

# Religious Extremism in Pakistan: A New perspective based on TPB and TRA Model

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## Abstract

Pakistan is situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, Middle East and West Asia. Given this geopolitical standing, Pakistan has often remained in the eye of a storm. The ship of the state has drifted into perilous waters. The Iranian Revolution, Post-Cold War era, Zia's Islamization agenda, coupled with the cataclysm of Nine Eleven has pushed Pakistan into uncharted waters. This study investigates the determinants of extremism in Pakistan, by reviewing the extant literature and drawing conclusion based on theories i.e, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). In order to achieve this objective, this article adopts the qualitative methods by applying the secondary sources of data collection. The study finds that religious education, political bondage, economic deprivation, social transformation towards sectarian divisions could be factors behind the rising tide of extremism in Pakistan. These findings are also supported by TRA and TPB theories. Further, this article suggests that the de-radicalization policy, religious education reforms, judiciary power, poverty eradication, political will besides political stability in the country can help to deal with the problem of religious extremism in Pakistan.

**Key words:** Religious extremism, Radicalization, Economic Deprivation, Political Bondage and Sectarianism

## 1. Introduction

Human life has been considered a most valued tangible asset in the material world. In Islamic society, the loss of one innocent life is considered as the death of whole humanity and saving one's life is considered otherwise. Since last two decades, the world is pre-occupied with concept of extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism, which have menaced the humanity. Though the divergence from the standard or norm is conventionally termed as "extreme". However, the element solely is not a sufficient base for explaining menace of security (Borum 2011). The term extremism denotes to the means, holding particular political and religious views or taking of extreme actions on the basis of these dogmas. When these opinions and beliefs take the shape of actions, several plans and schemes are implemented, they bring about the state of fear and terror and influence the variance to accept, it is not prepared to accept otherwise (Khalid, 2014). Baqai (2011) states extremist is an individual or a group, who predominantly advances violence to impel their convictions, dogmas or moral beliefs on others. The madrasas in Pakistan are seen as a source of extremism by international actors; such as, the United States and her European allies (Khalid 2014). According to their assumption, extremism is nourished in the Islamic schools (Madrasas). Madrasa is an Arabic term that means "School"; however, there is no clear definition that precisely depicts the term madrassa, (Blanchard 2008). Nevertheless, Tahir Andrabi (2005) more precisely defines madrassas as "schools that teaches a religious curriculum instead of one prescribed by the Pakistan Federal Ministry of Education" (P. 335).

While going through the prism of history about the origins of madrasa, it is believed that the first Madrasa was established in 10th century modern day Khurasan, Iran and then these schools were opened in Sub continent in the 13th Century (Blanchard 2008). Since the centuries, these madrasas have played unique role of preserving Muslim culture and transferring the knowledge of Qur'an and Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) to the coming generations (Leirvik 2008; Talbani 1996; Hefner 2007). It was in the 18th and 19th century that movements started in the subcontinent was Deobandi movement. There were two major reasons for the involvement of these madrasa in to militancy and power struggle. First, the movement started in the wake of colonization of the subcontinent by the British; they started Christian missionary schools in sub-continent and in competition to the missionary schools, Deobandi madrasas spread and popularized in the region. Second, during 1970's and 1980's the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and possible expansion of communism caused concern to the United States and her western allies. They decided to contain the communist advancement and in this quest they used these madrasa talib's to fight against the invading forces, so those madrasas, which were inclined towards militancy or in other words Jihad (holy war), were encouraged by the United States to fight with the invaders. They were provided weapons and training to fight with Soviet forces. The underlined study attempts to review an extant literature in religious extremism by proposing reasoned action and planned behaviour theory as a case study of Pakistan. Moreover, the study aims to examine the underlying factors behind increasing tendencies of religious extremism in Pakistan.

## 2. Significance of the Study

It is of vital importance for researchers and practitioners to critically understand the relationship between religious extremism and violence (violent terrorism). The distressful concern is the contemporaneous religious challenge which is unequal. The nationwide economies, International political or economic potentials, the global travels, the prices paid for petrol are not hindered much by the foreign policy convolutions or international relations. Rather the extreme inflicting religious ideals, and often colliding competitively, that invades in our lives at present and represents a important feature of earlier times (Pratt 2007). Hence, the further research in this avenue provides valuable implications.

