www.gmcrjournal.com

GMCR

GLOBAL MASS COMMUNICATION REVIEW
communicating humanity

VOL. IX, ISSUE II, SPRING (JUNE-2024)

GMCR

GLOBAL MASS COMMUNICATION REVIEW

HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

HumanityPublications
sharing research
www.humapub.com
US | UK | Pakistan

Article Title

Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation

Abstract

The Spiral of Silence theory by Noelle Neumann (Neumann N. E., 1974) comes from an era of no social media. It discusses how people's opinion is influenced by Fear of Isolation while forming a public opinion. The existing literature lacks the application of the Spiral of Silence to study social media dynamics. Most studies exist in traditional settings to study political cases and lack individuals' personal and social aspects. This study bridges this research gap by exploring the Spiral of Silence theory on social media and also revisits the concept of "The Hardcores" coined by Neumann. To explore new dimensions, new variables are adapted from the literature and the theory to determine the relation of Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak under the Moderation of Fear of Isolation. This research elucidates the dynamics of the expression of public opinion in this digital era and indicates further alternate dimensions.

Keywords: Spiral of Silence, Fear of Isolation, Willingness to Speak, Hardcore, Perceived Social Support, Self-Censorship, Personal Opinion Strength

Authors:

Alishbah Naz: Independent Researcher, Pakistan.

Mohsin Hassan Khan: (Corresponding Author)
Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
(Email: mhkhan.buic@bahria.edu.pk)

Abdul Basit: Assistant Professor, School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Citing Article

05	Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation			
	Author	Alishbah Naz Mohsin Hassan Khan Abdul Basit	**DOI**	10.31703/gmcr.2024(IX-II).06
Pages	53-64	**Year** 2024	**Volume** IX	**Issue** II

Referencing & Citing Styles		
	APA	Naz, A., Khan, M. H., & Basit, A. (2024). Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation. *Global Mass Communication Review*, *IX*(II), 53-64. https://doi.org/10.31703/gmcr.2024(IX-II).05
	CHICAGO	Naz, Alishbah, Mohsin Hassan Khan, and Abdul Basit. 2024. "Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation." *Global Mass Communication Review* IX (II):53-64. doi: 10.31703/gmcr.2024(IX-II).05.
	HARVARD	NAZ, A., KHAN, M. H. & BASIT, A. 2024. Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation. *Global Mass Communication Review*, IX**,** 53-64.
	MHRA	Naz, Alishbah, Mohsin Hassan Khan, and Abdul Basit. 2024. 'Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation', *Global Mass Communication Review*, IX: 53-64.
	MLA	Naz, Alishbah, Mohsin Hassan Khan, and Abdul Basit. "Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation." *Global Mass Communication Review* IX.II (2024): 53-64. Print.
	OXFORD	Naz, Alishbah, Khan, Mohsin Hassan, and Basit, Abdul (2024), 'Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation', *Global Mass Communication Review*, IX (II), 53-64.
	TURABIAN	Naz, Alishbah, Mohsin Hassan Khan, and Abdul Basit. "Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation." *Global Mass Communication Review* IX, no. II (2024): 53-64. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gmcr.2024(IX-II).05.

Title

Exploring the Spiral of Silence: Hardcore in Social Media Dynamics and the Moderating Influence of Fear of Isolation

Authors:

Alishbah Naz: Independent Researcher, Pakistan.

Mohsin Hassan Khan: (Corresponding Author) Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Bahria University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
(Email: mhkhan.buic@bahria.edu.pk)

Abdul Basit: Assistant Professor, School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Keywords:

Spiral of Silence, Fear of Isolation, Willingness to Speak, Hardcore, Perceived Social Support, Self-Censorship, Personal Opinion Strength

Abstract

The Spiral of Silence theory by Noelle Neumann (Neumann N. E., 1974) comes from an era of no social media. It discusses how people's opinion is influenced by Fear of Isolation while forming a public opinion. The existing literature lacks the application of the Spiral of Silence to study social media dynamics. Most studies exist in traditional settings to study political cases and lack individuals' personal and social aspects. This study bridges this research gap by exploring the Spiral of Silence theory on social media and also revisits the concept of "The Hardcores" coined by Neumann. To explore new dimensions, new variables are adapted from the literature and the theory to determine the relation of Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak under the Moderation of Fear of Isolation. This research elucidates the dynamics of the expression of public opinion in this digital era and indicates further alternate dimensions.

Contents:

Introduction

The Spiral of Silence theory was devised by Noelle Neumann in 1974 (Neumann N. E., 1974). This theory comes from an era when there was no concept of social media or the Internet. This theory came in the era of traditional mass media ever since then Spiral of Silence has been studied in traditional mass media settings mostly in a political context. In the pre-internet era studies of communication, the spiral of silence implies that people tend not to speak up about issues in public or among their close ones when they believe that

their personal opinion is contradictory to that of others.

