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**TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS USE THE MEDIA AND
SOCIAL MEDIA IN THEIR ACTIVITIES**

Major Mohammad Althunibat

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Abstract

The media and social media play a pivotal role in helping people to communicate, nurture, and engage with the target audience regardless of the geographical location. However, these benefits of social media can be exploited by terrorist organizations to pass orders, command and control their operations, disseminate propaganda and recruit new members. The promotion and glorification of terrorism-related propaganda is one of the main approaches used by the groups to seek support from their sympathizers and as a way to justify their acts. The instantaneous anonymity feature of social media platforms, such as Twitter and YouTube, makes it easy for terrorists to pass commands and control their operations with minimum expense and without being noticed. Since social media overcomes geographical barriers, terrorist organizations maximise this security loophole to recruit more members and receive financial aid from their proponents through password-protected websites. However, the media and social media can still be used to counter acts of terrorism. A significant amount of knowledge concerning the functioning of terrorists is derived from social media.

Keywords: social media, terrorist organizations, Twitter, YouTube

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Introduction

In the last two decades, social media has proved to a dynamic way of communication with the ability of reaching out to an extensive audience regardless of its geographical location.[1] The development of new telecommunication technologies has led to the creation of an online community with a worldwide presence and low barriers to entry. The media and social media allow people to communicate with their identity hidden from the public. Furthermore, social media has facilitated quick and effective borderless communication with an almost limitless audience.[2] The significance of the media and social media is extensive, ranging from its unique suitability for sharing content to being recognized as a basic human right. However, it is imperative to note that the same technology, which ensures effective communication is also exploited by terrorists for the purposes of launching terrorist attacks.

According to research, the advancement of communication tools, and in particular online platforms play a pivotal role in the mobilization and radicalization processes of violent and non-violent extremists.[3] Consistent with this assertion, it is believed that telecommunication is increasingly driving the use of the media and social media by terrorists as well as their sympathizers for a wide range of functions including financial support, dissemination of propaganda, recruitment of new converts, inciting the converts to engage in terrorism, and collecting and distributing content for terrorist purposes.[4] Although the importance of the media and social media evident, it can also be utilized to enhance communication amongst terrorists and disseminate content for supporting and planning terrorism. For instance, the ability of social media to disseminate information in real time and with anonymity makes it possible for terrorists to engage in violence without being easily identified. This essay explores the mechanisms in which terrorist organizations have optimized social media for recruiting, passing orders, and command control.

Means by Which the Media and Social Media Are Utilized by Terrorist Organizations

This paper adopts functional approach concerning the classification of how social media is increasingly employed to enhance as well as support violent acts. This framework has led to

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[1] Mulugeta Deribe Damota, "The Effect of Social Media on Society," *New Media and Mass Communication* 78, no. 9 (2019): 8.

[2] Stuart Macdonald, Sara Giro Correia, and Amy-Louise Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media: Automation and the Rule of Law," *International Journal of Law in Context* 15, no. 2 (2019): 185.

[3] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 188.

[4] Samah Mansour, "Social Media Analysis of User's Responses to Terrorism Using Sentiment Analysis and Text Mining," *Procedia Computer Science* 140 (2018): 96.

the identification of four categories: recruiting, passing orders, command and control, and propaganda.[5]

Propaganda

Research by Macdonald et al. (2019) on governing online terrorist propaganda noted that some of the primary uses of the media and social media is disseminating propaganda and installing fear on people.[6] The authors state that propaganda is executed in terms of multimedia communication offering practical or ideological orders, justification, explanation or glorification of terrorist activities. This propaganda includes virtual messages, magazines, presentations, treaties, video as well audio content and video games created by terrorists or sympathizers.[7] Nevertheless, studies reveal that subjective evaluation form the basis of terrorist propaganda, whereas legal advocacy serves to prevent or minimize acts of terrorism.

The distribution of propaganda is not a generally outlawed process because the international law is responsible for protecting the basic human rights which includes the right to freedom of expression.[8] It provides a security loophole for individuals to share opinions or share information that may be regarded malicious by others. One of the common exclusions with respect to this right includes communication that is detrimental to the wellbeing of a country region or the world.[9] In addition, communication that is likely or intended to trigger terrorism against people or a specific group of people is also prohibited.

