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International Terrorism: The Influence of Social Media in Perspective

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Abstract

The Influence of Social medial has and still continues to affect both regional and global security. The paper examines the relationships and influence of social media on terrorism in the 21st century. The author analyses how terrorists use the media as a means to extend its influence and threats against the global community. Today, terrorist groups are influencing, recruiting, inspiring, and guiding global strategies not just by iinternet operations but through an organized, steady infusion of Social Media or propaganda videos and call-to-action messages circulated via social media platforms, such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter[i], and Instagram, Flickr, and are now spreading to newer media as they develop – Ask.fm, Kik, Friendica, and, most recently, VK.com, Diaspora, JustPaste.it, and SoundCloud. And are also utilizing apps that are available on Google Play and iTunes for Apple[ii]. This paper analysis the influence of social media on terrorism and the countering measures been used, analyzing ISIS, Al- Qaeda, etc.

Keywords: Terrorism, Global Security, Social Media Influence, ISIS, Al-Quaeda

Introduction

The days of would-be terrorists needing to travel far to make contacts and acquire skills on how to build bombs has rapidly decreased. Social media forums have now become a means eg. Twitter and Facebook now provide a ready-made Rolodex of sources[iii] (CNN, 2013). The strategy of bringing like-minded people together via conversational media to increase radicalism[iv] has increased over the years. Social media are increasingly instrumental in spreading terrorist's ideology to the younger generation, now in their 20s or even younger, who have grown up watching video clips on YouTube and for whom social media are an integral part of life[v].

On March 2013 al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) launched a Twitter account that has gained more than 5,500 followers, and AQIM's account is following several other people including Al Shabaab's official twitter handle (the Somali terrorist group) and the al Nusra front in Syria, which in turn is following another rebel group in Aleppo. This is obviously how rapidly the connections start to multiply and how easy it is for a budding terrorist to build up global contacts[vi]. Today, terrorist groups are influencing, recruiting, inspiring, and guiding global strategies not just by Internet operations but through an organized, steady infusion of Social Media or propaganda videos and call-to-action messages circulated via social media platforms, such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter[vii]. Which also include Instagram, and Flickr, and are now spreading to newer media as they develop – Ask.fm, Kik, Friendica, and, most recently, VK.com, Diaspora, JustPaste.it, and SoundCloud. These users are significantly utilizing apps that are available on Google Play and iTunes for Apple. They explain to their supporters in detail how to use them effectively, with video tutorials and more[viii].

According to Klopfenstein (2006), the Internet has arguably replaced the role of the printed media in the field of terrorism, as, for the first time in history, terrorists can directly post images and message straight to the online world, which is undeniably global in reach (Klopfenstein in Kavoori 2006). Stohl (in Staci, Bennett, and Flickinger cited in Arda

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Bilgen) argues that terrorists are primarily interested in audience, not the victims, and emphasizes that how the audience reacts is as important as the act itself[ix]. President Obama said in his remarks wrapping up a Washington summit in 2015 on Countering Violent Extremism. "The high-quality videos, the online magazines, the use of social media, terrorist Twitter accounts—it's all designed to target today's young people online, in cyberspace[x].

The terrorist's social media framework targets youths that are idle, unemployed etc. with convoluted, fictional information and creating grassroots terrorists within[xi] regional and international borders, which then encourages domestic terrorists to set their own goals and take direct action with open-source and open-ended jihad at home. Hence, the article will critically examine the influence of social media on terrorism and its impact in the global community.

The Influence of Social Media on the Activities of Terrorist Organizations

According to Arda Bilgen, (2012) citing Rohner and Frey stated that, there are "mutually beneficial relationship between terrorist organizations and the media. As some remarkable terrorist attacks in history indicate, whether it is in Africa, United States (US), Europe, or the Middle East, it is by and large the case that the architects of terrorism exploit the media for the benefit of their operational efficiency, information gathering, recruitment, fund raising, and propaganda schemes"[xii]. Their aim is to publicize their political cause through the media, inform both friends and foes about their motives for terrorist deeds and activities, and attempt to explain their rationale for resorting to violence. Thomas Hegghammer, a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, acknowledged the role of social media in "the scale and speed of its mobilization"[xiii]. In a study by Gabriel Weimann (of the University of Haifa), it submit that about 90% of organized terrorism on the internet takes place via social media. According to Weimann, terror groups use social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and internet forums to spread their messages, recruit members and gather intelligence[xiv]. These organizations include many designated terrorist entities tweeting including the Taliban (alemarahweb and ABalkhi); Hamas (hamasinfo) and its military wing Al-Qassam Brigades (AlqassamBrigade); Hizbullah and its Al-Manar TV (almanarnews); and countless others[xv].