The "Spiral of Silence" efforts to define how media consumption, interaction between key groups, and expression of opinions affect the formation of social opinions in a society. Over time, there happens to be a "spiraling" effect in motion in a way that dominates popular opinions over one or more minority opinions, thus becoming more apparent and present. This theory, when initially proposed by Noelle Neumann, aided in describing the face-to-face communications taking place in media eventually shaping and forming a public opinion (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014). Though, due to the expanding development of digital media, recently the theory is being applied to digitally mediated interactions too (Ho et al., 2013).

With the continuous and rapid improvement of today's media environment, researchers keep on trying to find innovative ways to apply the theory. Granting, researchers persist in being alienated in views about the application of the "spiraling effect" on digital media platforms of the present. The spiraling effect is the new interest of scholars and today more studies are being conducted on it than in the past. The Internet, especially social media, has paved down new research opportunities and thresholds for researchers who intend to conduct cost-efficient research including the participation of several countries. Media and communication researchers agree that theory plays a crucial role by contributing to explaining an individual's personal behavior and relationships through traditional or digital media consumption (Scheufele & Moy, 2000). In particular, a close study of the theory showed that public opinion is neither fleeting nor accidental (Glynn & McLeod, 1984).

Problem Statement

The spiral of silence was coined in 1974 by Noelle Neumann (Neumann N. E., 1974) in a traditional media setting. Therefore, the application of the spiral of silence has been tested mostly in traditional media settings. Today, society has modernized; social media is the new and global media and this new media is a source of virtual mass communication. Much literature is available on studying the Spiral of Silence in traditional media (Price, et al., 2006; Pritchard, 2002; Ceron, et

al., 2012; Wanta, 2000; Ho & Mcleod, 2008; Moreno-Riaño, 2002; Gonzenbach W. J., et al., 1999; Shanahan, et al., 2007; Neuwirth, et al., 2007).

However, there is a research gap, as the literature lacks application of the Spiral of Silence on social media to study the social and personal aspects of its assumptions under the moderation of Fear of Isolation among social media users. Personal and Social aspects of individuals are important to be talked about because the personal behavior of individuals at the micro-level e.g., speaking out publicly or socially induces a predicted macro-level behavior e.g., public opinion. As acknowledged by Nagel, personal individual characteristics too influence the willingness to speak of an individual (Nagel, 2015). Moreover, available literature tends to ignore the discussion over "The Hardcores" mentioned by Noelle Neumann during the time she proposed the theory. This study addresses the research gap. It's interesting and productive to find out if this old-school media theory is still applicable in today's digital media setting.

Significance of the Study

Most studies on the Spiral of Silence exist in traditional settings to study political context in the form of particular case studies. This study explores the above-explained research gap to examine the social and personal aspects of core assumptions of the Spiral of Silence. But also aims to examine long-lost mentions of "The Hardcores" by Noelle Neumann. Consequently, the new dimensions in this study would be to find out the relation of the independent variable: Social media and the internet have provided a voice to those who usually had no opportunity to voice their opinions in society (Darroch, 2010; Yang & Su, 2020; Bedeley, et al., 2019). However, if this claim holds, then it is also debatable that the Spiral of Silence should no longer apply to the new media world. This study does not only seek to explore the research gap found in the literature but also explore the position of the spiral of silence and new dimensions of willingness to speak out on social media among social media users. The outcomes of this study add newness to the framework to understand if social media is helping break the spiral of silence or not. This study potentially gives an alternate view to the

above-mentioned claim. It could also open more dimensions and provide new claims for further research about the presence of Spiral of Silence on social media.

Research Objectives

1. To seek the relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users.
2. To identify if Fear of Isolation moderates the relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users.

Research Questions

R1: Is there a relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users?

R2: Does Fear of Isolation moderate the relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users?

Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users.

H2: Fear of isolation moderates the relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users.

Literature Review

The theory by Noelle Neumann, 'Spiral of Silence' also advocates that people might not speak due to fear of isolation. For this reason, users are likely to reassess posting their opinions on social media if they feel that they will not be liked by the majority of their online circle (Neuwirth, et al.,2007). They will either remain silent or conform to the opinion of the majority (Liu & Fahmy, 2011). In this regard, the spiral of silence is a spectacle involving people comparing their views to others' (Sparrow & Turner, 1997). Similarly, if people feel their views are in the majority or dominant, they are more likely to express their opinions openly. (David, et al.,1999). Personal individual characteristics influence one's willingness to speak (Nagel, 2015).

Before the dawn of online communication media content was largely regulated to set the climate of opinions. This has been changed due to the rise of user-generated content, which is unfiltered Personal Opinion (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012).