The glorification of terrorism is a prevalent phenomenon in propaganda that seeks to praise acts of terrorism. The ever-growing reach of content distributed through the media and social media significantly increases the population that is likely to fall victims.[10] Furthermore, the potential to directly distribute content through the media and social media weakens the dependence on traditional communication channels which takes various verification phases to evaluate the content being shared.[11] The media and social media propaganda comprise information, such as video clips, promoting and glorifying terrorism acts or of those created by terrorists that stimulate terrorism and lure the audience to take part in role-playing by serving as virtual terrorists.

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[5] Kyung-shick Choi, Claire Seungeun Lee, and Robert Cadigan, "Spreading Propaganda in Cyberspace: Comparing Cyber-Resource Usage of Al Qaeda and ISIS," *International Journal of Cybersecurity Intelligence & Cybercrime* 1, no. 1 (2018): 25.

[6] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin. "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 190.

[7] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin. "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 190.

[8] Aldona Maria Piwko, "Islamic Fundamentalism: From Ideologists to Propaganda in the Mass Media of Terrorist Groups," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 20, no. 58 (2021): 175.

[9] Piwko, "Islamic Fundamentalism" 175.

[10] Sultan Al-Masaeed, "Islamic State E-Caliphate on Twitter: An Observational Study," *Al-Balqa Journal for Research and Studies* 21, no. 1 (2018): 5.

[11] Mazida Mohd Desa and others, "Islamic Radicalization through Social Media for ISIS Recruitment of Fighters," *Central Asia and The Caucasus* 23, no. 1 (2022): 1625.

The promotion of extremism, which encourages violent conducts, is a common phenomenon across the growing range of the media and social media sites that host user-generated content. In this context, content includes those that has been formerly disseminated to a specific population, individually or through physical communication tools, such as Digital Video Discs (DVDs) and Compact Discs (CDs), has significantly turned their focus to the Internet.[12] In turn, such content is disseminated via various platforms, which includes dedicated webpages, virtual forums, online articles, social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and popular file and video sharing applications, such as Rapidshare and YouTube, respectively.[13] Further, the adoption of indexing services like Internet search engines, which facilitates the identification and retrieval of content related to terrorism.

The main danger of terrorist-related propaganda is the way, in which it is implemented and the purpose with which it is distributed. Terrorist propaganda disseminated through the media and social media addresses various audiences with specific objectives.[14] For instance, it can be shared using Twitter to other terrorist organizations or like-minded individuals, actual or potential supporters, critics, and indirect or direct victims of terrorism. In many cases, propaganda tailored to various proponents of terrorism aims to recruit radicalize and incite people by utilizing messages that depict pride, accomplishment, and dedication to an extremist objective. This propaganda serves as a driving force behind many potential terrorist recruits join terrorism organization with the hope of changing their lives for the better, which is not the case.

The ability of the media and social media to overcome traditional media facilitates its access to the lives of people regardless of their geographical location. The unrestricted access to the audience as well the ease with which their attention is gained indicates the possible reach of terrorism propaganda. For instance, in 2013 and 2014, Internet canvases, such as Twitter, overtook the online platforms as the most suitable space for Jihadist propaganda.[15] It was driven by the real-time ability of digital platforms that allowed for immediate viewership of violent acts and their aftermath that fuelled significant fear. Further, the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi is another example, which highlights ways in which Al-Shabaab utilized Twitter to illustrate how the attack was planned and executed.[16] The terrorist organization as well as its sympathizers had acquired recognition from global media outlets which broadcasted their attack via engagement on Twitter. As such, the media and social media messages serves as strategic parts of terrorist.

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[12] Mahmut Cengiz, Kutluer Karademir, and Huseyin Cinoglu, "The ISIS Model and Its Influence over Global Terrorism," *Terrorism* 18, no. 7 (2022): 14.

[13] Cengiz, Karademir, and Cinoglu, "The ISIS Model and Its Influence over Global Terrorism" 19.