The academic significance of the current study is highlighted with the help of two perspectives. First, the study contributes to the existing literature on subject of extremism. Second, the empirical and theoretical contribution of previous studies is associated to violent religious extremism. However, those research studies have relied mostly on secondary sources of data (Freytag et al. 2011). Although few studies (Blanchard 2008) conducted on extremism and terrorism used primary data, those studies despite focusing on extremism in Pakistan, selected samples from western world (e.g. Canada, USA and Britain), which might not truly represent the population involved in extremism behavior. This study help understand the reasons behind extremist behavior in Pakistan in an appropriate manner. Though the studies have been conducted on Islamic extremism yet there has been less studies conducted in an organized and systematic way to understand the extremist behaviour tendencies. Consequently, the study attempts to fill this literature gap. This study could further add into the existing body of knowledge by understanding religious extremism in Pakistan by proposing a model for future studies. It can help researchers and policy makers to take effective measures to avoid such evolving religious tendencies in future.

### 2.1. Why Study Pakistan?

Pakistan is world's sixth largest populous country with overall population of 182.1 million. According to statistics of 2013, its GDP is 236.6 billion US dollars with 3.7% annual growth rate (Analysis 2013)). The Information Economy Report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, states that Pakistan is amongst the four Asian countries respecting increased extremism tendencies and expanded acts of violence (Taylor & Smith, 2007). The study presents the following reasons for justification of selection of the sample country. 1. Although there are acts of violence in Pakistan and increased tendencies of extremism, however, little effort has been made to investigate the factors contributing towards increased tendencies of extremism in Pakistan. 2. The Pakistan's culture differs from those countries which have been examined in previous studies (e.g. Canada, USA and UK). For that reason, sample of Pakistan will assist in examining the adoptability of proposed research model, which may vary across different cultural settings. 3. Pakistan is a country with 97% of Muslim population, but racially and linguistically has considerable heterogeneity.

Pakistan is among the worst victims of war on extremism and terrorism, nevertheless, since 2001 onwards, Pakistan has lost more than 25000 lives and its economy, law and order and social life is excessively disturbed. Following the announcement of operation against extremist and terrorist hideouts in federally administered tribal

area's (FATA), and Khyber Pakhtunkhawa (KPK) in 2004, its intensity is increasing day by day. As a result of that the suicidal tendencies and attacks on armed forces and military installation has increased and the magnitude of the violent acts has increased many folds.

### 3. Literature Review

Religious extremism and its outcome (i.e. terrorism) has a long history, its systematic analysis, however, has a very short path. Although analytical literature on the causes of religious extremism and terrorism has a history of spanning much longer than three decades, little efforts have been made to systematically understand what exactly motivates individuals towards religious extremism or what factors impact individuals' beliefs to participate in terrorist activities (i.e. collective actions of criminal activities). Many researchers in psychology have worked on the causes of such abnormal behaviors, results of these studies, however, offer mixed findings and are not conclusive. For example, (Sarraj, 2002) a famous Palestinian psychologist, notes that combination of culpability, humiliation and desire to requite are major drives behind suicide bombing (an act of terrorism). (Konet 2001) and (Morgan 2002) on the other hand, suggest that suppressed sexual visionaries in teenaged men and women respectively, influence their decisions regarding involvement in self-sacrifice acts. Researchers in social science and its related disciplines such as sociology, political science, philosophy, health sciences and psychology, try to understand such unethical and/or criminal behaviors (like terrorism) from rational choice theory's point of view. According to (BECKER 1976) the rational choice hypothesis, although, was originally developed to understand and explain market behavior, the theory has been vastly used to understand wide array of human activities from criminal behavior to choice of religious faith. Despite of its vast accessibility across a variety of disciplines, researchers argue that rational choice lacks of realism in its assumptions. According to (Hechter, Michael 1997) people at times act impetuously, emotionally, or simply due to compelling habit, not necessarily that they calculate the expected outcomes of desired actions, as rational choice theory assumes.

In addition to above mentioned theory, other theories for example the reasoned action and planned behavior theory are among most famous theories applied to understand unethical behaviors. These theories have roots in social psychology and have been widely used in predicting unethical behaviour (such as criminal behaviour like terrorism). The Reasoned Action theory presented by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) is based on intention model evolved from social psychology that explicates individual' behaviour determinants in question. The primary objective of this presumption is predicting and understanding a person's behaviour. The fundamentals of this theory rest on the conjecture that an individual's behaviour is rational and the individuals assess the existing information in a systematic analytical manner. Specifically, the TRA implies that human individuals take into account the insinuations of their actions prior to performance of a particular behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). However, with the continuation of TRA applications in several intellectual discipline, researchers observed some limitations to this theory and found it insufficient when applied in certain contextual settings (Ajzen 1991) (Davis & Davis 1989) explained that TRA is general behavioral assumption. It does not indicate the distinct beliefs that are suitable in particular circumstances. Further, this theory was condemned for being inappropriate to predict the situations of individuals having low volitional controls (Ajzen, 1985)