The spiral of silence causes people to conform to other's opinions and beliefs due to peer pressure (Oh, 2011). Mass media does not represent unanimous and homogenous voices if voices are diverse and alternate even if they are few (Lang & Lang, 2012).

A study in an online setting was conducted and resulted in favor of a spiral of silence (McDevitt, et al., 2003). A study in 2011, in contradiction to this revealed that online users are less likely to be restrained by social and peer pressure (Oh, 2011). Anonymity benefited by the internet emasculates fear of isolation which in terms increases the expression of opinion (Heney, 2011). Meanwhile, the Arab Spring and social media oppose the Spiral of Silence theory by Noelle Neumann (Hochheimer & Al-Emad, 2013).

Only a few scientists have been involved in testing the spiral of silence in online communication, using a real-life setting a study tested willingness to speak out in the online chat room (Wanta & Dimitrova, 2000) and an experiment conducted compared reactions of face-to-face communication to computer-mediated communication the fear of isolation is reduced in an online setting (Ho & McLeod, 2008).

Before the dawn of online communication media content was largely regulated to set the climate of opinions. This has been changed due to the rise of user-generated content, which is unfiltered Personal Opinion (Dylko & McCluskey, 2012). People with diverse opinions may stick together to counter the threat of fear of isolation and increase their visibility and unity (Lang & Lang, 2012). Some researchers showed that people do not fear the climate of opinion in online settings. People are more likely to voice their views on online platforms than in person (Ho & Mcleod, 2008). According to research, in the changing online climate of opinions individuals select pluralistic information (Schulz & Roessler, 2012).

Additionally, online content exists past the online news outlets of traditional media. Online

media content over Blogs and Social Networking Sites or SNS is not likely to reflect the journalistic routine of the traditional mass media. Rather, it is expected to be subjective and variedly diverse as per the individual preferences of its creators (Schulz & Roessler, 2012). One more relevant new aspect is that in the online world, the options for the expression of opinions have also changed, as in people may "like" or "share" a certain content. Later on, SNS Facebook Meta introduced "Reaction" on its platform as a way for its users to express their emotions, feelings, and opinions more openly (Sammi, 2016).

A research survey in 2014, suggested that online contact affected the insight of people's judgment, it showed a low level of provision for drawing out the Israelian Defense Forces from the Gaza Strip while exposing people to right-wing online media. Though, the glass-looking effect was proven highly strong suggesting that people's own opinion shaped their perception (Tsfati et al., 2014). As concluded by Cialdini & Goldstein, "people tend to do what is socially approved as well as what is popular" despite acting on their own without getting under the influence of peer pressure (Cialdini & Goldstein, Social influence: Compliance and conformity, 2004).

Post 1974 theory's introduction, researchers researching it the following decade produced more indefinite results. A 2011 study supported a discussion on a message board over the topic of abortion, especially because the participants had the option of keeping their identity anonymous if they wanted to (Yun & Park, 2011). Similarly, (Hampton et al., 2014) studied Edward Snowden's 2013 government leaks and the results of that study were in favor of the theory, showing that people preferred to rather discuss their views and opinions on that topic on online SNS sites than in-person (Dalisay et al., 2012). Meanwhile, the opinions are variedly diverse, those reference groups who happen to be threatened by isolation could stand together as one unit and thereby not only prove their existence and visibility but also present group unity (Lang & Lang, 2012).

In a study, participants were more likely to express their opinions on online networking platforms than in person regarding the same gender matrimonial relation (Ho & McLeod, 2008).

Likewise, a study by Liu and Fahmy concluded that the "silencing" effect does not have much effect on the online expression of opinion (Liu & Fahmy, 2011).

Kim and Oh reasoned that online media being digital media is forthcoming for "netizens" – the inhabitants of the internet. Ordinary citizens or non-netizen do not get particularly influenced by the views of "netizens". The study exclusively explains the understanding of opinion climate. "Netizens" and other digital media influencers who are content creators and disseminators do influence the views of a mass public. So, the mass public is more likely to have confidence that their opinions or views are both "correct" and "factual." Irrespective of the factuality of one's opinion, this upsetting attribute of the climate of opinion is added proof that a subject matter might not be perceived appropriately to commence with. It can be said that extended exposure to the content or opinion of "netizens" might or might not persuade the public (Kim et al., 2014).

It was explored that during the 2014 US midterm elections, the opinionated media nonstop influenced the views of others who were stating their opinions. Moreover, when their opinions get the majority's support in their social circle, they are more inclined to openly share their opinions on online platforms (Wang, et al., 2017). Social Media enables the minority to freely and openly utter their opinions deprived of the fear of being socially isolated (Zuercher, 2008). Ways of online communication include "videos, pictures, flash animations, gifs, stickers, memes, text," and multiple other forms (Wolf et al., 2018).