[14] Matthew P. Mottet, "Analyzing Media of ISIS, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda: Use of Cinematographic Techniques in Retributive Justice Videos" (Master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2020), 5.

[15] Sultan S. Al Qassemi, "Social Media in the Era of ISIS," *PS21* (2015): 6.

[16] Stephen Gichuhi Kimotho and Carolyne Nyaboe Nyarang'o, "Role of Social Media in Terrorism Crisis Communication: A Case of Westgate Mall Terror Attack in Nairobi," *International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management (IJISCRAM)* 11, no. 1 (2019): 68.

The consequences of free flow and sharing of terrorist propaganda are highlighted in various terrorist attacks by Jihadists in the Western, such as in the US, Canada, France, and the UK. The Internet provides terrorist organizations with a platform for growing their digital presence into a meaningful online community committed to spreading propaganda.[17] The social media subcultures permit the audience to craft new video footages, set objectives, and enhance the dissemination of propaganda while creating an environment for manipulating the media. For instance, in the case of the Islamic State's (IS) online strategy, it was initially employed to lure foreign fighters into joining IS campaign in Iraq and Syria.[18] In addition, it quickly turned out to be a way in which social media users contributed to the rise of ISIS-related content that proliferated on websites, such as YouTube and Twitter.

Propaganda is central in communicating acts of terrorism. The unregulated distribution of content facilitated by social media is adopted tools for disseminating messages across the world, facilitate digital communities, and instil fear and disruption.[19] Terrorist organizations are highly adaptable to changes in how their messages are disseminated. Various terrorist propagandists aim to control the flow of information, deceive the public, and disseminate untruthful information. YouTube is one of the major social intermediaries through which its users rely on to distribute all sorts of instructions, entertainment, and private video content; in addition, it serves as a hub of terrorist indoctrination and teachings. Extremists of the ISIS and Al-Qaeda create radical clips digitally available on all social media websites, hence enabling terrorist leaders to influence the behaviour of viewers.[20] Further, these organizations have found YouTube and Twitter to be invaluable forums for amplifying and disseminating violent propaganda and information. As such, in an effort to remain updated in terms of how terrorist strategies are evolving, social media networks need to adapt their counterterrorism strategies to meet these inevitable challenges.

The media and social media offer unrestricted and unregulated platforms where terrorist organization create and share propaganda via seemingly limitless webpages channelling their content to lure potential converts into subscribing to the groups and enhance their activities. In particular, ISIS creates the most technologically sophisticated propaganda. Research indicates that with the help of complex digital strategies, the entity has been able to promote its objective and successfully created a regime of terrorists and recruited more terrorists to further their mission.[21] A significant number of terrorist organizations, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, employ videos that utilize Hollywood tricks and unique video aspects to depict extremists as heroes, and therefore, engaging in fighting for the respective organizations serves to protect the interests of the marginalized. These gruesome and violent reflections are shared together with images and

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[17] Kimotho and Nyarang'o, "Role of Social Media in Terrorism Crisis Communication" 72.

[18] Kimotho and Nyarang'o, "Role of Social Media in Terrorism Crisis Communication" 77.

[19] Jacob Davey and Dana Weinberg, *Inspiration and Influence: Discussions of the US Military in Extreme Right-Wing Telegram Channels* (London: ISD, 2021), 33.

[20] Aviad Mendelboim, and Liran Antebi, "Hamas and Technology: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back." Strategic Assessment 22, no. 2 (2019): 45.

[21] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 188.

pictures that describes romantic, exciting encounters and wealth enjoyed by the members.[22] The propaganda of terrorist organizations integrates horrifying experiences to intentionally target young generations through online avenues, depicting life in their territories as successful as well its converts as desirable and heroic. Such propaganda does not reveal the severe realities of life in terrorist organizations. For instance, in some cases terrorists are ordered to self-detonate as a way of eliminating any evidence that can be used to track the processes of terrorist's activities.

