serbia where speech acts occurred, analyzed the nature of the speaker and audience, and their impact and transmission. Hate speech was found to be the center of debates over the role of the media in fostering democratic processes and outcomes. Hate speech became more salient and prevalent during periods of political and/or economic turmoil. This occurred during the Egyptian revolution where hate speech took religious, xenophobic, cultural, and political forms. The researchers emphasized the relationship between hate speech and the media because government control of mainstream media channels led to high levels of censorship and hostility towards certain political or socio-economic groups. Government-controlled media contributed to an environment where hate speech continued unfettered and reflected the government's view of certain minority groups. Governments set the terms of political debate and constrain various opinions, which are important for the realization of a meaningful and vibrant democracy.

In Al-Rawi's (2015) study, the role of governments in controlling the media was obvious when political activists in Bahrain organized an anti-government demonstration in 2011. The Bahraini Sunni government framed the protests as a conspiracy backed up by Iran against the Arab Gulf States in order to spread Shiism and dominate the Gulf region. This sectarian aspect became the dominant image in order to discredit the cause of Shiite protestors who were asking for equal rights and job opportunities. Such sentiments

were framed by commentators, and main online communities. The main platform for the Sunni-Shiite schism was YouTube, where they could frequently flame and exchange highly sectarian language.

Likewise, news framing by print media newspaper editorials in the *News International* paper of Pakistan and *Arab News* of Saudi Arabia between January 2011 and December 2012 of the Arab Spring revealed that the lexical choices by editorial writers in mainstream newspapers positively framed the pro-Arab Spring protesters (public), who wanted to bring *'change'* in their countries. By contrast, the two newspapers negatively depicted the anti-Arab Spring authorities, i.e., the ruling elites, who resisted the change called for by the protesters (Afzal & Harun, 2020).

A recent study by Al-Jarf (2022b) found that the sectarian language prevalent on Arabic media shapes common Arab people's perceptions of some sects and political figures such as the Muslim Brothers, Houthis, Alawites, Sunni, Shiites, Kurds, Bashar Al-Assad, Erdogan, the Syrian Revolution, the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq and others. Arabic sectarian words and phrases collected from the media, and used by college students and faculty demonstrated that that the sectarian language used is characterized by hatred, intolerance, hostility and contempt towards the sect(s) they oppose as they constitute ideological and political threats to the region. Many Sunnis are afraid of the Shiite tide and the Shiite Crescent. Muslim Brothers, Houthis, and Hezbollah are considered *"terrorists"* and *"militias"*.

A fourth line of research studies focused on political correctness and the cancel culture concept. As an example, Iheanacho, 2022) investigated non-Muslim U.S. military veterans' attitudes and perceptions of political correctness and the mistrust towards Muslim military personnel in the post-9/11 era. Felaco, Nocerino, Parola and Tofani (2023) studied political correctness and cancel culture in Twitter communication in Italy, the features and meanings that people give to political correctness and cancel culture, the negative meanings of the terms as limiting the freedom of speech, and the positive meaning as excluding some terms that may offend some people or groups depending on the context and situation in which they are used. Neuwirth (2023) examined equality in view of political correctness, cancel culture and other oxymora (paradoxes) and the need to control the external aspects of language use to inquire more deeply into the inner cognitive processes. Thiele (2021) focused on the journalistic debate about political correctness and cancel culture and who exerts power over social discourse, and those who utilize journalistic influence and claim to be threatened by censorship and speech bans.

The above literature review shows how hate speech and sectarian language disseminated by Arabic media impact common people's perceptions of different religious sects after the Arab Spring in 2011 and the political correctness and the cancel culture concept in relation to some sects in foreign countries, but there is lack of studies that focus on sectarian language and political correctness and the cancel culture concept in Arab countries since 2011. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the issue of political correctness/incorrectness and the cancel culture attitudes as manifested in religious sectarian expressions that have been prevalent on Arabic media since the onset of Arab Spring in 2011. Assessment of the political correctness/incorrectness will be based on analysing the language describing religious sects such as *Sunni, Shiites, Salafists, Muslim Brothers, Jihadists, Alawites, Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah* and *Wahabis* in the media; the new lexical coinages introduced by Arabic media that reflect hate speech and hostile sentiments towards the religious sects they oppose; and Arab college students and instructors' attitudes towards the different religious sects and the kinds of sentiments they have.