The 2009 study in China proved that the growing usage of internet-mediated platforms resulted in more shared views, online posted information, and online responses by other users. (Shen, et al., 2009). People's fear of isolation is reduced yet it can still influence people's willingness to speak (Liu & Fahmy, 2011). The factor of fear of isolation is reduced in online settings so its effect is insignificant. Online users feel less social pressure and fear of isolation in computer-mediated communications. It allows the benefit of many social and psychological aspects, such as anonymity, user-generated content, reduction of fear of isolation, and social anxiety,

which encourages online users to communicate to express their views on public platforms (Ho & Mcleod, 2008). The literature in general shows that the application of the spiral of silence in the online form is being challenged by the Internet (Lemin, 2010). Therefore, with the rise of internet-mediated communication, people are more eager to voice their opinions.

Theoretical Framework

Spiral of Silence was first outlined by Elisabeth Noel Neumann in 1974, explaining that people choose to remain silent and do not share their opinions openly and freely face-to-face with most people because of the fear of being isolated by others. So when the opinion of the majority dominates publicly and takes over the opinion of the minority, the opinion of the minority becomes more and more difficult to come forward (Crandall & Ayres, 2008). Due to social threats, the theory "Spiral of Silence" is vitally grounded on the fear of social isolation. (Malaspina, 2014).

Noelle Neumann's spiral of silence theory has four core statements:

1. Individuals are constantly threatened by social conformity, individuals are always pressured to conform to society and its beliefs.
2. Individuals fear social isolation, if they don't conform to the majority group, they will face social exclusion or they'll be out-grouped.
3. Before giving their own opinion, individuals judge the common opinion in society regarding something.
4. The willingness of people to speak out is affected by the dominant opinion. They change their opinion or align with that of others. In some cases, they may even opt for self-censorship.

Hardcore: Personal Opinion Strength

Here a new angle also arises, as stated by Neumann, a group of people called ''hardcore

Figure 2
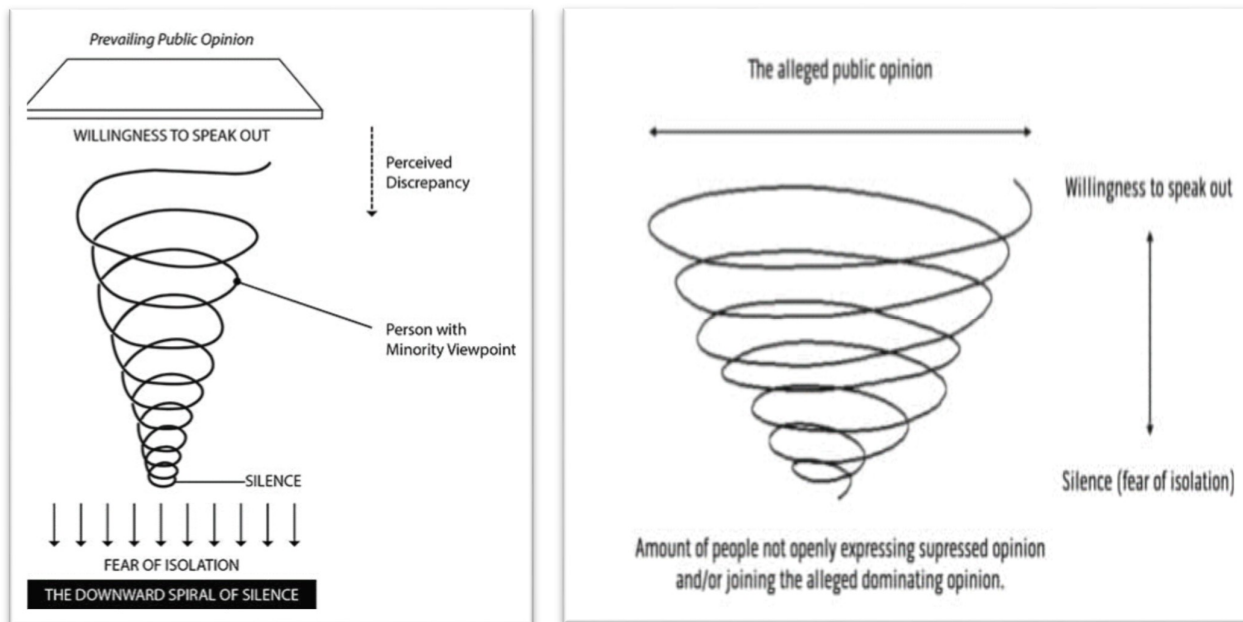
avant-garde, heretics, or outsiders'' are not threatened or feared by social isolation or social rejection. She describes such people as those who do not conform to change their opinions or remain silent in expressing their opinions openly. They are strong-headed and strong-willed people. They
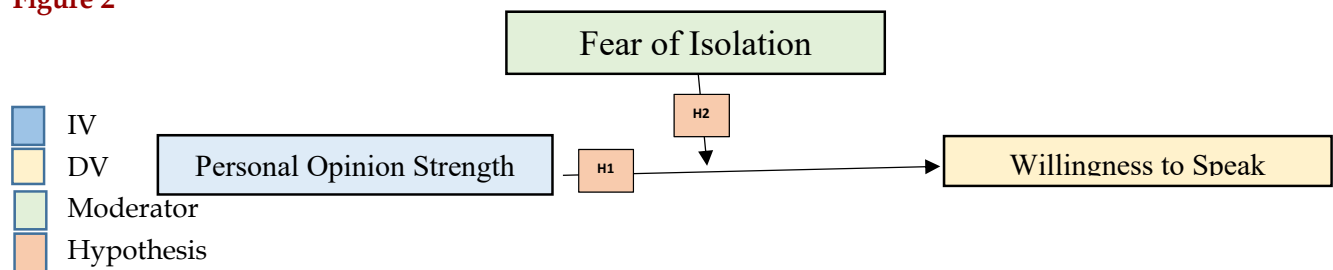
hold a defensive position concerning their opinions (Neumann E. N., 1984). They stick strongly to what they believe in and are not afraid to express it. This group of people is exclusively willing to speak out, not go for self-censorship or change their opinion with that of others, no matter what (Nam, 2010).