The Internet provides terrorist organizations with efficient ways of recruiting members, distributing propaganda, and disseminating their ideologies to an extensive population with minimum effort. Geographical location is not a barrier to sharing of information between terrorists and potential recruits. Terrorist organizations develop unlimited number of accounts of social media profiles, making communication more convenient and almost impossible to mitigate.[23] For instance, Twitter and Facebook have been on the forefront in laying measures to neutralize terrorist organizations by terminating terrorist-related profiles. However, these profiles are quickly replaced by other ISIS-supporting accounts. Social media messages are unregulated as sources of information, and thus, terrorist organizations have a chance to post propaganda with no oversight or regulation.[24] Social media platforms remove the ability to pre-screen messages by permitting real-time dissemination of terrorist messages. The media and social media's anonymity feature fosters increased levels of violence by drawing people to their cause. It makes it easier for terrorists to disseminate propaganda without being identified.

Finally, terrorist organizations employ the internet to determine and target the most vulnerable persons to join their organizations. For instance, ISIS uses social media platforms that are common among the youth in an effort to attract and recruit them based on their propaganda. Terrorist organizations design their content to look appealing to a given vulnerable population by portraying themselves as the solution to their problems.[25] Besides removing suspicious populations by blocking non-believers from their content, the use of passwords allows terrorist organizations to run and control private communication networks without legal frameworks. In this context, protected communication may not be found security personnel, and, as a result, recruitment activities and other terrorist acts take place in relative privacy and secrecy.

Recruitment

Conventionally, terrorist organizations have relied on a range of strategies to recruit new members, often based on their teachings, locations and objectives. From this viewpoint, there are different and non-uniform recruitment processes. Nonetheless, terrorists gain skills and knowledge amongst themselves and there are often similarities in how they reach out, indoctrinate, and recruit new members.[26] The media and social media platforms are utilized as a way of distributing violent video footages and developing alliances with and seeking aid from

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[22] Al-Masaeed, "Islamic State E-Caliphate on Twitter: An Observational Study" 5.
[23] Al Qassemi, "Social Media in the Era of ISIS" 6.
[24] Damota, "The Effect of Social Media on Society" 9.
[25] Piwko, "Islamic Fundamentalism" 183.
[26] Mansour, "Social Media Analysis of User's Responses to Terrorism Using Sentiment Analysis and Text Mining" 100.

those that subscribe to targeted propaganda. Terrorist rely on propaganda disseminated through password-protected sites as a way of clandestine recruitment. The flexibility of media and social media sites provide terrorists as well as their supporters with a range of potential converts. Further, regulated access to cyber spaces provides a platform for converts to gain skills and provide support to terrorist organizations by engaging in direct action in furtherance of the goals of terrorist organizations.[27] T The adoption of technological entry barriers and radicalization platforms enhance the sophistication of identifying terrorism-related activities by intelligence and security agencies.

Terrorist propaganda is usually crafted to catch the attention of the vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups. The recruitment and radicalization process usually takes advantage of peoples' views of suffering, exclusion, or humiliation. In this context, propaganda is used to cover the demographic factors, such as gender, age, and socioeconomic conditions.[28] The media and social media are effective tools for recruiting vulnerable members of the public particularly young adults who constitute a large percentage of digital consumers. Propaganda distributed over social media in a bid to radicalize the youth can take the form of popular music videos, cartoons, or computer games. Techniques used by media and social media platforms owned by terrorists or their sympathizers to target the vulnerable by incorporating cartoons and stories for children with content glorifying terrorism acts which includes suicide attacks.[29] In addition, terrorist organizations design Internet video games that are employed as training and recruitment strategies. Such games may promote and glorify the use of violence against a country or politicians, rewarding virtual success and may be offered in various languages to capture a broader audience.

Over the recent past, terrorist groups have shifted their focus to the media and social media as alternative means of recruiting and training extremists. Evidence shows an ever-increasing growth of digital communication tools that offer alternative ways of disseminating terrorist content in the form of audios, online manuals, video clips, information, and advice.[30] Further, the media provide comprehensive guides that can be in the form of multimedia format and various languages on themes, such as the conditions of joining terror groups, ways of developing firearms, explosives, or other dangerous documents that outline ways through which terrorist attacks are planned and executed. In this context, media and social media serve as training camps as well as for sharing information, specific techniques, methods, and required knowledge to successfully launch terrorist attacks for the purpose of spreading fear and propaganda.