This study is significant because religion is the most effective factor that affects people's lives in the Middle East and the most important actors in the Arab region are Islamic clerics and scholars who justify or un-justify politics (Yenigun, 2016). In addition, the Middle East is the only region in the world where religious sect affiliation is the predominant identity marker determining group membership. The average person in the Middle East is twice as likely as people in other developing regions to belong to identity groups excluded from legitimate political representation. Trends in studies on language, religion, race, cultural attributes and ethnic conflicts in the Middle East revealed a high level of identity-based political inequality in the region and that the intensity of the conflict is more than a predominant religious identity divide (Rørbæk, 2019).

Moreover, this study aims to answer some questions that communication specialists and sociologists are asking about the growing incidents of hate speech on social media, why people use media, what gains they are seeking by using them, and what the online ethnocentric hate speech, ideational and social benefits are.

2. Data Collection

A sample of religious sectarian expressions was collected from comments on Arabic print media reports, Arabic satellite TV news channels, Arabic Facebook and Twitter pages, hashtags, and Arabic online video clips showing intolerance of some religious sects. Religious, sectarian expressions are those that describe something about people belonging to certain religious sects in the Arab communities. They contain hate speech, attacks, hostility, criticism, accusations, hatred, hostility, disapproval, cynical expressions and sectarian slurs at a person, a group belonging or supporting certain religious sects in Arab/Islamic societies such as *Sunnis,*

Shiites, Muslim Brothers, HAMAS, Takfirists, Salafists, Jihadists, ISIS, Al-Nusra, Hezbollah, Houthis, establishments *as Al-Azhar* and some Islamic and religious figures such as *Hassan Nasrullah, Morsi, Qharadhawi, Arour, Khomeini, Khamenei* and others.

In addition, Arabic is a derivational language where all noun, adjective, adverb, agent, patient, tool, and place name forms are derived from triliteral and quadrilateral verbs. Interestingly, a sample of sectarian words that appeared in the media only during the Arabi spring or in the post-2011 era was collected. These lexical items are new coinages and lexical hybrids that consist of a foreign affix such as *(-phobia, -stan, -leaks, -cracy, -ji, -meter, -mania, -net)* + and an Arabic root (Al-Jarf, 2023; Al-Jarf, 2022a; Al-Jarf, 2021b; Al-Jarf, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2014; Al-Jarf, 2011; Al-Jarf, 1994).

Furthermore, a sample of 40 Arab college students and 20 faculty was surveyed. They were given a list of Islamic religious sects and figures *(Shiites, Muslim Brothers, Houthis, Hamas, Hizbollah, Erdogan, Qaradhawi, ISIS and others ...etc)* and were asked to describe each in at least three words. Descriptions given by the subjects were grouped according to each religious sect and religious figures and whether they supported or opposed each.

3. Data Analysis

For each religious sect or religious figure mentioned in the previous section, expressions used in mainstream media of social media were grouped together. Religious sectarian expressions reflecting hate speech were semantically classified into religious metaphorical slur, satiric word play, pejorative descriptions, insulting modifiers to create loaded descriptivism, and expressions that express hatred, contempt, hostility, disparagement, derogation, criticism, and disrespect towards the religious sect(s) or figure(s) they oppose (Al-Jarf, 2022b; Al-Jarf, 2010; Al-Jarf, 1998).