So, the variable "Personal Opinion Strength" has been adapted from the theory itself for this study, it tested and examined what role people's strength of opinion plays in this study and how it affects the application and implication of the theory 'Spiral of Silence' while Fear of Isolation moderates the ability of willingness to speak. There is a probability that those who might be more 'strongly opinionated' or 'hard-headed' would not be affected by any social pressure, fear, or any other external obstacle in the way of speaking out freely.

Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework mentioned below

explains the relationship between the independent variable Personal Opinion Strength on the dependent variable Willingness to Speak to be tested under the moderation effect of Fear of Isolation. This conceptual framework is designed and grounded on the hypothesis and objectives of this study.

According to the proposed conceptual framework, there is a significant relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak. While Fear of Isolation positively moderates the relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak.

Figure 2

Methodology

The nature and requirements of research objectives and research questions have been kept under consideration for designing this segment of this study. To study the following assumptions of the Spiral of silence theory; fear of isolation, willingness to speak out, and hardcore on social media. This quantitative research was cross-sectional. The Data Collection Instrument of this research was a standardized survey questionnaire to collect primary data. The population of this study was students of universities in Punjab who have been social media users for the past 3 years. As for the sample, the sample size is 300, and social media users from five universities in Lahore were selected. These universities are; PU, Minhaj University, UMT, UCP, and Superior University. Participants include 30 males and 30 females, ranging between 20 years to 35 years of age were selected from each of these universities to get diverse responses.

For this study, a multi-sampling technique is used to select samples from the population. The Purposive sampling technique has been used for

this study. So, only those students who met specific criteria were conveniently selected as part of the sample from the population of this study. The criteria for selection of the sample are as follows: 1) students who have been users of social media for the past 3 years, 2) students who are users of these three social media applications: Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. A survey questionnaire was circulated among selected participants with the help of a Convenient sampling technique to collect the responses from the respondents via internet-generated survey links i.e., Google Forms. The survey consisted of 25 items Items of Scale adapted from existing studies.

For data analysis, In this study, the variables of this study have been vigorously tested and examined for the sake of reliability and authenticity of this research SPSS software has been used to Compute Variables, Descriptive Analysis, KMO, Cronbach's Alpha, Correlation, and Regression tests. Lastly, to test the moderation effect the Hayes Moderation Process was run. In defining the research strategy for this study, the ethical issues were considered to protect the integrity of the resulting data.

Results

Regression Analysis

Model 1

The table below is an illustration of linear regression analysis conducted in the form of the basic model. To judge the direct effect of Personal Opinion strength on willingness to speak.

Table 1

Coefficients							
Model 1	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**	**95.0% Confidence Interval for β**	
	β	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	1.720	.273		6.304	.000	1.183	2.257
Opinion	.457	.080	.315	5.739	.000	.300	.613
a. Dependent Variable: Willingness							

Unstandardized Coefficients indicate how much the dependent variable 'Willingness' variedly predicted from the independent variable 'Opinion' when all other independent variables are held constant.

The β value of Opinion is .457, showing the prediction effect of the independent variable 'Personal Opinion Strength' on the dependent variable 'Willingness to Speak'. Acceptable T value is, T > +2 and < -2. The higher the T value, the better it is. The t value of opinion is t (298) = 5.74 > 2, P < .05. A multiple regression test predicted willingness from opinion. The independent or the predictor variable i.e., Personal Opinion strength has a highly statistically significant and direct effect on the dependent or criterion variable i.e., willingness to speak. F (1, 298) = 32.931, P < .05. With one unit increase in opinion, willingness will increase by 10% meanwhile, t (298) = t > 2 = 5.74, p < .05.

