

Social Media as a Source of Radicalization: A Case Study of Pakistan

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Abstract

Since its inception Pakistan has been confronted with multiple internal and external security challenges, however, the post-9/11 attacks scenario further complicated the landscape of religious extremism, radicalization and terrorism. The surge in terrorism in Afghanistan brought spillover effects of the War on Terror on Pakistan and experienced a transition from old to new terrorism, where extremist organizations incorporate internet to disseminate propaganda, generate funds and recruit & train people. This study integrates the media dependency theory to understand social media, dark web and radicalization nexus. Furthermore, the study investigates radicalization through social media by terrorist organizations in Pakistan with the help of case studies of Noureen Jabbar Laghari and Bushra Cheema. Five ways to counter radicalization in Pakistan have been suggested including a counter-narrative on social media, content analysis of the data on the internet, curriculum and Madrassa reforms, peace education and use of technical software such as eGLYPH to quickly remove radical data from social media. Lastly, the research attempts to contribute to counter-radicalization by combining the media dependency model and ideas for counter-radicalization as the dependency model elaborates on the impact of mass media content on the audience.

Keywords: Social Media Radicalization, Counter radicalization, Content Analysis, Curriculum reform, Madrassa reforms.

Introduction

The 9/11 attack has changed the way the world viewed terrorist organizations. The United States declared a “War on Terror” against Al-Qaeda which was operational in Afghanistan, with a threat to the world and supporters of the terrorists that “Either you’re with us or you’re with terrorists”.¹ Pakistan joined hands with the United States of America in the war on terror. But things turned out more different than President Musharraf had intuited. The War on Terror has affected Pakistan as much as it affected Afghanistan as it brought poverty, economic, political and social miseries, unemployment, extremism, sectarianism, unrest and radicalization to Pakistan.²

Al-Qaeda diverted its attention from the main goal of the 1990s and 2000s and shifted its focus on fighting the United States on Afghan soil and resulting in the emergence of new regional and local militant organizations. The evolution of mass media has revolutionized the world. On one hand, it did bring the world closer but it also multiplied the threat of cyber-terrorism and cyber-radicalization. Dr. Asma Shakir Khwaja mentioned how the availability, accessibility and affordability of people to the information have increased. Due to internet connectivity, the world is just a click away. According to the Digital 2022 Report published by Hoot suite and “We Are Social”, there were more than 82.90 million internet users in Pakistan.

¹ “Transcript of President Bush’s address”, *CNN/US*. September 21st, 2001

² What is Islamic State”, *BBC News*. (December 2, 2015)

The following figure shows an overview of the adoption and use of connected devices and services:

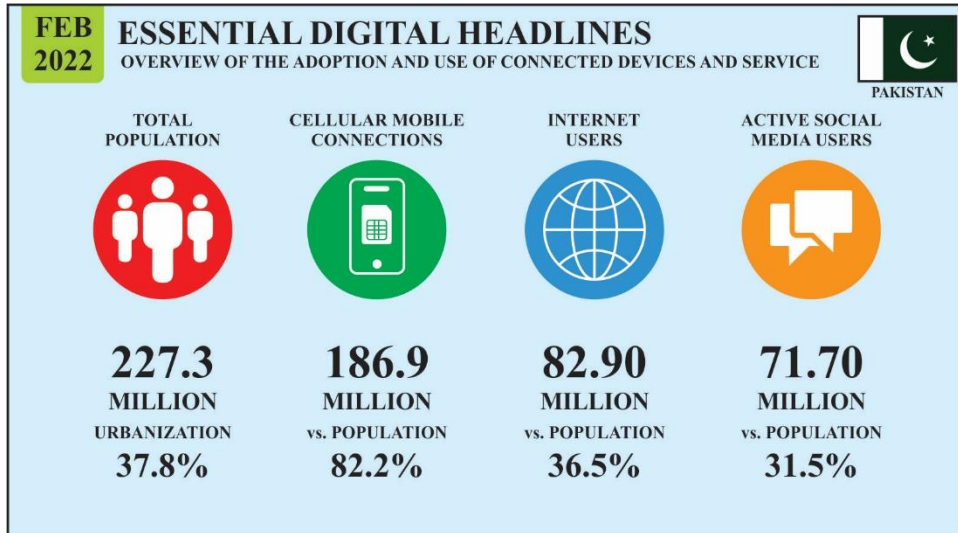


Figure 1: Country profile outlook Pakistan

The internet users have multiplied over the period as follows:

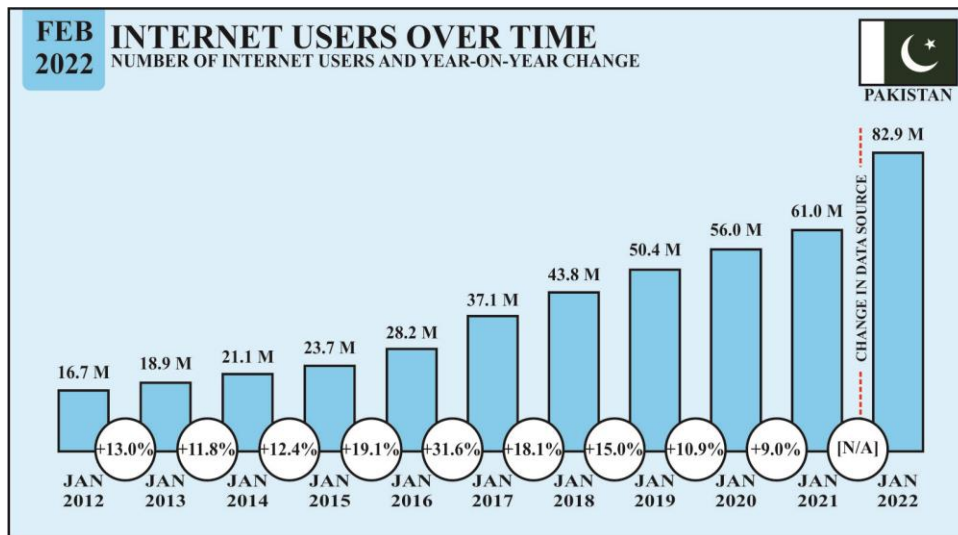


Figure 2: Internet users in Pakistan

The following figure describes the social media users in Pakistan:

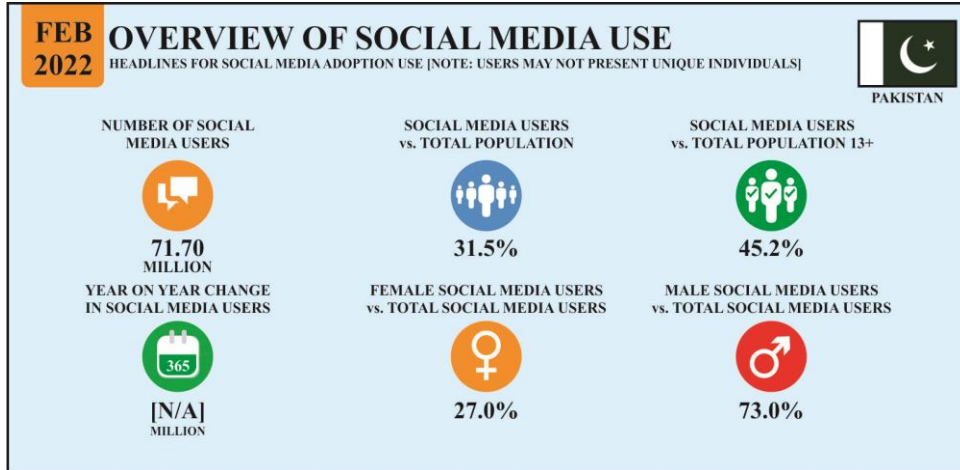


Figure 3: Socialmedia users in Pakistan

Facebook is the most used social media channel in Pakistan.³

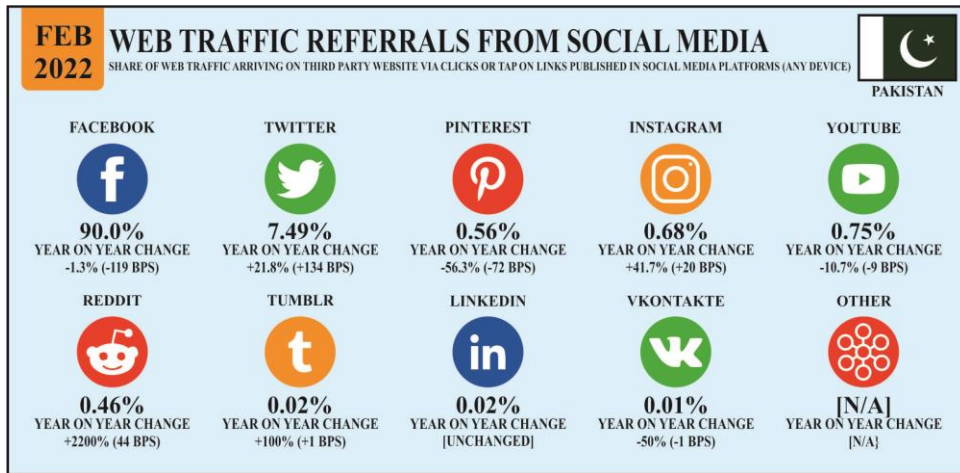


Figure 4: Web traffic referrals from social media

³ “Facebook most popular social network in Pakistan: Report”, *The express tribune*, July 3rd, 2018.

The above-mentioned figure 1, figure2, figure 3 and figure 4 show the number of internet users has increased after the introduction of 3G/4G in Pakistan as they are providing cheap access to the internet. There are two reasons for the high rate of social media subscribers in Pakistan: one is the successful penetration of 3G/4G/5G and the development of broadband internet and secondly, the smartphones are affordable. Pakistan has already placed itself in the first twenty countries with the highest number of internet users leaving behind Canada, Switzerland and Australia.⁴

Theoretical Framework

This study incorporates the Media Dependency Theory presented by Sandra Ball Rock each and Melvin DeFluer in 1976.⁵ This theory is a combination of different theories, for example, it takes ideas from the social categories theory of psychology, extends the concepts of the uses and gratification approach of mass media and also focuses on the impact of media on the audience.⁶ The media dependency theory proposes a link between users, media and the social system in which they exist. As mentioned by George Siemens in Connectivism theory human is always striving to get new information. Media dependency theory claims that depending on media fulfills this need of human beings. According to the uses and gratification theory, people choose what they want to see. So the dependency of all are

⁴ “Internet users by country (2016)”, *Internet live stats*.