Secondly, the data were analyzed according to the definition of political correctness and the "cancel culture" concept. Political correctness[1] refers to the language, statements, measures, or policies that aim at avoiding offense to or denigration of members of a particular group in a society on the basis of religion, race, gender, and ethnicity and eliminating language and practices that might offend or harm any group. On the other hand, political incorrectness[2] is the attitude or policy shown by someone who does not care if they offend or upset any group of people in the society who has a disadvantage, or who is being treated differently because of their gender, faith, disability, or ethnicity. Some behaviors that are politically incorrect[3] are making a claim about someone else's beliefs or practices, using social media to flame or insult, using demographics or statistics to pigeonhole colleagues, employees or customers, or asking a minority to speak for everyone in their group.

Thirdly, the outcomes of the use of religious sectarian language were identified according to the "cancel culture[4] concept which refers the practice of withdrawing support for or shaming public figures or groups who have done or said something offensive or objectionable. It is a form of boycott or social pressure and often occurs on social media platforms.

4. Results

4.1 Political Incorrectness in the Arab Media

Analysis of the religious sectarian expressions collected shows political incorrectness in the language used by some mainstream media, and social media, which offends particular religious sects in the Arab/Islamic society or treats them differently. They reflect intolerance of the sect(s) the perceivers dislike, show disapproval, hostility, hatred, accusations, contempt, criticism, and disparagement. They refer to the sects they oppose or dislike in a derogatory, pejorative, satirical, and/or insulting manner and use loaded language, cynical expressions and sectarian slurs as in the following examples:

- **Shiites** are perceived by some Sunnis, Takfirists and Salafists as *terrorists, Rwafids, Magi, Safavi, Zionist-Safavi, fundamentalists, children of pleasure,* i.e., *illegitimate children, Kharijites of the End Times; curse of God be upon the Shiites.*
- ***Al-Azhar Mosque*** (in Cairo) is referred to as *Al-Azaar Al-Sharif (ill-mannered).*
- Some call the clerics of Iran like Khomeini and Khamenei the *Mullahs of Iran, the Mulla regime, Wali Al-Faqih government,* and *blundering of the Magis.*
- ***Hezbollah***, a Lebanese Shiite Party, is described by opponents as the *Devil's Party, Hizb Lat (party of Lat idol), Iran's party, Hezbollah's militia, a terrorist militia.*
- ***Nasrallah***, leader of Hezbollah, is described a*s leader of the Hezbollah gang, Hassan Nasrullaat; Hassan text lira.*
- ***Salafists*** and ***Takfirists*** are considered *Jihad Salafists, Salafist Groups, Sunni fundamentalist, extremists, radicals, Takfiri terrorism, apostate, atheists,* and *Islamic militants.*

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[1] https://doyletatum.com/2021/07/25/political-correctness/
[2] Political incorrectness
[3] https://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/8-things-you-re-doing-that-are-politically-incorrect.html
[4] https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/what-is-cancel-culture-a-quick-guide-to-the-online-phenomenon_uk_5f058dc6c5b6480493c93320

- **HAMAS** is described as *terrorists.*
- **Houthis** are described by opponents as *militias, coups against legitimacy, Houthi armed men.*
- **ISIS** and **Al-Nusra** are considered *Takfirists, terrorist groups; militant (armed) groups; bloody; the stray group, inhuman; mass massacres; ISIS gangs; ISIS criminal acts; Jihad of marriage; Kharijites of the end of time.*
- Some describe those who die in war or explosions as *casualties, victims,* or *dead people.*
- **Qaradawi** is described as the *authority's shaikh who caller for fraction, trumpet of the regime,* and *Qirdawi (the monkey).*

Similarly, political incorrectness is evident in the descriptions given by the sample of students and instructors in this study who used sectarian language to describe the different religious sects and religious figures, which are similar to those used in media reports, on News TV stations and social media. The students and faculty used offensive descriptions like *infiltrator, spiteful, hypocrites, traitors, secular, infidels, accomplice, the astray group,* and *terrorists* as in the following examples:

- Shiites are depicted as *rawafid, rejectionists, extremists, magi, Shiite tide, enemies of peace, dangerous, fire worshippers.*
- Hizbollah is described as *terrorists, Party of Satan, Party of Lat (an idol), enemy.* They called Erdogan a *tyrant.*
- To them, Al-Jazeera broadcasts *fake news, lies,* and *lacks credibility.*
- *Hamas* and *Houthis* are viewed as *terrorists, killers,* and *Iran infiltrators.*
- The *Muslim Brothers* as ironically referred to the *Islamised sheep,* and the *stray group.*

Semantically and pragmatically, the descriptions yielded by the students and instructors are characterized by:

- religious metaphorical slurs as in *Islamized sheep* for the *Muslim Brothers* in Egypt, *Lat Idol Party* and *Satan's Party for Hizbollah* in Lebanon.
- satiric word play using phoneme interpolation, phoneme substitution, and word substitutions as in *Qirdogan* or *Kirdogan* for *Erdogan* where *Qird* is *monkey* and *Kir* is *donkey.*
- pejorative descriptions produced by combining a general-purpose insult + the name of ethnicity as in *Nasrullaat,* i.e., *idolator, half a lira* for *Hassan Nasrullah;* calling *Iranians "fire worshippers".*
- Adding common insulting modifiers to create loaded descriptions as in *regime's trumpet; desert's crab; biggest Satan; snake's head; America's tail.*

Similarly, sectarian lexical hybrids created by some journalists, political analysts and activists have a negative connotative meaning and show political incorrectness as in the following examples:

- **-Phobia**: *ISIS phobia, Jihadists-phobia, Jihad-stan (land/state of Jihad), Shiitism-phobia, Shiite phobia, Hezbollah phobia,* Ikhwano-phobia (phobia of the Muslim *Brothers), Houthi phobia,*
- -**stan**: *Ikhwanistan (land of the Muslim Brothers), Hamas-stan (land/state of Hamas), Jihad-stan (land/state of Jihad), Sunni/Sunna-Stan,* i.e., land/state of Sunnis, *Shi'ite Stan (land/state of Shiites),*
- **-meter:** انقلاب ميتر Coup-meter, Rohani-meter, Morsi-meter,
- **-cracy قراطية:** الدين قراطية religion-cracy, اضطهادو قراطية suppression-cracy.
- **-leaks:** *ISIS leaks, Qaida leaks, Daesh-leaks, ISIS-leaks, Morsi-leaks.*
- -**mania**: *Sisi-mania*
- **-net:** *Sahwa n*et (Awakening net)
- **Turkish suffix -ji**: اخوانجي *Ikhwanji* (follower/supporter of the Muslim Brothers), اسلامجي *Islamji* (fake follower of Islam) (Al-Jarf, 2023).

The above examples show that the political incorrectness that has prevailed after the Arab Spring has been somewhat common and reflects discord, tensions, and internal divisions among the different religious sects in some Arab societies. It is threatening to equality, citizenship, and domestic peace. It is creating conflicts and friction among people supporting and opposing the different sects. It seems that the aim is to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people belonging to certain religious sects.

4.2 *The Cancel Culture Attitude*
This study found that some members of the religious sects in Arab/Islamic societies in the Middle East have been subject to detention, estrangement, animosity, banning of political activities, or forced displacement. They are banned from appearing on some T.V. stations. Some are banned from certain positions such as the parliament, others were fired from their jobs. Some have immigrated to other countries such as Turkey, Qatar, and Europe. Then they were asked to leave the host country (Turkey & Qatar), were deported, were asked to close down their T.V. stations or the mellow down their criticism of the regime as in the case of some T.V. Stations belonging to the Muslim Brothers in Turkey. The accounts of some Muslim Brother T.V. anchors on social media

(Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) were closed/removed. The object of hate speech, as Ngwodo, 2018 indicated, is to denigrate such groups, to mobilize hostility and/or incite acts of violence against them.

5. Discussion

Findings of this study demonstrate that the sectarian language used by the Arab media reflect political incorrectness and a cancel culture attitude towards certain religious sects and religious figure. This finding is consistent with findings of two prior studies by Neuwirth (2023) and Thiele (2021). In the first study, Neuwirth (2023) examined equality in view of political correctness, cancel culture and other oxymora (paradoxes) and the need to control the external aspects of language use and to inquire more deeply into the inner cognitive processes. In the second study, Thiele (2021) focused on the journalistic debate about political correctness and cancel culture and stakeholders who exert power over social discourse and those who utilize journalistic influence and claim to be threatened by censorship and speech bans.