Model 2

Table 2

Coefficients							
Model 2	**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig**	**95.0% Confidence Interval for β**	
	β	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.022	.190		15.870	.000	2.648	3.397
Opinion	.156	.042	.217	-3.715	.001	-.238	-.073
Fear	.183	.061	.230	3.935	.655	.120	.361

A multi-linear regression analysis was conducted in the form of an interaction model. To judge the direct and interaction effects for Independent Variables i.e., 'Fear of isolation significantly moderates the relationship between Personal Opinion strength and willingness to speak'.Pearson's R-value is .40 which indicates the level of prediction in Willingness from Personal Opinion Strength. The value of R square is .062.

When all other independent variables are held constant. β value of 'Opinion' is .156, and the independent variable 'Fear' has a β value of .183 which predicts the dependent variable 'Willingness'. The t value of an opinion is t (298) = -

3.715 > 2, P < .05. Therefore, we can accept that there is a first-order correlation between the independent and the predicted variable. The T value of 'fear' is t (298) = 3.935 > 2 and P= .655 >.05. It means that Fear has no statistically significant contribution to the regression model for willingness.

A multiple regression was run to predict willingness from opinion. The predictor variable i.e., personal opinion strength does bring a statistical variance effect on the criterion variable i.e., willingness to speak. With one unit increase in Personal Opinion Strength, Willingness to Speak will increase by 15% meanwhile, t (298) = t > 2 = 3.935, p < .05.

A multiple regression test to predict 'Willingness' from 'Fear' generated results that the

T value of 'fear' is t (298) = 3.935 > 2 and P= .655 > .05. The t value of fear for willingness is less than the critical value and the p-value is higher than 0.05, F (2, 297) = 12.344, P > .005. It indicates that 'Fear of Isolation' does not statistically significantly affect the relationship between Personal Opinion strength and Willingness to Speak.

Moderation Analysis using Andrew Hayes Process

"Hayes Process" was used to assess the effect of moderating variable i.e., 'fear of social isolation' between 'Personal Opinion strength' and 'willingness to speak'. The result of the process technique is used below:

Y: WILL, X: OPI, W: Fear

Table 3

Model Summary					
R	R-sq	F	df1	df2	p
.3734	.1395	15.9892	3.0000	296.0000	.000

Model						
	Coeff.	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.4778	1.0128	.4718	.6374	-1.5153	2.4709
OPI	.5568	.2838	1.9616	.0507	-.0018	1.1154
Fear	5698	.3630	1.5696	.1176	-.1446	1.2841
Int_1	-.0738	.0982	-.7508	.4533	-.2671	.1196

Int_1:   OPI   x   Fear

The covariance matrix of regression parameter estimates

Table 4

Covariance Matrix				
	Constant	OPI	Fear	Int_1
Constant	1.0257	-.2788	-.3532	.0949
OPI	-.2788	.0806	.0935	-.0267
Fear	.1318 -	.0935	-.3532	.0347
Int_1	.0949	-.0267	-.0347	.0097

There is about 13.95% of the variance in Willingness to Speak by Personal Opinion Strength when (p = 0.05). The Willingness to Speak is not affected by Fear of Isolation as it is not statistically significant (p > 0.05)The interaction model of Fear of Isolation is not statistically significant (p > 0.05) with Personal Opinion Strength. It suggests that Fear does not statistically significantly moderate the relationship between the independent variable Personal Opinion Strength and the dependent variable Willingness to Speak. Although there is a direct relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak, the Fear of Isolation does not affect this relation.

Discussion

Discussion of the Findings

The overall Sampling Adequacy of KMO is 0.817, and the value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant < 5. Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to guarantee scale. The findings of the demographics section showed the well-established gender representation among the 300 respondents, as the frequencies were as follows: 150 (50%) males and 150 (50%) females from five selected universities.

The regression analysis of H1: "There is a relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak among social media users" showed the following results: There is a significant positive relationship (β = .457, $p < 0.05$) when ($R^2 = 0.100$). An increase in Personal Opinion Strength increases the Willingness to Speak by 10%. The study confirmed a significant positive relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak (β = .457, $p < 0.05$), with a 10% increase in willingness for each unit increase in opinion strength. There is a significant positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables. So, the hypothesis 1 is significant and rejects the null hypothesis. Online expression of one's opinion has been growing positively impacting the expression of opinion in public. Thus, resulting in more shared views, online posted information, and online responses by other users. More participatory behavior is noted (Shen, et al., 2009).