⁵ “Dependency Theory”, Communication Studies theories, University of Twente, Last updated: February 27th, 2017. <https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Mass%20Media/Dependency%20Theory/>

⁶ Ibid

not similar, users have the authority to select and use.⁷ Two factors define the dependency of users on specific media:

- Users depend on that media, which fulfills their needs more comparatively,
- People depend on media to get updated about social environment. It is usually applied during a crisis time when policies are changing rapidly.⁸
- The audience chooses their dependence based on their needs and interests.⁹

The needs of users are not always personal but sometimes these are defined by the cultural and social structures and interactions. What users choose to watch is depending on their interaction with the outside world. The user's behavior is defined by his interaction with society and what he watches on media. There are three potential results from the user's dependency on media, cognitive, affective and behavioral.¹⁰ The cognitive effect means a change in liking and disliking, the affective effect works on your emotions i.e. creating emotional affiliations with certain things based on likes and dislikes and lastly, the behavioral effects are the actions and inactions taken by users as a result of cognitive and affective effects.¹¹

⁷David L, "Uses and Gratification Theory," in *Learning Theories*, January 26, 2016. <https://www.learning-theories.com/uses-and-gratification-theory.html>

⁸"Dependency Theory", Communication Studies theories, University of Twente, Last updated: February 27th, 2017. <https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Mass%20Media/Dependency%20Theory/>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰Yang Lin, "Media Dependency Theory", *Britannica*, May 29th, 2014. <https://www.learning-theories.com/uses-and-gratification-theory.html>

¹¹ Ibid

Ball, Rock each and DeFluer put forward a model for this interaction:

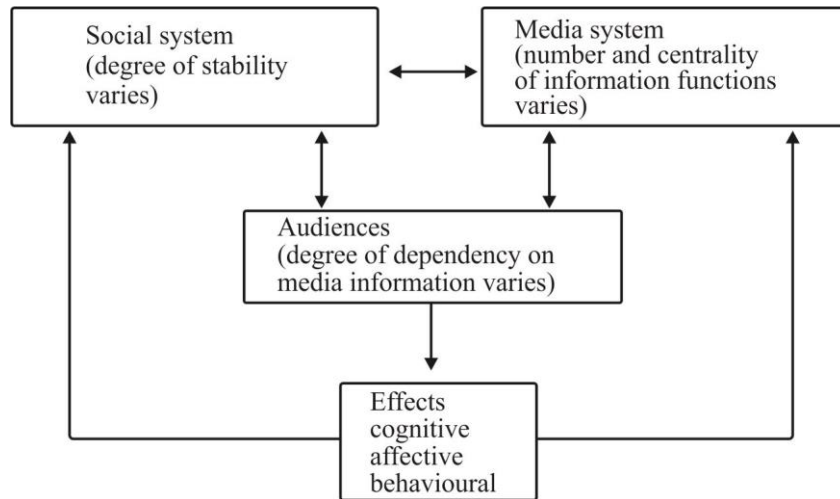


Figure 5: Conceptual model of media dependency

The media maintains individuals' dependency on them by always providing them with new and relevant information.¹² Cognitive and affective effects help in the maintenance of this dependency because people do not think rationally but emotionally which results in higher involvement of users.¹³