Although the dissemination of propaganda is not completely outlawed, its adoption by terrorist organizations to encourage acts of terrorism is perceived to be unlawful. The media and social media provide a pool of opportunities and material to revise, disseminate, and save messages, which praise or trigger acts of terrorism. However, there is a need to draw the

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[27] Cengiz, Karademir, and Cinoglu, "The ISIS Model and Its Influence over Global Terrorism" 23.

[28] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 188.

[29] Al Qassemi, "Social Media in the Era of ISIS" 7.

[30] Cengiz, Karademir, and Cinoglu, "The ISIS Model and Its Influence over Global Terrorism" 21.

difference between normal propaganda and the one intended to trigger terrorist acts.[31] In an effort be held accountable for inciting acts of terrorism, various countries require one to show the desire and a direct casual association with alleged propaganda and the actual plot or terrorist activities. For instance, during a meeting of group experts, a French personnel argued that the distribution of intrusive tools on explosives cannot be defined as a violation of the French law until the details showed that the content was disseminated to glorify or conduct acts terrorism.[32]

Recruitment, radicalization, and incitement to terrorism are considered to be key issues along a continuum. By definition, radicalization involves brainwashing which constitutes the conversion of public members into terrorists that seek to engage in terrorism according to the extremist teachings. The radicalization process often involves the use of propaganda whether communicated in person or via the media and social media. The duration and the efficacy propaganda and other persuasive approaches adopted by terrorists vary based on individual relationships and circumstances. Terrorist organizations use the media and social media to receive financial support from sympathizers as well as mobilize supporters and recruit more members to play active roles to support of terrorist acts.[33] In addition to seeking recruits by utilizing the full panoply of media and social media t to reinforce the presentation of their content. In addition, recruiters utilize highly interactive media and social media technologies to enhance their online presence while looking for receptive members, particularly new members.

Chatrooms are easily embedded within media and social media sites. Various studies have discussed the application of chatrooms by violent extremist organizations to recruit new members. Chatrooms are described as spaces where the most vulnerable population without prior exposure are highly susceptible to meeting radicalizing religious narratives.[34] Unlike chatrooms, many terrorist organizations are strategically and ideologically anti-Facebook. Such groups hardly employ Facebook to directly recruit new members or plan their activities due to its tracking mechanisms associated with the site. It may help law enforcers to track down the actual places of the terrorists and specific times. Instead, Facebook is mostly used by terrorist organizations as the epicentre for disseminating videos and other forms of information or as a means of finding members with a similar agenda and how to provide support rather than direct recruitment.[35] The media and social media radicalization and recruitment have great advantages over traditional and riskier public recruitment. Terrorist organizations rely on internet technologies to reach out to an incalculably huge audience. Since digital sites offer these groups a flexible recruitment pattern of new members, the odds of detection are minimum because they do not require transportation support.

Twitter is one of the commonly used platforms that terrorist rely on to disseminate propaganda and recruit more terrorists. Twitter facilitates the dissemination of messages with maximum length of 140 characters, which makes it easy for terrorists to skim through or get the orders at a glance. One of the main advantages of this medium includes its ability to offer real-

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[31] Al-Masaeed, "Islamic State E-Caliphate on Twitter: An Observational Study" 5.
[32] Piwko, "Islamic Fundamentalism" 177.
[33] Piwko, "Islamic Fundamentalism" 180.
[34] Al-Masaeed, "Islamic State E-Caliphate on Twitter: An Observational Study" 5.
[35] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 191.

time coverage without necessarily proving the authenticity of the shared content. [36]Terrorists take advantage of the Twitter features that permits them to glorify acts of terrorism without having to validate the source. This process rapidly increases the base of terrorist organizations by reaching out to populations that are highly susceptible to using social media. A recent study revealed that between 2014 and December 2014, over 46,000 Twitter profiles were linked with the glorification of ISIS activities.[37] Furthermore, terrorists rely on social media to maximize the recruitment process through expansion of its existence to global networks. One of the innovative features of Twitter is its ability to "retweet" content and share messages on other platforms, such as Facebook. Such flexibility of social media provides terrorist organizations with a chance to reach a wider audience within the shortest time and with minimum resources.