As for H2: "Fear of isolation moderates the relationship between Personal Opinion strength and willingness to speak among social media users". H2 is not statistically supported as the Fear of Isolation does not significantly moderate the relationship between Personal Opinion Strength and the Willingness to Speak ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that Fear of Isolation doesn't affect individuals expressing their opinions strongly. The p-value is higher than 0.05.

This result is supported by literature as well. The hardcore are the people who do not change their selves to fit in with others. They hold a defensive position about their opinions. They stick strongly to what they believe in and are not afraid to express it. This group of people is exclusively willing to speak out, not go for self-censorship or change their opinion with that of others, no matter what (Nam, 2010). Those who might be more 'strongly opinionated' or 'hard-headed' would not be affected by any social pressure, fear, or any other external obstacle in the way of speaking out freely. Personal individual characteristics influence one's willingness to speak (Nagel, 2015).

Conclusion

The spiral of silence is a whole spiraling process that starts at the very micro level, forming individual thoughts and perceptions that later construct public opinion. Spiral of silence is a theory that falls under the theory of political science and mass communication. It revolves around factors like fear, conformity, social pressure, assessment and observation of norm behavior, a sixth sense (i.e., individuals' innate ability or quasi-statistical sense to gauge public opinion), pluralistic ignorance, and evaluation of public opinion. The thinking process of determining where a 'dominant opinion lies' is actually what starts the spiraling process. Media is the main factor to promotes a dominant idea and influences an individual's perception of what a dominant idea is. This individual perception later collectively forms a public opinion.

The theory came in an era when conventional media existed. Where media had an enormous impact to cover only the voice of the majority. This media caused pluralistic ignorance. Today the nature of media has changed to the very core in the form of 'new media' or 'social media'. Social media comes with a pluralistic approach encouraging an environment for everyone to speak out. The era and individuals of the latest era are different than the people of past eras. Today every individual has the ability and inability to speak out, make social media content, and even go nationally or even globally viral for common or dissenting ideas. Hence, the opposite extreme nature of these two media, era, and nature of people creates room for openness to new thought processes and questions about changing our way of thinking and perception about the mechanism, functionality, application, and implications of this conventional theory on social media.

This theory also talks about the vocal minorities known as the "hardcore". Such individuals are non-conformists, ideas or beliefs of such

individuals are unpopular and have already been rejected by others. These individuals have nothing to lose by speaking out. These individuals are strong-willed and hardheaded, they are highly opinionated about their beliefs or ideas. So that, they stick with it. This existing gap in the literature explored, proved that social media has made the presence of such people even firmer while strengthening their ability to voice their opinions.

At the start of this study, the aim was upfront to test the core assumptions of the spiral of silence i.e., Willingness to Speak as the dependent variable, specifically the newly adapted independent variable; Personal Opinion Strength from the concept of Hardcore tested under the moderation effect of Fear of Isolation. This study was carried out on the reality-based participation of social media users and concluded that Personal Opinion Strength positively influenced the Willingness to Speak of people. Thus, accepting the H1. The increase in Personal Opinion Strength also increased people's Willingness to Speak resulting in diminishing the effect of the spiraling process.

The Moderation Effect of Fear of Isolation was tested using the interaction model to find out its impact on the relationship among variables of Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak. In the basic regression model, Personal Opinion Strength and Willingness to Speak there exists a direct relation between these variables. However, there exists no significant correlation between Personal Opinion Strength and Fear of Isolation. The Moderation Effect of Fear of Isolation was tested using the interaction model through the Hayes Process to find out its impact on the relationships among these relationships. It explored that there is no statistically significant effect of Fear of Isolation on the relationship between Personal Opinion strength and the Willingness to Speak. The results showed that the "Fear of Isolation", the major force running the Spiraling Process weakens and does not affect the hardcore people in shaping their beliefs or voicing them. Therefore, it also further paves the way to an alternative view regarding the implication and application of the theory 'Spiral of Silence' on digital media platforms.