Jean Paul Rouiller from the Geneva Center for the Training and Analysis of Terrorism says, social media is vital to modern terrorist organizations. "They would not have been able to (sic) survive, they would not be able to recruit people. The human touch always needed, but social media is their shop- window," he said[xvi]. In addition to every shop-window of Twitter and Facebook accounts there are also more limited private chat-rooms where terrorist leaders from around the world exchange information and tactics. According to Rouiller, one notorious forum was run by French terrorist suspect Nabil Amdouni until it was closed down by the French, and was later arrested in summer in Toulon 2012. In Rouiller assertion the documents recovered during the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad indicates that bin Laden himself may have posted messages on this forum. The dead al Qaeda chief was very careful to stay away from electronic devices

himself, but it is thought he wrote down messages on pieces of paper which a trusted lieutenant would then type and save on to a USB stick, finally passing this to someone else to post on the forum[xvii].

Terrorists Trade On Social Media: Weapons and Fundraising

According to UK media reports, Facebook are bee used by the terror groups active in Syria to buy and sell heavy weapons, guns and ammunition. Islamic State and Al-Qaeda terrorists could potentially also use Facebook to buy an anti-aircraft rocket launcher capable of blowing a passenger jet out of the sky. One of the weapons that was put on sale was a MANPADs, or man-portable air defence systems, a type of missile launcher capable of bringing down both civilian and military jets. Which was being sold for USD 67,000 on the page called 'The First Weapons Market in Idlib (Syria) Countryside (FIRSTPOST Report, 2016)[xviii]. The sellers - Syrian rebels, the nature of the conflict in the war zone means and suggest the easy possibility of the fall of the weapon into Islamic State hands. One post on the page shows an AGS-17 Soviet-Era grenade launcher available for USD 3,800[xix]. The page also hosts an advert for a TOW missile launcher, which the seller claims comes from "The US Pentagon". TOW missiles have been controversially supplied by the CIA to selected rebel groups in Syria and Iraq since the civil war erupted in 2011[xx]. One Youssef Yassim, an Islamic State supporter from Idlib, did made use his profile on Facebook page to buy a "thermal camera" – used for hunting at night. Hackers allegedly aligned with ISIS threatened Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey in a video. The 25-minute film, uncovered by deep web company Vocativ, displays images of Zuckerberg and Dorsey with bullet holes over their faces[xxi]. In addition, Twitter is also widely used for fundraising for jihad. For example, on February 26, 2014, Sheikh 'Abdallah Al-Muhaisni, a Saudi cleric who joined the mujahideen in Syria, launched a Twitter fundraising campaign (@Jahd_bmalk) to buy ammunition for the "Islamic brigades" fighting in Syria. According to various tweets from the account, over 26,000 riyals were donated. A previous campaign was titled "Participate in Jihad with your Money." In previous Twitter fundraising campaigns, photos of donations such as stacks of gold bars, luxury cars, and so on were circulated, along with photos of the weapons purchased with proceeds from their sale[xxii].

With the contemporary impact and in view with the effect of social media trade by terrorist group, this paper will not differ from the view by Gaurav B Thakor and Chandresh Parekh (2016)[xxiii] that "Internet fundraising techniques illustrates terrorists' technological sophistication and strategic manipulation of readily-available technology in order to raise funds for militant campaigns".