Finally, YouTube has increasingly become a popular platform that terrorist organizations employ for recruitment purposes. The platform is increasingly becoming a substitute to television for the groups that seek to reach out to a broader audience across the world. Perhaps, this social media site is employed by each terrorist organization, containing propaganda information by organizations, such as the Shining Path of Peru.[38] However, entities such as Al-Qaeda has transformed the objective of YouTube from a mere tool for spreading propaganda to a complex recruitment avenue. Since detecting online violations is challenging, terrorist groups have the opportunity of uploading content on YouTube that cannot be allowed on regular television channels. For instance, one of the most successful and popular videos shared by ISIS on YouTube was the assassination of James Foley in 2014.[39] The video footage was later removed by YouTube as having violated the platform's policy. However, the process of removing the video was not immediate, and therefore, it achieved its objective by gaining global attention.[40] The platform permits its subscribers to make comments on videos, making it a tool that facilitates the networking of terrorists. This concept leads to the development of communities where communities of persons with a common objective to pass information, share ideas, and influence one another with the goal of enhancing the recruiting bases of terrorist organizations.

Passing Orders

The most basic function of media and social media is enhancing communication. Terrorist organizations have increasingly become complex at taking advantage of telecommunication technologies for anonymous dissemination of orders related to planning acts of terrorism. For instance, mere e-mail accounts can be employed by these groups for electronic or virtual "dead dropping" of communication.[41] It refers to the development of drafts that remain unsent, hence leaving minimum digital traces, which may be accessed from any social media by

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[36] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 191.

[37] Damota, "The Effect of Social Media on Society" 10.

[38] Desa and others, "Islamic Radicalization through Social Media for ISIS Recruitment of Fighters" 1627.

[39] Al Qassemi, "Social Media in the Era of ISIS," 7.

[40] Desa and others, "Islamic Radicalization through Social Media for ISIS Recruitment of Fighters" 1627.

[41] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 192.

various individuals with the relevant password. Since terrorist organizations do not have permanent territorial safe havens, many of them rely on social media to pass orders. It is evidenced by the fact that the majority of terrorism prosecuted acts involve the use of the media and social media.[42] In particular, passing terrorism orders typically involves remote communication between various conspirators.

Terrorist organizations and their sympathizers publish huge amounts of information on the media and social media. In reference to these entities, it can drive the intent of promoting acts of terrorism and broaden their interactions. The implementation of social media to facilitate acts of terrorism is advantageous in terms of logistics and low arrests as two-tier encryption allows the hiding of the senders' identities as well as those of the receivers.[43] Various terrorist organizations such as Islamic State and Al-Qaeda and their supporter networks are increasingly exploiting open-source applications to establish "cloud platform" websites to preserve their content. These are password-protected websites that enable terrorist actors to disseminate the content through URLs.

This Internet form of passing orders, guidance and advice has become commonplace in various terrorist organizations. For instance, the postmodern terrorist organizations are taking advantage of the fruits of globalization and contemporary innovations that are used to plan, coordinate, and execute acts of terrorism. These groups are not limited to geographic locations within a particular territory, or financially or politically reliant on a given state rather they depend on technologically modern forms of communication, such Facebook and WhatsApp. These platforms have increasingly become favourite tools for terrorist organizations. Decentralized and providing near-perfect anonymity, the social media websites are not subject to control restrictions, and be accessed by anyone. It is believed that online platforms have allowed terrorists to research and oversee acts of terrorism, expand the reach of their propaganda, recruit new adherents, communicate with global sympathizers, seek financial support, and enhance awareness and sympathy for their acts.