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

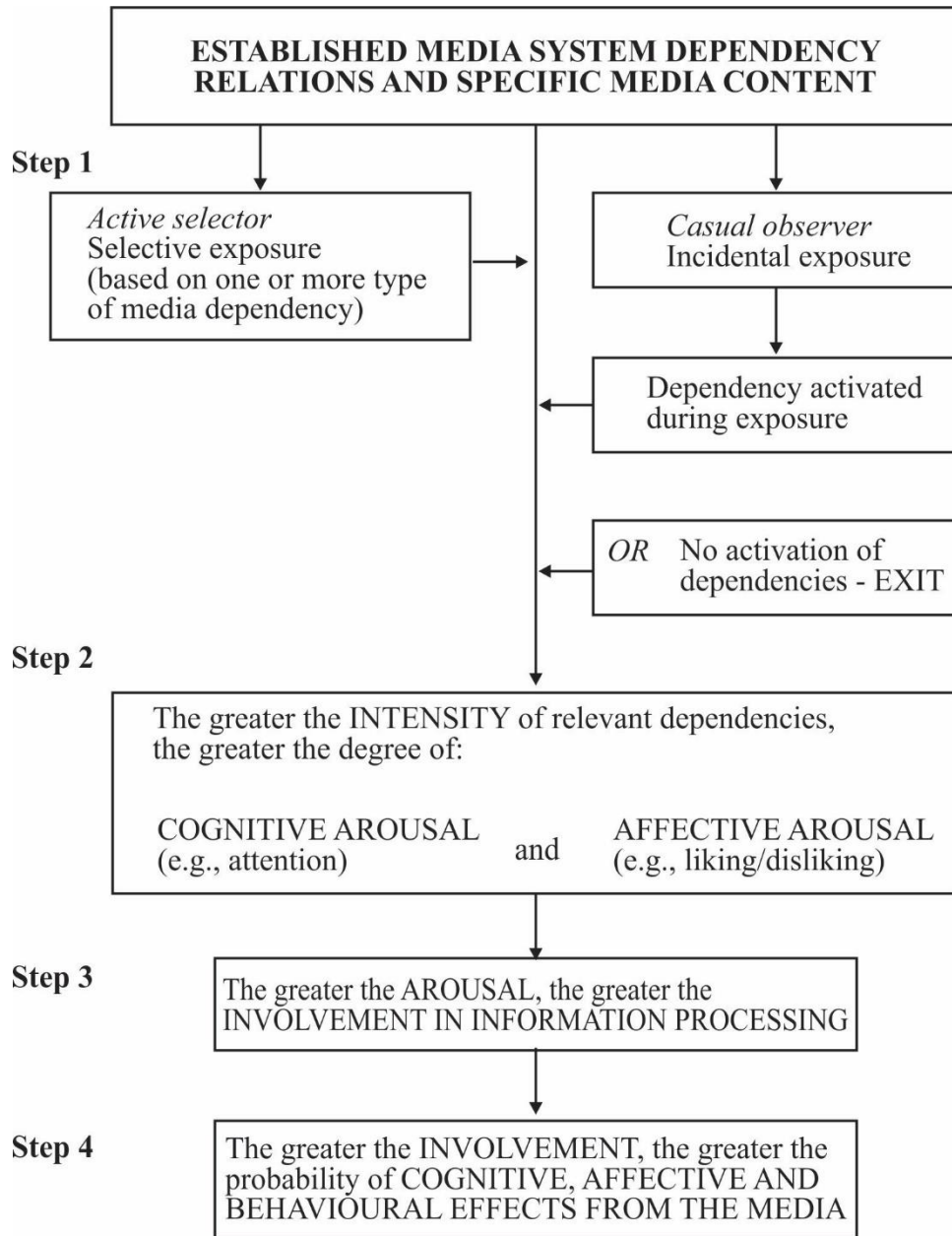


Figure 6: Step by step media dependency process

Higher the media dependency higher will be the user's cognitive and affective arousal and it will define their actions. For example, putting the case study of Noreen Laghari on this model. Noreen Laghari in her interview mentioned that she participated in a conversation in a post on Facebook. Her desire to learn new facts convinced her to get involved in a religious conversation with a person that she thought was rational. She started depending on that person or indirectly on the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) narrative. Her dependency on ISIS results in strong cognitive arousal on religious matters. With the passage of time and higher dependency on ISIS to get the information she was emotionally affiliated with the organization, as religion is a sensitive and emotional subject and she started thinking emotionally and not logically which ultimately resulted in behavior that she thought was right.¹⁴

Social Media Radicalization

There are five ways in which ISIS is using the internet: Firstly to spread propaganda, secondly to send and receive finances to carry out terrorist activity and thirdly for online training of the recruits and lone-wolf terrorists who are living far away from the headquarters, fourthly planning the activity if the members are present somewhere else and fifthly for the cyber-attacks such as hacking and identity theft which hides the identity of a terrorist because they are using someone else's profile.¹⁵

¹⁴ 92 News HD, "Exclusive interview with Noreen Laghari", video, May 8, 2017.

¹⁵ *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, "The use of internet for terrorist purposes". (Vienna: UNODC, 2012)

Propaganda

"Organizations, such as ISIS, use social media websites, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, to spread manipulated information. The manipulation involves the manipulation of facts as well as religion. The members of ISIS are not only fighters but doctors, engineers and also social media managers. The social media team spreads propaganda by manipulating religious beliefs.

Internet and Social media channels are more famous among college and university students, that's why ISIS published magazines on the internet and can be downloaded easily even today. ISIS published two magazines namely Dabiq and Rumiyah.¹⁶

Dabiq was the first magazine published by ISIS in 2014 with the first issue titled "The Return of Khilafah".¹⁷ The main objective of this issue was to inform the people about the presence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, to inform people that khilafat has been announced and lastly to call upon the Muslims to join ISIS.¹⁸ This issue declared democracy as an evil and requested the Muslim states to abandon it immediately and do hijrah to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

The second issue of Dabiq was titled, "The Flood". The crux of the issue was that ISIS threatened the Muslims all around the world to join ISIS otherwise ISIS will carry out Jihad against them.¹⁹ All other volumes of Dabiq till the 15th volume included the further elaboration of the main aims

¹⁶ "Islamic state's (ISIS, ISIL) Horrific magazine", Clarion project.

¹⁷ "The Return of Khilafah", *Dabiq*, Issue 1

¹⁸ "The Return of Khilafah", *Dabiq*, Issue 1

¹⁹ "The Flood", *Dabiq*, Issue 2

and objectives of ISIS, including the Khilafat, Imam and emphasis that Islam permits violence.