To address these limitations, Ajzen in 1991 extended the TRA and proposed a new theory called theory of planned behaviour (TPB). TPB is an extension of the TRA (Ajzen, 1991) and the later (TRA) was proposed to study individuals' behaviour in a situation in which they had no control over the performed behaviour (Mathieson, 1991; Ajzen, (1991) added the perceived behavioural control (PBC) construct in the TRA model to accommodate situations in which individuals' lacked full volitional control. The above discussion suggests that not a single theory will be able to understand specific behaviour of individuals (religious extremism) in a particular context. This research integrated key behavioural theories (TPB and TRA theory) in order to systematically understand and explain the religious extremism and terrorism. The proposed theory will also incorporate key constructs/factors of social psychology, political science, sociology and related disciplines, such as religion, curriculum, economic benefits, states attitude towards its subjects, social norms, political influence and role of media. The main aim of the study is to find the critical external factors that have significant impacts on individuals' beliefs and intention towards religious extremism and subsequently to involve in terrorist acts through the proposed causal chain. By understanding religious extremism behaviour from individuals' viewpoints, the findings of this study will not only help policy makers (i.e. States) to prioritise their task and efficient implementation of policies in order to minimise the extremism behaviour, but also, could save many innocent lives.

#### 4. Research Methodology

The study conducts the qualitative methods for data collection. The study reviews the secondary sources of data. This research study aims to identify and analyse the critical factors that considerably affects individuals' beliefs and intention towards religious extremism, which likely leads them to involve in terrorist acts through an integrated theory. The study relies on the past literature and established sources to develop the hypotheses and conceptual framework with regards to the antecedents and ramifications relating to individual's beliefs towards extremism.

#### 5. Theoretical underpinnings

**Theory of Reasoned Action:** The Reasoned Action theory by Fishbein and Azjen is extensively studied and an influential method of social psychology commonly used for examining the human behaviour.

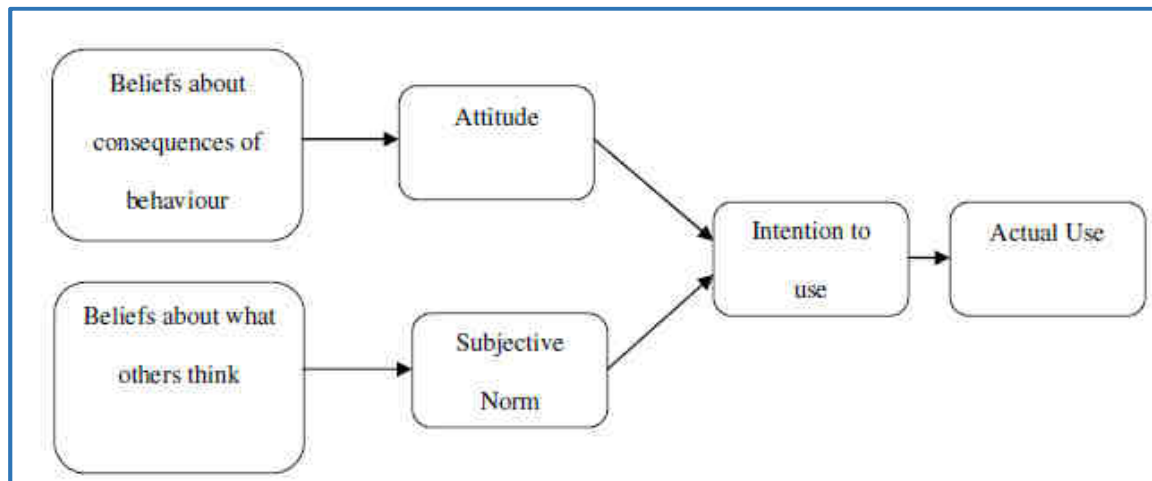


Figure 1, Theory of Reasoned Action.

Keeping in view the critics and feedback from the research community, Azjen extended TRA in 1991 and proposed a new model, known as the theory of planned behaviour (TPB).