Al-Quaeda, Taliban

Al-Qaeda has been noted as being one of the terror groups that uses social media the most extensively. Brian Jenkins, senior advisor for the Rand Corporation, commented on Al-Qaeda's dominant presence on the web:

Meanwhile, as almost all terrorist organizations have websites, al Qaeda is understood to be the first to fully exploit the internet. This reflects al Qaeda's unique characteristics. Acknowledge itself as a global movement,

which therefore indicates its dependence on a global communication network to reach its perceived constituents. It portrays its mission as not primarily or simply creating terror among its foes but awakening and creating an awakening in the Muslim community. Its leaders view communications as 90 percent of the struggle. Irrespective of the risks imposed by intense manhunts, the regular communication of its leaders through video and audio messages are been posted on its websites and disseminated on the Internet. The number of websites devoted to the al Qaeda-inspired movement has grown from a handful to reportedly thousands, although many of these are ephemeral[xxiv].

Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of al-Qaeda, argues that "[al-Qaeda is] in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. [Al-Qaeda is] media battle is primarily for the hearts and minds of the ummah" (Seib and Janbek 2011).

Al Qaeda's media arm, the Global Islamic Media Front, released a training material, an English-translated bomb-making manual over the Internet on various social media sites. The manual originated from the teachings of Abu Khabbab al Misri, who is a well-known Egyptian bomb maker in the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) community, he taught in terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and was later killed by a US missile strike in Pakistan few years ago. This new, comprehensive explosives training manual-gone viral-teaches kitchen laboratory operations; general chemistry; in-depth instructions for synthesizing primary, secondary, and improvised explosives from commonplace ingredients; and directions for making detonators and IEDs. Using social media as a learning platform to grow technical capabilities has become a trend, which is creating new ways for homegrown jihadists to harness skills and knowledge in building IEDs and improve the learner's operational techniques for launching lethal attacks. Moreover, social media is providing greater geographical reach for prominent terrorist groups and their widespread affiliates by providing experienced bomb makers and terrorist leaders[xxv]. Inspire magazine, published by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The magazine's earlier issues attempted to encourage Americans to join terrorist training camps abroad by depicting an almost summer-camp like atmosphere[xxvi]. Al-Qaeda has an Internet presence spanning nearly two decades. In a report by the Czech Military Intelligence Service, Al-Qaeda is spreading its ideology among the Muslim community in Europe, mainly through social media means[xxvii].

While the **Taliban** on the other hand, since May 2011 has been active on Twitter, its has more than 7,000 followers. It tweet under the handle @alemarahweb, the Taliban tweets frequently, on some days nearly hourly[xxviii]. This account is currently suspended[xxix].

In December 2011, it was discovered that the Somalia-based terror cell Al-Shabab was using a Twitter account under the name @HSMPress[xxx]. Since opening on December 7, 2011, the account has amassed tens of thousands of followers and tweets frequently[xxxi].

Shortly after a series of coordinated Christmas bombings in Kono, Nigeria, in 2011, the Nigerian-based terror group Boko Haram released a video statement defending their actions to YouTube[xxxii]. It has since then uses the media to pass across its messages.

ISIS

Steven Stalinsky and R. Sosnow (2015) [xxxiii] vis-à-vis Idahos S.O and Adebayo K.M (2016)[xxxiv] posits that, ISIS poses a direct threat to international safety and security, as they are the largest in land control and fighting size, and wealthiest terrorist organization in history. ISIS which previously controls more territory and resources than any terrorist organization that has ever existed, has now as a result of massive attack against its forces and composition been reduced both in territory ad in manpower. The head of GCHQ, Robert Hannigan, spoke about how ISIS terrorists in Syria and Iraq have "embraced the web". He added that terrorists are now able to hide their identities using encryption tools which were once only available to government agencies.