After Dabiq, Rumiyaḥ was published in 2016.²⁰ Contrary to Dabiq, Rumiyaḥ was more extremist in its content. Rumiyaḥ legitimizes the use of force against non-Muslims, keeping in mind that Rumiyaḥ not only legitimizes violence against armed personnel but also against children and women. It says: “Muslims were reminded that the blood of the disbelievers is halal and killing them is a form of worship to Allah.”²¹

Their propaganda is somehow successful because people are joining ISIS and the rise in extremism is a harsh reality. One of the important questions under consideration is what motivate people to do hijrah? The answer was given by two Indonesian girls, who along with their families migrated from Indonesia to Syria.²² They said that they watched videos posted by ISIS members on social media channels, where everything was a dream for us, a fantasy world where everyone was living peacefully under the caliphate, kids are playing, adults were busy in their own social life and none of them are worried about anything because of good governance there were no economic and social problems, but when they reach there, the reality was far different from what they saw at social media.²³ They shared that within one month they started to plan their return.

²⁰ “Rumiyaḥ” Issue 1

²¹ Ibid

²² Sarah El Deeb, “Seeking an ISIS dream, one Indonesian family finds a nightmare in Syria”, *Stuff*.

²³ Ibid

Financing

No organization can work without financing. Terrorist organizations raise funds on social media channels by manipulating people through disinformation and discourse that supports their narrative.²⁴ Internet banking or online banking has helped in providing funds to terrorist organizations. Apart from banking other service providers such as PayPal have emerged as an important entity for fund transfer.²⁵ Online money transfer is also a victim of fraud, in a way that bank accounts are being hacked by the terrorist organization, they extract all money from the account and either transfer it to their accounts or utilize it in online shopping.

The concept of “Zakat”, which is one of the five pillars of Islam and is obligatory for every adult person, was also given in the online magazine of ISIS “Dabiq”.²⁶ The amount of taxes is as high as 2.5% on goods and agriculture, as well as business and commerce, this tax generates USD 900 million per year.²⁷ Other than taxes or Zakat, ISIS is dependent on its agricultural products, especially wheat, this helps them in a way that they are not dependent on outside sources for their food, but they can feed their locals with their production.²⁸

Terrorist organizations use social media as a platform to call for donations. Sometimes with hidden personalities and sometimes openly, they use

²⁴ *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, “The use of internet for terrorist purposes”. (Vienna: UNODC, 2012)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ “The Return of Khilafah”, Dabiq, Issue 1

²⁷ “The financing of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”, *AFET*. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/603835/EXPO_IDA\(2017\)603835_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/603835/EXPO_IDA(2017)603835_EN.pdf)

²⁸ “The financing of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”, *AFET*.

applications such as Telegram for transferring the funds.²⁹The benefit of using social media as a source of funding for terrorist groups is that they may engage in online crimes like identity theft and solicit donations from their profiles into their accounts.

Training and Planning

Terrorists understood the importance of internet in today's world. They have uploaded magazines that help in radicalization and recruitment of people. Then the third and most important step is the training of those individuals and making plans. They use social media channels to communicate with each other. This communication also includes the online training of lone wolf terrorists. For this purpose, the terrorist organizations have uploaded their manuals online in PDF formats on how to carry out a terrorist attack and how to make bombs and chemicals at home.³⁰ The e-book that was published by ISIS to train people entitled "How to survive in the west: A Mujahid guide", is easily available on Google and its links are present all-over social media channels specifically Twitter and Facebook.³¹ This book helps in training the Mujahideen as well as their planning. This book is specifically for the Muslims living in the west, where the non-Muslim population is more than the Muslims and where Muslims are frequently under the threat. This book provides a framework on how to carry out religious obligations in such circumstances and how to prepare oneself for Jihad.³² The first part of the book focuses on in-depth guideline on how to

²⁹Stacey Yuen, "Its not just Russia – terror financiers are also using social media propaganda", *CNBC*.

³⁰LizzeDearden, "New York attack: Terror manuals containing instructions for bomb used by Akayedullah remain online", *Independent*.

³¹Tom Batchelor, "Islamic State terror manual tells Jihadis how to make a bomb", *Express United Kingdom*.

³²"How to survive in the west: A Mujahid guide (2015)", *ISIS*, 2015

act so that you do not catch the eyes of the intelligence agencies and other people around you; it advises them to be not so obvious with their religion, if you are a revert you should keep it hidden, if you are a Muslim then you should act similarly like you used to do before, there is no need to change your looks, group and activities.³³ It advises them to dress just like the non-Muslims in a way that they should hide their real identity from the intelligence agencies, they legitimize looting the money that non-Muslims own and lastly communicate within themselves or ISIS just like the intelligence agencies do, for example, the very old lemon ink letter in which the paper looks normal until it is under fire, this will help in a way that no one can read your messages and secondly used code words, never communicate directly.³⁴

The second part of the book is completely focused on physical training, it suggests them to exercise daily, go for a run before breakfast and go to the gym, other than that it advises them to go for self-defense training and practise target at home with the help of kids toys like guns, crossbow, etc.³⁵ The next part of the book focuses on carrying out the jihadi (Effort or struggle in way of God) activity, this part focuses on the strategy of the activity and how important it is for the Jihadis to connect to the world through social media channels after the activity has been done. It shows them that claiming responsibility for any action against the non-Muslims is the biggest part of Jihad and mass media channels will help in doing so because they are always waiting for breaking news, claiming responsibility threatens the non-Muslims and there is a reward for Jihadis.³⁶ Lastly, it

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid. page 8-18

³⁵ "How to survive in the west: A Mujahid guide (2015)", *ISIS*, 2015

³⁶ Ibid

suggests them to use Wikipedia, WikiHow and YouTube, which will help them in carrying out any activity, all they have to do is to write, “How to ...” and the results will help them out. WikiHow has numerous results when being searched with “How to make a bomb”, it provides them with step-by-step instructions to make bombs.³⁷ The following image shows a simple process to make a non-lethal vinegar bomb.