**Theory of Planned Behaviour:** Subsequent to criticism of the researchers Azjen reworked and improved the Reasoned Action theory. The shortcomings were addressed and theory was extended in 1991. Azjen advanced a new theory called theory of planned behaviour (TPB). TPB is an expansion of the TRA (Ajzen, 1991) and afterwards (TRA) was proposed to review individuals' way of behaving in a state where people possessed no control over the acted behavior (Mathieson, 1991);Ajzen, 1991). The perceived control of behavior (PBC) was added by Ajzen (1991) in the TRA model construct to fit with the situations of individuals lacking complete volitional control.

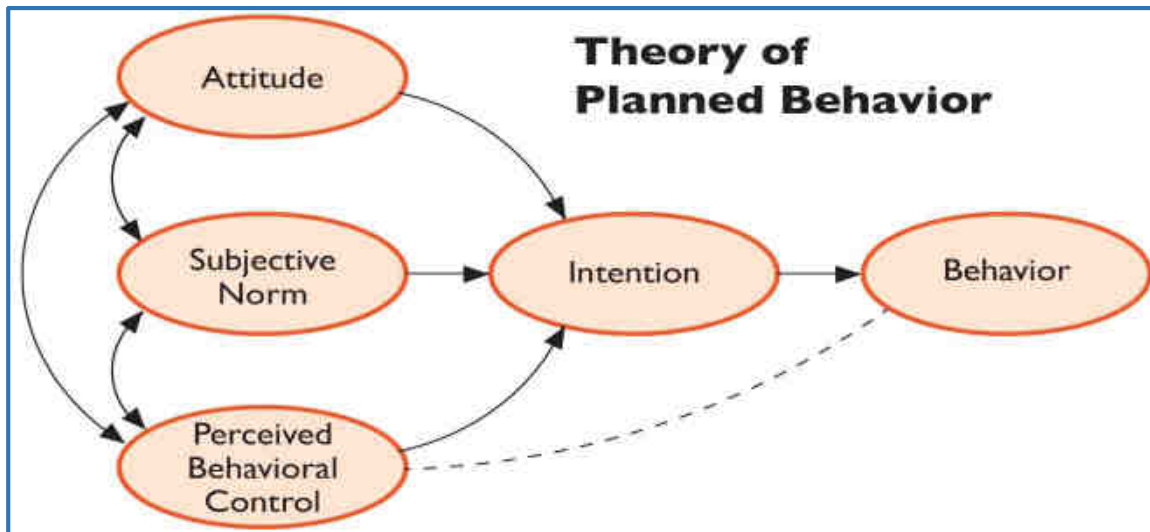


Figure 2. Theory of Planned Behaviour.

### Proposed Model for the Future Studies

Influencing factors towards individual's behavioural intention vary, depending on context, targeted respondents and the subject in question. The research community has been keen in doing research to measure the extremist's intention, intensity and diagnose the significant factors causing extremism in a particular society or religion. Social psychologists and academic researchers have contributed many theories as a measurement tool in this context. The causal factors of a theory as TRA, TPB, Theory of rational choice, are proving to be insufficient to measure the actual behaviour of human psychology.

On the basis of above mentioned facts, an integrated frame of broad social psychology theories is put forward, including TRA and TPB and Theory of rational choice, to diagnose the significant factors affecting individual's behaviour intention towards extremism in Pakistan. Since TPB has been extensively applied in the context of human psychology prediction, therefore it is a baseline model of this study. After thorough literature review, only high frequency variables in religious extremism context like Curriculum, Religion, Economic benefits, State attitude, Social Influence, Political Influence, and Role of media are used as external variables. Figure 3.1, exhibit the conceptual structure and hypothesized interactions among different constructs.