Unlike findings of this study, Iheanacho (2022) found that the majority of non-Muslim U.S. Army veterans in his sample who participated in the Global War on Terrorism after 9/11 had a positive perception of Muslim army soldiers and viewed their interaction with them as having a positive influence. They also acknowledged the significant and consequential public mistrust of Muslims in the army after 9/11. Iheanacho's findings highlight the positive correlation between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction toward outgroups. These results have positive social change implications in amplifying public policy that supports diversity and inclusiveness as a strategic imperative, not limited to U.S. army personnel, but also to broader national settings.

In their study about *politically correct* and *cancel culture* in Twitter communication, Felaco, Nocerino, Parola and Tofani (2023) reported that Italian subjects yielded different meanings of the term *politically correct* in the negative sense as a limitation of freedom of speech, and in the positive sense as the exclusion of some terms that may offend some people or some groups. This means that the meaning of a word is relative and depends on the context and situation in which it is used. Also, the recourse in the discourses of cancel culture is only rhetorical. No actions of cancellation or boycott of someone or something have been taken.

Furthermore, the negative hate speech found in the present study against certain religious sect are consistent with results of studies by Egbunike and Ihebuzor's (2018), Yamaguchi (2013), Bajt (2019), Bajt (2016), Baider and Kopytowska (2017) and Darwich and Fakhoury (2016) who found a high level of hate speech on Twitter in Nigeria; a surge in xenophobic and racist discourse on the Internet that involved attacks on Koreans and ethnic minorities in Japan; a rise in hate speech against migrants and Muslims in Slovenia, in relation to the *"refugee crisis"*; hate crimes and verbal and physical aggression against the "Other" in EU countries; and the Sunni–Shiite divide after the Syrian civil war.

In addition, the sectarian language used by instructors and students in this study is consistent with results of studies in Scotland and Ireland conducted by Merrilees, Taylor, Goeke-Morey, Shirlow, Cummings and Cairns (2014), Taylor and McKeown (2019) and McKinney, Francis, and McKenna (2021) who found that previous experience with sectarianism, or intergroup violence was positively related to higher levels of adolescent participation in sectarian antisocial behaviour and family ethnic socialization. Sectarian attitudes were found to be higher among nominal than practising Catholics.

Contrary to findings to students' reactions and attitudes in the current study, Jordanian university students could easily identify "hate speech" on social-media sites because they were exposed to it. Jordanian students asserted that smart phones were commonly used for spreading hate speech and that social-media sites affect users' attitudes and feelings of security when dealing with hate speech in the news. Jordanian students usually alert their family members and friends about hate speech (Al Serhan and Elareshi, 2019).

The religious sectarian expressions analysed in this study, whether those used in the media or the negative descriptions given by students and instructors reflect the Sunni–Shiite divide in the post-2011 era in the Middle East as reported by Darwich and Fakhoury (2016) who indicated that sectarian identities have been conceived as a security threat to the region or certain groups. Perceivers and receivers of sectarian language view each other as existential threats. Bymanm (2014) added that conflicts between religious sects in the Middle East arose in the large part from the weakness of institutions and governments, not from religious doctrine.

Another explanation is that social media provides a broad access to information sources not controlled by governments or major corporations, thus facilitating the creation and coordination of activist networks, and constituting an unbeatable space for deliberating and exchanging ideas. The Arab Spring is an example of how social media helped transform indignation into action and lead to liberating and transformative movements. The dissemination of messages, tweets, posts, and video clips that incite violence, using a variety of online forums and social media, has been documented as a detrimental channel through which violence could be fuelled (Isasi and Juanatey, 2017).