The magazine published by Al-Qaida, “Inspire”, in 2010 had one topic in its content “Make a Bomb in the kitchen of your mom, The AQ chef”, which has a pictorial stepwise manual on making a bomb by using the products easily available in a kitchen.

The following images show one of the processes of making a bomb:

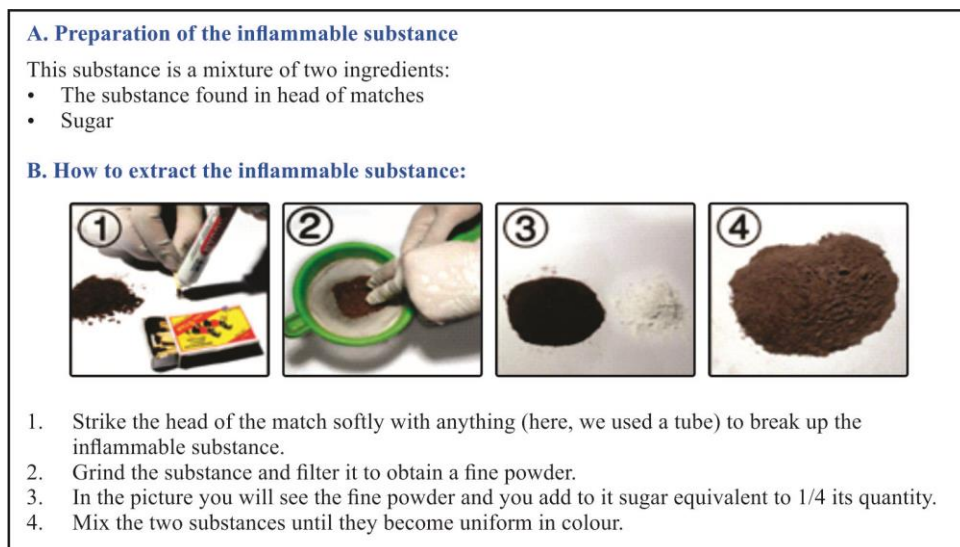


Figure 7: Preparation for the inflammable substance (Step A&B)

³⁷“How to make bomb”, *WikiHow*.(Available on: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Vinegar-Bomb>)

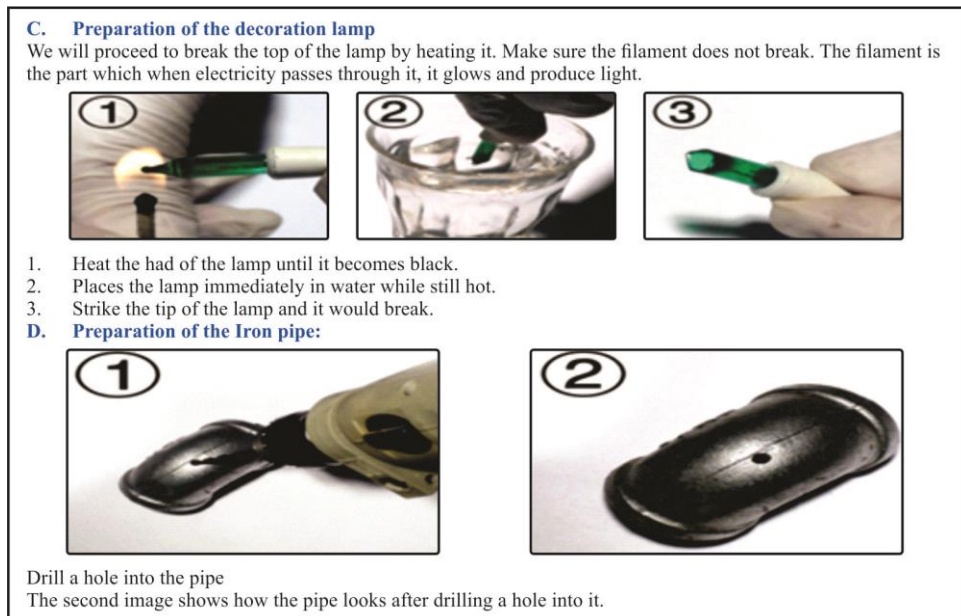


Figure 8: Preparation for the inflammable substance (Step C&D)

