

TINATIN KAROSANIDZE

FREE UNIVERSITY OF TBILISI

t.karosanidze@freeuni.edu.ge

RADICAL GROUPS IN NON-MAINSTREAMING MEDIA

Abstract

Contemporary radical groups more often use non-mainstreaming media to achieve their political aims. The development of social media clearly showed radical extremist groups that Internet platforms are the most successful area for spreading their ideology, operations, and recruiting. At the same time, it is cheaper than TV or press and gathers a much bigger number of people.

The research analyzes the areas where radical violent groups use non-mainstreaming media, i.e., propaganda, radicalization, fundraising, spreading the information, and planning the operations.

Keywords: radical groups, social media, extremism, recruiting, funding.

The fact that media is an important tool for radical groups is related to their tactics to fight to get as many people as possible to hear about them. In the 1st century BC, Zealots or Sicarii group operating in Judea attacked their victims in public markets to instill fear among the population. Later, the emergence of the press allowed anarchist extremists to publish their own newspapers and spread information in this way. At the end of the XIX century, the USA published a newspaper, *'Freiheit'*, the editor of which was the anarchist John Most, and where the articles on anarchist ideologies were printed. In 1902 Mr. Most was arrested because of justifying the attack on President McKinley, and wrote that killing the president was not a crime (Nacos 2016, 8).

Modern radical groups publish their own magazines too, where different articles are printed. The users of these magazines and journals are members of radical groups, although any interested person can access the electronic versions. ISIS published several magazines such as *'Dabiq'*, and *'Rumiyyah'*. Al-Qaeda also has its own magazine called *'The Inspire'*. The founder of the magazine is Anwar Al-Awlaki, one of the leaders of Al-Qaeda. The English language magazine published religious articles, but the same magazine printed the article titled "How to Make a Bomb in Your Mother's Kitchen", which gave the detailed receipt of making a bomb (Reed and Ingram 2017, 6-7).

The popularity of television and live broadcasts has given extremist groups a wider opportunity to broadcast their actions or demands. For example, during the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, members of the Palestinian group Black September attacked the Israeli Olympic team and took hostage the entire team members. It should be noted that 6 million people all over the world watched the opening ceremony of the Munich Olympic Games at the same time. Accordingly, the members of the Palestinian group calculated that their actions would be heard around the world through television.

Internet development put extremist organizations in front of the new platforms. Social media has become a cheaper and easier way to spread their messages, as it covers a much bigger audience. Radical groups use the Internet for several purposes: radicalization and recruitment, spreading information, coordination and planning operations, and fundraising.

The reality that the Internet became a new platform for tactics to fight is pointed out by new terminology, which arose among radical Islamic groups: "*E-Jihad*", so-called electronic jihad, and "*Internet Intifada*" which means intifada by the Internet. The aim of the new form of terrorism was not to damage physically but to concentrate more on material damage. That's why this new form of terrorism has more followers and supporters. However, the most radical groups began to use the Internet actively. In 2015, ISIS members hacked the US Military Central Command site and published the names of 100 officers. The group called its members to find these officers to kill (Lamothe 2015).

The use of the Internet by extremist groups is a big challenge for world security, which is confirmed by the declaration made by the White House in 2021 that "to fight against using the Internet by

terrorists and violent extremists, which aims to radicalize and recruit new members, is the main priority for the US” (Evans and Williams 2022, 1). The statement was also related to the “PIZZAGATE” scandal, which started in 2016 in the US, that allegedly members of the Democratic Party molested children in a pizzeria in Washington DC. The same year, Hillary Clinton’s election campaign chief, Mr. John Podesta’s email, was hacked, allegedly containing encrypted messages about child abuse (Sorkin 2016).

This is how was born the term QANON, used for Internet conspiracy theories. QANON posts were actively distributed in the social network in the form of Q drops. The author of the posts usually claimed to be a high-ranking official. Such posts spread the information that members of the Democratic Party were Cabalists and Satanists. Pope Francis and Dalai Lama were also named Cabalists. According to the research of the Institute of Strategic Dialogue, done during 2017-2021, QANON had 68 million tweets, 487,000 Facebook posts, and 281,000 Instagram posts. It is easy to find out that followers of these pages were mainly US President Donald Trump’s supporters. Among them were also the attackers on the Capitolium on the 6th of January, 2023 (Rubin, Burggeman, and Steakin 2021).

The present research is based on an analysis of social media as well as posts and statements of extremist groups spread on various platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). The magazines and journals of extremist groups such as *‘Rumiyyah’*, *‘Dabiq’*, and *‘The Inspire’* are also analyzed.

The research analyzes the issues related to the reasons and purposes of using nonmainstream media by extremist groups. While working on the research, several reasons were defined as why extremist groups use social media, i.e., radicalization, fundraising, recruitment, and spreading information or ideology.

Radicalization and Recruitment

It has already been unequivocally confirmed that radicalization is not a spontaneous decision, and a certain process precedes it. Radicalization goes through three stages: identity crisis, legitimization crisis, and legitimacy crisis. The factors causing the crisis can be both internal and external. External factors are mainly the environment or society where a person lives. External factors can also act as a push for the radicalization of a person. For example, protests, armed attacks, and riots (Smith 2018, 5).

An identity crisis, in which the individual blames the state, leads to a crisis of legitimization, and the latter becomes a prerequisite for a crisis of legitimacy. A radicalized person looks for a suitable environment to fulfill his “function”, which recently became a virtual social media group.