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Results of this study show political incorrectness and a cancel culture attitude on mainstream media and social media towards different religious sects in the society in order to get the desired behaviour by creating a sense of ideological, political, and existential threat. Political incorrectness is even seen in student and faculty views of the different sects and the descriptions they gave of each.

To achieve political correctness in Arab societies towards people and groups from different faiths and sects, to create conformity and avoid forms of expression or actions that may exclude, marginalize, or insult such groups, and to reduce the harmful effects of religious sectarian language, this study recommends the following:

Since religion is the most effective and important factor in people's lives in the Middle East and the most saliant actor in the Middle East are Muslim scholars and clerics who justify or un-justify politics, Muslim scholars belonging to different sects can play a major role in establishing political correctness and de-escalating the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites by working on a common principle of reconciliation and coexistence following the example of the Sunni scholar Sheikh Mahmood Shaltoot and the Shiite scholar Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadhlallah (Jafer, 2012).

Moreover, Arab educational systems can play a major role in establishing political correctness by strengthening the national identity, creating a culture of tolerance, instilling citizenship education, diversifying school communities, and promoting interaction among students from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in order to build social cohesion and reduce sectarian violence and friction (Baytiyeh, 2017).

To help promote facts, encourage salutegenic behaviours, calm down fears and discourage students from becoming hateful, hate content can be opposed with counter-narratives and sending out consistent informed counter-hate textual messages. The students can respond, react to, and discuss such hate speech and counter-narratives on social media. Pages on social media can be created for counteracting hate speech that targets certain religious sects among students and teachers. The aims of such pages are to raise students' awareness of the religious sectarian language prevalent on social media, teach tolerance to the students, develop critical awareness, critical thinking skills, dialogue skills and global awareness related to religious sects in Arab countries and the ability to search for valid and authentic information. Teachers and students from different Arab countries, sects, and religious backgrounds can follow such pages and actively participate in the dialogs and activities with each other to gain knowledge of the reality of religious sectarianism and to critically reflect on it. They can monitor bias on social media platforms and verify information by examining the sources and checking facts in multiple resources (Al-Jarf, 2021a).

To reduce online sectarian hate speech, counter-speech interventions can be created on Twitter and other social media, with messages priming common national or religious identity sent to followers to attenuate the use of hostile anti-outgroup language. Siegel and Badaan (2020) found that messages that prime common religious identity sent by the elite are the most effective in reducing the spread of sectarian hate speech and alerting individuals to the norms of acceptable social behaviour.

Furthermore, students' global awareness can be raised by bringing the outside world to the classroom through publishing and watching videos about different religious sects around the world. Student followers can discuss and comment on the video content.

Students' awareness of the Islamic view of different Islamic religious sects can be raised by publishing views of senior Muslim Scholars such as Al-Azhar Shaikhs, Mufti of Egypt, or Lebanon and senior Ulamas (Muslim scholars) in Saudi Arabia which who call for unity among Muslims belonging to different sects in the community such as Abadhi, Sunnis and Shiites. In addition, teachers and the curriculum can raise students' awareness of the Islamic view of the other. The Quran clearly says: *"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female, and made you peoples and tribes, so that you get to know one another. Indeed, in the sight of Allah, the most noble of you is the most pious"*. The Quran also says: *"There is no compulsion in religion. The right path and the wrong path are clear"*.

The social contact hypothesis that predicted a positive correlation between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction toward other groups can be applied. Such contacts had positive social change implications in amplifying public policy that supports diversity and inclusiveness as a strategic imperative in broader national settings (Iheanacho, 2022).

A publicly available Arabic dataset for detecting religious hate speech can be created. Arabic lexicon consisting of terms commonly found in religious discussions can be compiled along with scores representing their polarity and strength. Various classification models using lexicon-based, and deep-learning-based approaches can be developed as well (Albadi, Kurdi, & Mishra, 2018).

Finally, this study recommends that the assessment of sectarian language whether religious or political, continues by future researchers interested in the Middle East to find out to what extent changes in the economic, social, and current global events affect their intensity and prevalence.

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