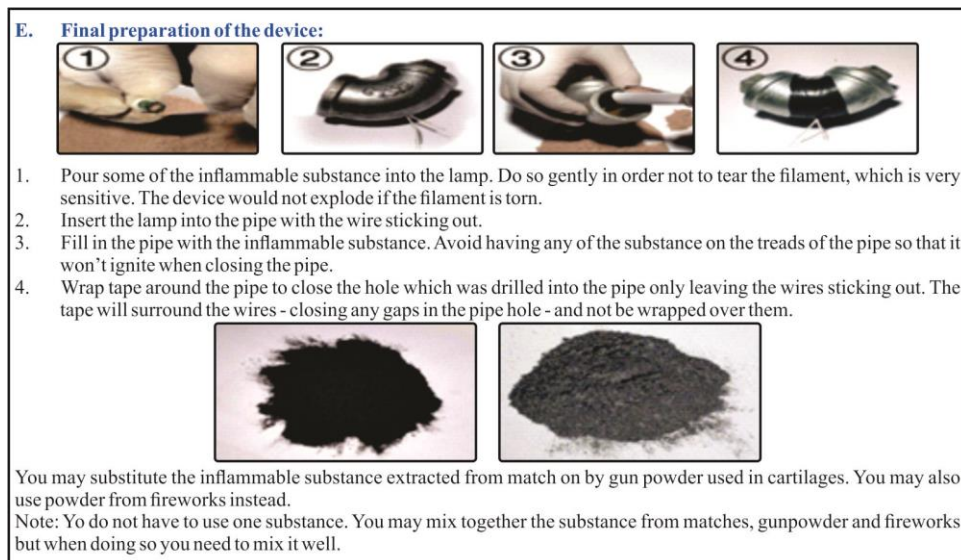


Figure 9: Preparation for the inflammable substance (Step E)

Cybercrime

The world of internet is not safe from criminal activities as well; these criminal activities are known as Cybercrimes in the digital world. Cybercrimes include spamming, hacking, phishing and identity theft, etc.³⁸ Terrorist organizations are known for using fake identities on social media. They have been instructed in online magazines and e-books to use fake identities on social media and also steal identities which are commonly known as identity theft. The users have been instructed to use internet safely, in a way that the search does not gain attention of intelligence agencies. For this purpose, they have introduced people to a browser TOR, where the IP address is different every time a person searches for it.³⁹ Using this browser will not lead the intelligence agencies to your home place firstly and secondly, they will not be able to track the search pattern one has made because of the changed IP address.

Case Study of Noureen Jabbar Laghari

Noureen Jabbar Laghari, a 19 years old girl, was a student at Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences in Hyderabad. She went missing one day on her way to college on 10th February 2017.⁴⁰ She was found in Punjab housing society on 14th April as a result of an intelligence operation and was returned home. In an interview, she disclosed that she traveled from Hyderabad to Lahore because she was tempted by the concept of Khilafat on social media. She was approached by the members of ISIS and then she asked them if she wants to do Hijrat (migration).⁴¹ She tried to relate the

³⁸ "What is cybercrime? How to deal with it?" *The windows club*.

³⁹ "How to survive in the west: A Mujahid guide (2015)", *ISIS*, 2015.

⁴⁰ "Exclusive interview with Noureen Laghari", *92 News*.

⁴¹ *Ibid*

concept of Hijrat with religious interpretation and was inspired by the concept of an Islamic state. She was told that she will be taken to an Islamic state from Lahore, therefore she came to Lahore first. There she was married to Ali Tariq, the same person who used to talk to her on social media, who was killed during the operation.⁴² When came to Lahore she was directed to carry out a suicide attack on Christians, however, she was arrested by the night before the attack was planned.⁴³ There had been an impression that she went to Syria for training⁴⁴ but she refused such claims.⁴⁵

Not only this but social media has a wide range of official and unofficial pages which are banned by the government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The famous ones include Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jammāt (ASWJ), Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Tehrek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi.⁴⁶

⁴²Muhammad Hussain Khan and Imran Gabol, “Woman held after encounter in Lahore went to Syria for training”, *Dawn News*.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵92 News, “Exclusive interview with Noureen Laghari”.

⁴⁶Jahanzaib Haque and Omer Bashir, “Banned outfits in Pakistan operates openly on Facebook”, *Dawn News*.