Terrorist Groups Activities on Social Media: A Discourse

The use of social media is front and center in tracking online and offline crimes, especially terrorist activity. As reported by Dan Lohrmann, 2016[xxxv], the Orlando killer was inspired by online extremism. And information was also revealed about Omar Mateen's posts on Facebook before the attack. Citing CBS News, the killer posted social media messages that his attacks were in support of ISIS. He promised more "attacks from the Islamic State [ISIS] in the USA." Also according to CNN Reports (2015)[xxxvi] that three men were arrested over plans to travel from New York to join ISIS, and that one of them allegedly posted online about his desire to shoot the President of the United States. This however, indicates and supports the claim that terrorist groups and their sympathizers are exploiting the freedom of cyberspace.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to analysed some of the activities of what terrorists are doing on popular social media platforms. ISIS has proved fluent in YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, internet memes and other social media. During their offensive and March into the northern Iraqi city of Mosul its posting activity on the internet ramped up, reaching an all-time high close to about 40,000 tweets in one day[xxxvii]. With Islamic State, more commonly known as ISIS or ISIL, leads the way. It's highly organized social media campaign uses deceptive tactics and shows a sophisticated understanding of how such networks operate[xxxviii]. Its social media presence has expanded its influence well beyond the battlefields[xxxix]. Amateur videos and images are being uploaded daily by its footsoldiers, which are then globally shared both by ordinary users and mainstream news organizations. ISIS use of hashtags is interesting, as they focus them on group messaging and branding concepts. Social-media monitor Recorded Future found that ISIS had succeeded in creating hype with a total of 700,000 accounts discussing the terrorist group[xl].

In many respects, Islamic State learned their propaganda craft from al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). However, IS quickly eclipsed its mentor, deploying a whole range of narratives, images and political proselytizing through various social media platforms. Playing cat-and-mouse with ISPs and software providers like YouTube and Twitter, supporters of IS across the world have contributed to these various social media texts. As Jeff Lewis (2016)[xli] explains, as quickly as platform manager's close down

accounts, IS and its supporters continually create new IDs which they then use to build new accounts and sites for propaganda. ISIS aim in employing social media is not only to spread its messages and recruit followers, it includes Westerners, and to also empower its supporters to take part in same process. The increasing numbers of Americans and other Westerners seeking to join ISIS, combined with the support it has received on the ground in some places, suggest that its online efforts may be paying off. Two Americans have been reportedly found featured in pro-ISIS propaganda videos: One using the name Abu Dujana al-Amriki in 2013, why the other using the name Abu Abdurahman al-Trinidadi in 2014. ISIS's sophisticated use of social media - a blueprint that will likely be copied and expanded upon by other terrorist groups as well. Amplify ISIS's message, tweeting links to ISIS propaganda and hashtags at an unnaturally fast pace, which causes them place higher in search results[xlii].

J.M. Berger (2015)[xliii] testifying before US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs said: we can confidently estimate that during the autumn of 2014, there were at least 45,000 Twitter accounts used by ISIS supporters. This figure includes accounts that were both created and suspended during the time it took us to collect the data. The country that has received the most threats by ISIS via videos broadcasted on social media is Russia, with more than 25 in two years. France follows, with almost 20 in the same time frame. During the last weeks, events have shown that threats to those countries were not only digital, but also real. On October 31, fourteen days before the attacks in Paris, ISIS released a video encouraging young people in France to join the terrorist group. Something same occurred on June 26, a terrorist attack in Lyon which was been inspired by ISIS. One month earlier, ISIS had released a video on social media encouraging young French citizens to commit terrorist attacks. Also, a month before the attack on January 7 at the offices of Charlie Hebdo, ISIS had earlier made a release of a video showing a group of young French citizens asking their peers to enlist in the ranks of terrorist group[xliv].

ISIS had attempted to branch out to alternate social networks such as Friendica, Quitter and Diaspora, but with limited success; Friendica and Quitter in particular were quick to remove the group's presence from their sites[xlv]. The use of social media tools to communicate openly with target audiences, such as potential recruits in the countries jihadists wish to attack, is contributing to the emerging spread of bomb-building capabilities and IED operations around the globe. (Ibid). Mr Hannigan commented that even the group's grotesque videos of beheadings highlight the sophistication of their use of social media. "This time the 'production values' were high and the videos stopped short of showing the actual beheading," he said[xlvi].

Counter Measures
A. Using the same strategy, they use
The campaign of the success of U.S. Delta Force raid that freed 70 Kurdish prisoners held by ISIS in Iraq promoted through six different Twitter accounts specializing in countering ISIS in social media which released video of the U.S. raid against ISIS on Twitter, adding the Arabic hashtags used by ISIS in their communications. According to data provided by the Twitter analysis software Tweetbinder, the six Twitter accounts published 843 tweets in one week with the Kurdish prisoner video, reaching an audience of 711,313 Twitter users. These brought extremely powerful voices because this was the first time that Arabs and Muslims express in public the atrocities of ISIS[xlvii].