Social media became a successful place for creating virtual groups of like-minded people and spreading information. Virtual interaction helps to spread radical ideas and recruit new members. After questioning ex-members of radical far rights groups, results showed that the Internet helped and intensified their radicalization. From 2005-2016, the violent activities of 479 extremists were increased by using social media (Herath and Whittaker 2021, 1027-1048).

Several factors help the recruitment process. The first step is the dehumanization of the enemy when the enemy is not a concrete person but is mentioned abstractly. For example, Islamic extremist groups call their enemies “Kafirs” (non-believers), “Crusades”, and “pigs”.

The next step is to select a victim. The victim is chosen according to the concrete group’s ideology and tactics. For example, Italian Red Brigades operating in Italy choose high-ranking social group representatives, judges, military officers, and public figures, police. Their target became the Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro, who was attacked in 1978 and taken hostage. Later, when the group’s demands were refused to fulfill, the prime minister was killed (Chailand and Blin 2007, 236-237).

The following steps are related to blaming the victim and defining the form of punishment. In the case of religious groups, the dehumanization of the enemy helps to justify religious killing. But nonreligious groups also justify their deeds of killing by their ideologies. For example, Tamil Tigers is the top group that uses a suicide form of terrorism. In 1991, the group member Dhanu killed the prime minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, during his visit to Sri Lanka. The reason for the killing was Gandhi’s support of the Sinhala people, which was confirmed by his visit. Because of such support, Tamil Tigers punished the prime minister.

Spreading the Information

Extremist groups actively use mainstream media as well as social networks to spread their messages. For example, ISIS first appeared in a 2014 video where a member of ISIS cut the head of the

American journalist James Foley¹. The killer in the video, which lasted just for five minutes, called the US president to withdraw armies from Iraq unless he would kill another American journalist (Carter 2014; Aldera et. al 2021, 161614).

YouTube became a successful platform for Boko Haram to spread its propaganda. The group kidnapped girls from Borno in 2014 and later spread self-made videos. Abu Bakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, took responsibility for kidnapping girls and justified selling them as slaves because he followed God's instructions (Besenyo and Sinko 2021, 73).

Al-Shabab extremist group operating in Somalia also uses its own media department called "*Al-Kata'ib Media*", which is the main tool for recruiting new members. However, the group is very active on Twitter as well. The first Twitter account, @HSMPress, was created in 2011, and it is the abbreviation of the name – *Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahedeen Press Office*. In a year, the group got 2500 followers on this platform (Besenyo and Sinko 2021, 70).

As for online magazines, ISIS and Al-Qaeda supporters have launched several magazines for those who are not officially members of the groups but support their ideology. Three of these magazines stand out:

*'The Wolves of Manhattan'*², which was created by an online group named "*Jaiysh Al-Malahim Al-Iliktrunii*" (Electronic Combat Army) linked to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; the magazine has been published since 2020 in Arabic, English, and French.

Al-Qaeda-affiliated extremist Abu Yahia Al-Khurasani owns '*Mujaheds in the West*'; it is an English-language publication, and its readers are mainly radical Muslims living in the US and Europe. The articles issued in '*Mujaheds in the West*' are related to instructions on how to kill as many Westerners as possible by various methods.

'Voice of Khurasan' is also an English-language publication, which was released first in February 2022 and covers the activities of ISIS in Central and South Asia.

In addition to their own media, extremist groups actively use social platforms. Twitter has proved to be a successful platform for Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb, where the first tweet appeared on March 16, 2013. The group actively uses an "open platform" for followers and interested parties to ask questions. It is worth noting that questions could be asked in French, Spanish, English, and Arabic, but answers were given only in English or Arabic (Besenyo and Sinko 2021, 66). In 2013, the group created an account on Twitter named "*Africa Muslima*", which simultaneously created a blog and a Facebook page. However, the blog and a Facebook page were soon shut down due to a lack of updates, and Twitter became the only media site for the organization.

Fundraising

Extremist groups use diverse sources for funding, such as private donations, the Hawala system³, mosque networks, state funding, and different funds. As for Internet platforms, radical groups use these platforms for fundraising. Groups also create donation applications and emails and send funding information directly to specific addresses. Hamas launched a Bitcoin fundraising campaign on social media, however, later, the Hamas military wing announced quitting this campaign (Al-Mughrabi 2023).

Al-Shabab group in Somalia is actively involved in social media platforms to raise funds, and that is why the group uses the Hawala system. In 2009, the Al-Shabab group posted on online forums asking for donations and raised about 40,000 US Dollars from the diaspora in a week (Besenyo and Sinko 2021, 72).

In conclusion, it can be said that extremist groups and movements are actively involved in virtual activities. Radical groups use the same platforms as ordinary users, adapt to technology just as easily, and are often among the first users of new platforms.

¹ American photo reporter James Foley was kidnapped by ISIS members in Syria in 2012. He has been taken hostage for 21 months. In 2014, James Foley was brutally killed.

² The name '*The Wolves of Manhattan*' is connected to the 9/11 famous terrorist attacks.

³ Hawala system – popular unofficial transfer system based on money brokers or hawaladars network trust and honor. The Hawala system acts out of the traditional bank and finance systems or works simultaneously with them. For Hawala transactions, a minimum of two money brokers take care of fulfilling the "deal" without cash or transaction.

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