Further, the media and social media allow terrorist organizations to pass orders to global targets with whom it would otherwise be challenging to reach out to. The involved applications provide a pathway for the groups to feed the mass media with propaganda that explains their goals. As a result, the groups' orders reach greater audiences and easily influence the public agenda.[44] Furthermore, there are various motivating factors behind the migration of terrorist organizations to social networking sites. Entities, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, have always employed the latest technologies to support their cause. For instance, the adoption of sophisticated encryption programs for passing orders and altering computer games to mimic real-life missions and attacks.[45] As such, their implementation of the media and social media is a natural progression of their technology-oriented tactics.

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[42] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 192.

[43] Desa and others, "Islamic Radicalization through Social Media for ISIS Recruitment of Fighters" 1628.

[44] Al-Masaeed, "Islamic State E-Caliphate on Twitter: An Observational Study" 5.

[45] Al Qassemi, "Social Media in the Era of ISIS" 7.

The media and social media platforms are attractive to terrorist organizations due to their control features that regulate who can access the groups' pages. This provides an avenue for vetting individuals before granting them permission to view the organization's content or engage in the discussion forum. In addition, the encryption feature provides terrorist organizations with a chance to control the content posted on the pages.[46] It offers a unique environment for terrorist organizations to pass orders as well as control the messages and access it while also reaching large audiences. In addition, online dissemination of orders, which is translated into other languages facilitates the recruitment of more targets from various locations.

Passing orders between terrorist organizations and vulnerable persons are greatly benefitted via the availability of online environments, such as Twitter and Facebook. One of the advantages of digital technologies is that the media platforms overcome barriers to entry and allow individuals to connect associates and reach out to persons vulnerable to radicalization. Cyberspace provides terrorist organizations with a constraint-free environment and anonymity for passing orders. It provokes terrorists to act or speak more radically online than they can do traditionally.[47] This aspect implies that the media and social media provide terrorist organizations with a safe environment free of attacks where training material can at worst be removed. As a result, the media and social media support acts of terrorism in passing orders to the converts and advancing ongoing operational activities via training. In being able to store material and exist in cyberspace, terrorists have realized the importance of remaining operational in the media and social media sites even if their physical environments are threatened. The perception that the media and social media platforms provide terrorist organizations with a safe environment for passing order. In addition, the members of right-wing neo-Nazi groups view the internet as safe and anonymous.[48] In addition to this strategic benefit of safety and anonymity, the media provide terrorist organizations with the capacity to hide their identity within the online environment. In terms of logistics, social media provide an idea platform for planning and executing terrorist attacks while hiding their identity and physical location.

Command and Control

The exploitation of social media platforms by terrorist organizations to command and control their operations has always been key to their success. Commanding and controlling their operations constitute the main goal of undertaking acts of terrorism.[49] The use of social media by ISIS and other terrorist organizations highlights one of the recent evolutions of the relationship between those groups, media platforms and information and communication technology. The adoption of multi-language content facilitates the passage of commands and control. For instance, the dissemination of commands through social media has helped terrorist organizations to achieve operational penetration into jurisdictions well beyond their primary areas of operation.

Terrorist organizations and sympathizers rely on the internet to finance, command and control acts of violence. For instance, *Inspire* is a digital journal distributed by Al-Qaeda with

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[46] Al-Masaeed, "Islamic State E-Caliphate on Twitter: An Observational Study" 5.

[47] Damota, "The Effect of Social Media on Society" 11.

[48] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 192.

[49] Mansour, "Social Media Analysis of User's Responses to Terrorism Using Sentiment Analysis and Text Mining" 101.

the aim of helping Muslims to train for jihad at home.[50] The magazine entails huge amounts of ideological materials that seek to guide and command terrorists by including statements attributed to Osama bin Laden as well as other key figures. Further, the fall of the 2010 edition comprised practical commands that outlined ways in which a four-wheel-drive vehicle can be used to launch terrorist attacks and how lone individuals could initiate indiscriminate attacks by shooting guns from towers. The publication even suggested that terrorists need to target cities to optimise the chances of killing members of the government.[51] The command-and-control material available on the Internet comprises tools that enhance anti-intelligence hacking processes and enhance the privacy of illegal communication and online activities via the adoption of security tools and anonymizing approaches. The interactive nature of the media and social media helps create a community of terrorists from various locations and backgrounds hence driving the development of networks for exchanging commands and tactical materials.