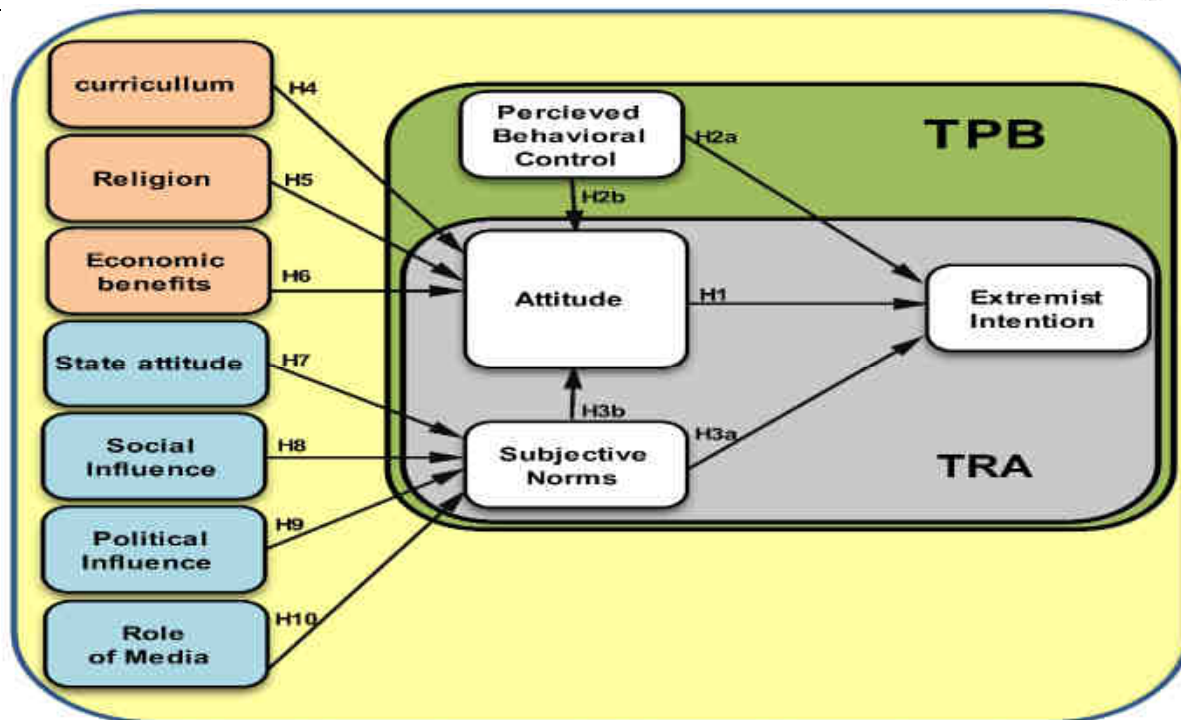


Figure3. The proposed framework for research

These proposed constructs and hypotheses have been supported by prior research studies in the context of religious extremism literature.

### Dependent Variable-Extremist Intention

Behavioral intention is the degree to which a person plans to perform an explicit behavior. This extent is determined by an individual's attitude towards subjective and behavioral norms (Davis & Davis 1989). The behavioral intention (BI) is the weighted sum function of the attitude toward behavior (A), subjective norm (SN), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (Chi 2011).

### Factors Affecting Behavioral Intention towards Extremism.

**Attitude:** A person's positive and negative feelings regarding performance of targeted behavior is an attitude (Fishbein M. 1975).

**Perceived behavioral controls:** PBC is the individual's perception of his or her control over performance of behavior. It explains that determination of behavior is possible by behavioral intention (BI) and perceived behavioural control (PBC) (Fishbein M. 1975).

**Subjective Norms:** The norm that defines perception of an individual that the majority of people who are imperative to the individual thinking, whether a specific behavior in question should be performed (Fishbein M. 1975).

**Curriculum:** Religious Education is an important component of the education system of the country. It is understandable that most philosophers sharply differentiate between traditional Muslim education and secular education (Zia 2003). Though secular subjects are taught by few madrasas, generally madrasas proffer a core curriculum which is religious based, with Quran and Islamic text as its main focus. On the other hand, some argue that a small group of radicalized madrasas, situated close to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, support a militant form of Islam and educate their Muslim scholars to battle against nonbelievers and stand in opposition to the West immorality. Some believe the religious prospectus teaching notified by Islamic customs common in the Gulf as intimidating the survival of modest viewpoint and practices in other parts of the Muslim globe (Blanchard 2008).

**Religion:**The primary purpose of religious groups in world in general and Pakistan in Particular, remains to this day, is to enforce Islamic law and or Shari'a, such that they believe, the religion is not synonymous with doctrine, but rather a way of life (McClure 2009). These religious groups now use strategies and tactics to stimulate fear-based compliance to dogmas, for instance fear-mongering stratagem, instant and intense unscientific resistance to the physical realism, and premeditated concealment and the actual message distortion to inflict submission to religion. In the present crisis period, where extremists search for any justification in religion's name, believing that Islam is not solemn rite but it is based on a complete guideline to affairs of life, enclosing a wide continuum of all values including ethical, spiritual, communal, cultural, economic, political and legal. (Baqai 2011).

**Economic benefits:** In actual fact, people's way of understanding and interpreting religion as learned in instincts is itself affected by economic and political situation (Platteau 2011).