B. Shorting down the channel of influence
Until last fall about two years, Twitter took an extremely permissive approach to the question of what content it would permit. Starting shortly before ISIS disseminated a video of the beheading of American journalist James Foley, Twitter began to take a more aggressive approach to ISIS specifically, and thousands of ISIS supporter accounts have been suspended. Other jihadist groups have been targeted, but in lesser numbers[xlviii].

C. Using it as an investigative means

Social Media: Recruit and Radicalism
Extremists of all kinds are increasingly using social media to recruit, radicalize and raise funds, and ISIS is one of the most adept practitioners of this approach[xlix]. Some experts think there are examples of terrorists who have immersed themselves in this online world of extremism and have "self-radicalized" without ever having met another terrorist in real life[l]. ISIS has maintained Twitter accounts for several of its official media outlets, including Al-Hayat media, which mostly distributes polished propaganda pieces in Arabic, although it also maintains Twitter feeds in various other languages, including English; Al-Medrar, which publishes in a variety of languages; Platform Media, which primarily tweets news updates in Arabic; and Al-Battar media, that has English and Arabic feeds that tweet news, graphics, official statements, and videos. In addition, multiple ISIS regional groups maintain Twitter feeds posting news, images, and video of their activities[li]. Major Nidal Hasan, who allegedly shot dead 13 people and injured 30 others at Fort Hood in 2009, is an example cited by analysts like Neumann, as a "self-radicalizing" terrorist. Authorities say he was in email contact with the Yemen-based preacher Anwar al-Awlaki in the months prior to the shootings[lii].

The internet/social media can be used as a "facilitator--even an accelerant for terrorist and criminal activity[liii]." The increase of online English-language extremist material in recent years is readily available with guidance to plan violent activity[liv]. "English-language web forums […] foster a sense of community and further indoctrinate new recruits"[lv]. Mueller, Robert S assert that, the Internet has "become a tool for spreading extremist propaganda, and for terrorist recruiting, training, and planning. It is a means of social networking for like-minded extremists...including those who are not yet radicalized, but who may become so through the anonymity of cyberspace[lvi]."

The differences between Al-Quaeda and ISIS, al-Qaeda terrorists use the internet to distribute material anonymously or 'meet in dark spaces'. ISIS has taken a direct approach especially when uploading videos of them attacking towns and firing weapons[lvii].

Recommendations
Defeating this resilient, asymmetrical threat will require flexibility in legacy security measures and operations, as

well as strategies of creative insights and collective developments of smart security solutions from all stakeholders. This should include developing a far greater depth of knowledge in explosives-especially in improvised and commercial explosives-and in global IED designs, operations, and capability levels and a more comprehensive understanding of the general threat spectrum the world faces. Law enforcement's ability or inability to swiftly respond to the growing use of social media channels and evolving IED tactics around the world will signal to the enemy the depth of nations strength in defeating this irregular, unprecedented challenge in the world;

1. Military operations against terrorism should be accompanied by a digital communication strategy that provides audiovisual material to be shared on social medial.
2. Counter-narrative campaigns against ISIS or Islamic fundamentalism should be based on true stories of Arabs and Muslims who have experienced firsthand experience of the suffering caused by ISIS.
3. ISIS counter-narrative campaigns obtain more engagement and more views when they are distributed through non-government channels[lviii].

Conclusion

Conclusively, never before in history has the statement "anyone can become a terrorist" been more true or easier to attain than with the advent of social media. This pervasive, asymmetrical threat is proliferating through the use of social media tools; bringing about long-term security challenges for intelligence organizations and domestic law enforcement agencies; and raising the domestic threat of unpredictable, small-scale surgical strikes by homegrown terrorists using vehicle-borne, person-borne, and leave-behind IEDs-the terrorist's weapon of choice. Finally, it's clear that terrorists have been spreading propaganda and IED instructions over the Internet for years. While the role social media is playing in contemporary's means of communications is much more dynamic[lix]. And developing a more effective strategy to defeat terrorists and terrorism in social media and in the public opinion sphere is more paramount than ever.

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