Terrorist groups are unpredictable and ever-changing individuals with the ability to adapt and evolve based on the current conditions. Conventionally, terrorists were taught to possess a centralised, hierarchical structure in which top leaders controlled the operations of the entire organization.[52] With the integration of social media into their operations, terrorists have been able to observe consistency in their disseminated messages to specific individuals and branches. Over the last two decades, the media and social media have enhanced the sophistication and minimised the cost of sharing information. However, it has also supported the processes of terrorist organizations to reorganize themselves into a network-style structure and enhanced the capacity of each terrorist to operate more independently.[53] Such an approach has provided terrorist organisations with increased resilience, flexibility, responsiveness, and outreach. As a result, terrorists maintain operations even when their physical headquarters are demolished.

The means through which terrorist organizations pass commands and control their operations greatly vary. Developments in technology and changing terrorist behaviour have allowed those groups to utilize media tools with increased convenience.[54] For instance, the new and emerging media, such as WeChat, has made it easier for terrorist organizations to publicize their content to the world through social media at their discretion. Furthermore, the media and social media have allowed the distribution of terrorist messages to reach an extensive audience more concisely. In the words of Macdonald et al., terrorist organizations do not rely on print media to make commands and control their operations.[55] Rather, print media has been overtaken by social media which is more convenient to use, much quicker and more effective. As the terrorist content reaches the designated targets, they take advantage of the publicity to seek sympathy and recruit more members. In summary, the media and social media have increased the

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[50] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin, "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 193.
[51] Desa and others, "Islamic Radicalization through Social Media for ISIS Recruitment of Fighters" 1629.
[52] Desa and others, "Islamic Radicalization through Social Media for ISIS Recruitment of Fighters" 1629.
[53] Piwko, "Islamic Fundamentalism" 189.
[54] Al Qassemi, "Social Media in the Era of ISIS" 7.
[55] Macdonald, Correia, and Watkin. "Regulating Terrorist Content on Social Media" 194.

scope of terrorist activities and have become crucial tools for terrorist groups in terms of facilitating their operational objectives with minimum resources and risk.

Recommendations

The Internet can be used to counter-terrorism. For instance, while terrorist organizations have created various ways of using the media and social media to further their illicit activities, social media tools also can also be used to gather key information and other activities to prevent acts of terrorism. Further increased use of the media and social media for any acts of terrorism provides a corresponding increase in the availability of electronic data, which can be used prevent acts of terrorism. Respect for the rule of law and human rights is one of the key aspects necessary for fighting terrorism. Therefore, countries need to develop multinational counterterrorism laws and practices that promote and protect basic human rights and the rule of law. In addition, law enforcement officers tasked to investigate the media of media and social media for terrorist purposes should be provided with special training in the technical aspects of how terrorist organizations use social media to plan and execute their activities. For instance, countries can develop their law enforcement cybercrime training programmes to provide equip their security personnel with the necessary skills of countering terrorism. Finally, social media companies should adjust the sensitivity of terrorism detection tools so that while people can freely share content, they do it in a way that promotes peace and not terrorism.

Conclusion

In review of the essay, the adoption of the media and social media as a way of recruiting terrorists, passing orders, commanding and controlling as well as disseminating propaganda shows that the digital environment has played a factor in furthering acts of terrorism. The majority of contemporary terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Al-Shabaab, rely on Internet networks like, for instance, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to plan and launch attacks. Various studies have shown that terrorist organizations craft traumatic incidents to optimize their propaganda impact. Furthermore, the acts of terrorism are effectuated by few people who directly inflict violence on a relatively small number of people. It is particularly true given that social media provide terrorists with the ability to directly disseminate content circumventing the issue of border barriers. The social media platforms serve as a mead for recruiting new members and receiving financial support from their sympathizers. Password protected sites provide an ideal platform for recruits to learn about terrorism. Terrorist recruitment via social media is backed by the availability of video clips stored in CDs and DVDs to help the recruits master the acts of terrorism. In summary, the most key function of the media and social media is to facilitate communication and terrorist organizations constantly employ new and emerging technologies to further their acts of terrorism.

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