**State attitude:** This scenario is more reasonable in case of the leader deciding himself in encouraging the religious movements expansion to offset secular, left-wing political coercions (Platteau 2011). The rising religion's role is the effect of an intentional strategy of the political sovereign (Platteau 2011). The recent past in fact presents numerous prominent illustrations to the effect that cynical rulers of politics, with a secular environment frequently, view Islam as a readily accessible philosophy and mechanism of legality to turn aside criticisms, set up their authority and human rights, or reinforce their nationalist credentials (Platteau 2011). Religious allusion is utilised by leaders in self-preservation, or as a counter-offensive tactic, alongside opponent groups perturbed at the letdowns of corrupt, reticent, authoritarian, and states which proved as ineffective thus did not deliver the promise (Platteau 2011).

During the past, political sovereign had a tendency to the upper hand with religious authoritorial systems in their communication and dealings, and the standard of non-attachment of the ulema to materialistic relationships appeared to prevail generally (Platteau 2011). It is obvious now that in the governing kind of politico-religious stability succeeding in the domain of Islam, political rulers had their modes and means, entailing that sacred leaders were either attracted in collaborating with the political schema of leaders or compelled to do to avoid experiencing inconsiderate outcomes (Platteau 2011). When the state is despotic and its surfeit provoke strong political antagonism, it is persuading the ruler to control religion for the rationale of restraining demur and devastating rebellions, and so achieve utter power. When the nation state is tyrannical and the head of state wants to integrate a society vastly fragmented along ethnic, tribal, or linguistic lines, he may allude to Islam and the transcendental characteristic of the Umma to rationalize sturdy actions towards national unanimity (Platteau 2011).

**Social influence:**Social influence is the level to which a person perceives that important others consider he must be a part of any activity. Main contributors of social influence can be friends and family members, Mass media (e.g. TV, Radio, newspapers), Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Blogs) etc.

**Political influence:** This attribute makes it tough to unravel the relevant contributions of each of these features to the despondent political acts of Muslim nations, principally in context of political involvement, inclusiveness and responsibility (Platteau 2011). To the Western discernment of the severance of religion from political affairs and the affirmation of individual human rights, the Muslims resist encompassing vision of the divine rule that implies the assimilation of politics and religion and communal rights recognition for all the Muslim faithful (Platteau 2011).

Throughout phase of state collapse, however, Islam has come into eminence since it facilitates in filling a risky power vacuum, or because of its instrumentalization by political sovereigns eager to legitimize an repressive regime. Yet, the military-Mulla coalition which had exploded lately in 1950s under the Martial law of General Ayub Khan attained its peak under Zia ul Haq and the religious fanatics became an central part of the state devices (Javaid 2011, PP-285). How so ever, state exploitation of Islam may be a response to the use of religion by political rivals when the religious potencies are engrossed in political oppositions (Platteau 2011).

**Role of Media:**During the Afghan war, western and Pakistani media declared these talib's as mujahedeen (Holly warriors). The extremist components were enthused and extolled during mass media movement,(Javaid 2011, PP.284) to fight against Russians. After 9/11 western media propagated the same (mujahedeen) as terrorist.

## 6. Conclusion

The word extremism basically emanates from the perception that it encapsulates political and religious views or taking of extreme actions on the basis of these dogmas. In the backdrop of building opinions and beliefs paves the way towards shaping of actions, several plans and schemes are implemented in addition to that, it also brings about the state of fear and terror and influence the variance to accept, it is not prepared to accept otherwise. Theoretically, the Reasoned Action Theory as propounded by Fishbein and Azien happen to be vehemently influencing methodological approach in social psychology commonly used as a tool in examining the human behaviour. Moreover, the Planned Behaviour theory was an expansion of the Reasoned Action Theory. The latter theory was proposed as a study in the individual's conduct and behavior in conditions in which they had no power over the acted behaviour. Therefore, the scholars like Ajzen believed to have extended and included the perceived behavioural control (PBC) construct in the TRA model so that the situation of individual's absence of control over volitions is accommodated.

However, after reviewing an extant literature and theoretical background of the underlined study, it entails: religious education, political bondage, economic deprivation, social transformation towards sectarian divisions could be factors behind the rising tide of religious extremism in Pakistan. Further, this article suggests that the political will, de-radicalization policy, reforms in religious education, strengthening the judiciary, eradicating poverty besides political stability in the country can help to deal with the problem of religious extremism in Pakistan. Strong measures coupled with a vision could radically transform Pakistan from an extremist country into a more moderate state.

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