References

Ceron, A., Curini, L., Iacus, S. M., & Porro, G. (2012). Tweet your vote. How content analysis of social networks can improve our knowledge of citizens' policy preferences. An application to Italy and France. ., 1–21. https://www.sisp.it/files/papers/2012/andrea-ceron-luigi-curini-e-stefano-iacus-1414.pdf Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *55*(1), 591–621. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.142015 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Crandall, H. M., & Ayres, J. (2008). Communication apprehension and the spiral of silence. *Journal of Northwest Communication Association, 31*, 27-39. Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Dalisay, F., Hmielowski, J. D., Kushin, M. J., & Yamamoto, M. (2012). Social capital and the spiral of silence. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *24*(3), 325–345. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds023 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Darroch, J. (2010). Social media: giving a voice back to the people. In *Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks* (pp. 30–38). https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230251182_4 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Gearhart, S., & Zhang, W. (2013). Gay bullying and online opinion expression. *Social Science Computer Review*, *32*(1), 18–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439313504261 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Glynn, C. J., & McLeod, J. M. (1984). Public Opinion du Jour: An Examination of the Spiral of Silence. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *48*(4), 731–740. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2748681 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Hampton, K., Rainie, L., Lu, W., Dwyer, M., Shin, I., & Purcell, K. (2014). Social Media and the 'Spiral of Silence'. *Pew Research Center*. Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Heney, V. (2011). *Isolated from the Fear of Isolation? Assessing the Relevance of the Spiral of Silence Theory in an Era of Online Communication*. Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Ho, S. S., & McLeod, D. M. (2008). Social-Psychological influences on opinion expression in Face-to-Face and Computer-Mediated communication. *Communication Research*, *35*(2), 190–207. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650207313159 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Hochheimer, J. L., & Al-Emad, M. (2013). Social media in the Arab Spring: Hope and the Spiral of Voice. In *BRILL eBooks* (pp. 47–60). https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848882591_006 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (2012). What is this Thing we Call Public Opinion? Reflections on the Spiral of Silence. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *24*(3), 368–386. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds014 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Lemin, D. (2010). *PUBLIC OPINION IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA: TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE.* Gonzaga University. Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Liu, X., & Fahmy, S. (2011). Exploring the spiral of silence in the virtual world: Individuals' willingness to express personal opinions in online versus offline settings. *Journal of Media and Communication. 3*, 45-57. Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Malaspina, C. (2014). The spiral of silence and social media: Analysing Noelle-Neumann'sphenomenon application on the web during the Italian political elections of 2013. *(MS), London School of Economics and Political Science*. Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

McDevitt, M. (2003). Spiral of Moderation: Opinion Expression in Computer-Mediated Discussion. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, *15*(4), 454–470. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/15.4.454 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Moreno-Riano, G. (2002). *Political tolerance, culture, and the individual*. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA63701761 Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Nagel, S. (2015). Public affairs, private lives: a study on the effect of Combat exposure on public affairs soldiers. In *Submitted to MOspace by University of Missouri--Columbia Graduate Studies*. https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/bitstream/10355/46589/1/research.pdf Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Nam, K. (2010). The effect of personality on the spiral of silence process. 사회과학연구, *26*(2), 365–388. http://dspace.kci.go.kr/handle/kci/1036299
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence a theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, *24*(2), 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Neuwirth, K., Frederick, E., & Mayo, C. (2007). The spiral of silence and fear of isolation. *Journal of Communication*, *57*(3), 450–468. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00352.x
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Oh, W. (2011). *Willingness to speak out: comparison between online versus offline communication.* Amsterdam: World Association for Public Opinion Research 64th annual conference.
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Pritchard, D. (2002). Viewpoint Diversity in Cross-Owned Newspapers and Television Stations: A Study of News Coverage of the 2000 Presidential Campaign. *Federal Communications Commission*.
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Schulz, A., & Roessler, P. (2012). The Spiral of Silence and the Internet: Selection of online content and the perception of the Public Opinion Climate in Computer-Mediated Communication Environments. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *24*(3), 346–367. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds022
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Shanahan, J., Glynn, C., & Hayes, A. (2007). The Spiral of Silence: A Meta-Analysis and Its Impact. *Mass media effects research: Advances through meta-analysis* , 415-427.
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Shen, F., Wang, N., Guo, Z., & Guo, L. (2009). Online Network Size, Efficacy, and Opinion Expression: Assessing the impacts of Internet use in China. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *21*(4), 451–476. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edp046
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Turner, J., & Sparrow, N. (1997). Hearing the silence: the spiral of silence, parties and the media. *Media, Culture & Society*, *19*(1), 121–131. https://doi.org/10.1177/016344397019001009
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Wanta, W., & Dimitrova, D. (2000). *Chatrooms and the spiral of silence: An examination of online discussions during the final 1996 U.S. presidential debate.* International Communication Association.
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Wolf, M., Sims, J., & Yang, H. (2018). Social media? What social media? *In UKAIS*, 3.
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Yang, Y., & Su, Y. (2020). Public Voice via Social Media: Role in Cooperative Governance during Public Health Emergency. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health/International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(18), 6840. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186840
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Yun, G. W., & Park, S. (2011). Selective Posting: Willingness to post a message online. *Journal of Computer-mediated Communication*, *16*(2), 201–227. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2010.01533.x
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext

Zuercher, R. (2008). .In my humble opinion: The spiral of silence in computer-mediated communication. *Paper presented at the National Communication Association 94th Annual Convention.* San Diego, CA.
Google Scholar   Worldcat   Fulltext