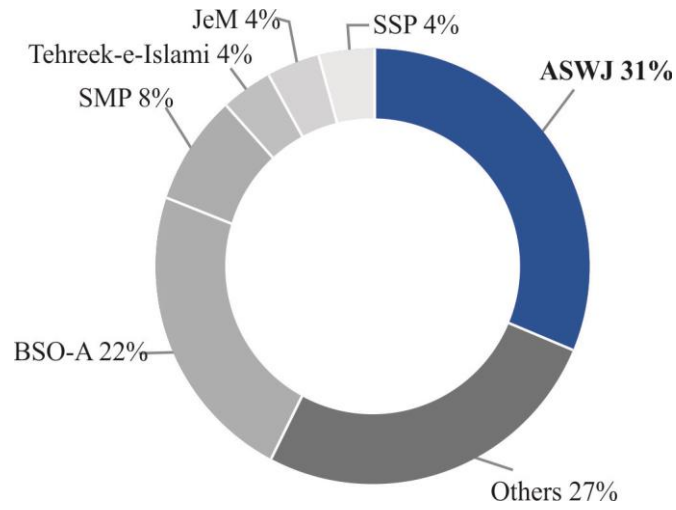


Figure 10: Organizations with the most Facebook pages⁴⁷

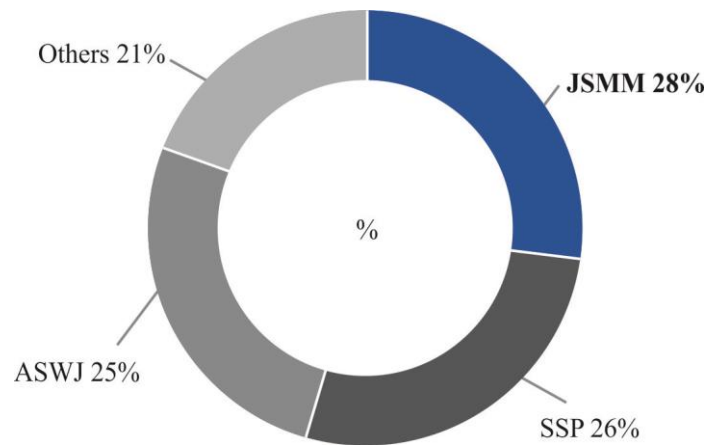


Figure 11: Highest number of Facebook groups⁴⁸

*ASWJ – Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamat, BSO – Baloch Student organization Azad, SSP – Sipah-e-Sahaba

⁴⁷Jahanzaib Haque and Omer Bashir, “Banned outfits in Pakistan operates openly on Facebook”, *Dawn News*.

⁴⁸ Ibid

There are at least 15,000-20,000 users per page and group; some may have less or more.⁴⁹ These pages and groups are being used to spread the propaganda by communicating the links to the other chat rooms on the internet and also sharing information regarding the upcoming magazine or issue brief. The groups are usually closed and require administrative permissions to be added, hence the number of people reporting it is fewer to ban that group. Terrorist organizations usually keep on changing their chat rooms, to use these Facebook pages and groups to share links to the new group.⁵⁰

Case Study of Bushra Cheema

Bushra Cheema, with her three daughters and a son, joined ISIS.⁵¹ Bushra did her MPhil from Punjab University and was serving as a principal at Noor-ul-Huda Islamic center in Lahore. She joined ISIS with the help of social media, to clear some concepts, which have not been shared; She contacted Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi, through WhatsApp and Skype who convinced her to join ISIS.⁵² She told her husband that she is leaving for Kasur to attend Dars-e-Quran, but later she told her husband on WhatsApp that she is leaving for Syria, a week later she called her husband and told him that she is going to Syria via Iran and tried to convince him to join her

⁴⁹Jahanzaib Haque and Omer Bashir, "Banned outfits in Pakistan operate openly on Facebook", *Dawn News*.

⁵⁰Rita Katz, "A Growing Frontier for Terrorist Groups: Unsuspecting Chat Apps", *wired*, January 9, 2019. Available on <https://www.wired.com/story/terrorist-groups-prey-on-unsuspecting-chat-apps/>

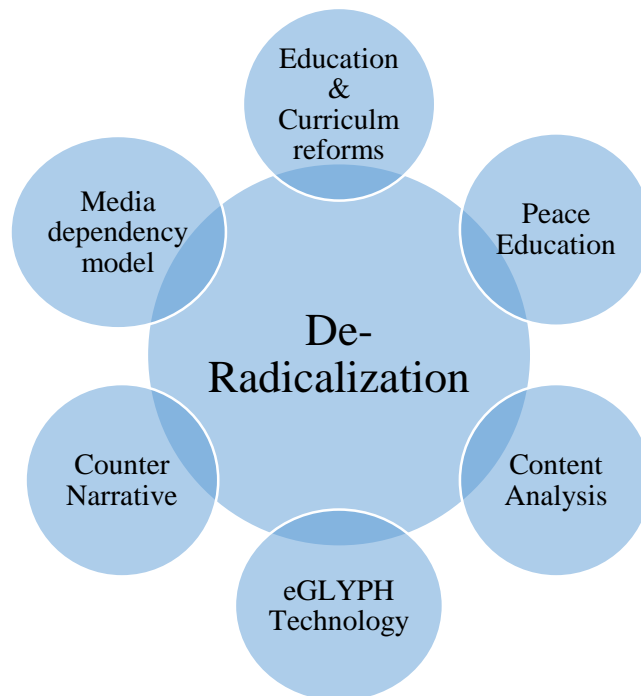
⁵¹Khurram Shahzad, "Pakistani woman along with her four children leaves for Syria to join ISIS", *Daily Pakistan*.

⁵²Umer Cheema, "20 men, women, children from Lahore join Daesh, go to Syria", *The News*.

and kids as well.⁵³ She is now in Syria and reaching out to female folk through social media and convincing them to join ISIS by sharing video links on Facebook and WhatsApp.⁵⁴

Counter Radicalization

Considering Pakistani society and keeping in view different political, socio-cultural and religious aspects in mind, the following model has been developed to counter radicalization in Pakistan. The model has been developed with the help of interviews and available work on the subject.



⁵³, “Pakistani woman along with her four children leaves for Syria to join ISIS”, *Daily Pakistan*.

⁵⁴Umer Cheema, “20 men, women, children from Lahore join Daesh, go to Syria”, *The News*.

Counter Narrative

Internet is considered a basic human right and any move to bring changes in policy lead to the restriction of freedom of speech.⁵⁵ People can never be safe from cyber-attacks and extremist ideology on the internet and it is not possible to control the communication by radical organizations through social media websites, as mentioned by Luke Bertram internet was not designed to be safe and secure.⁵⁶ It aimed to make communication easier. The threat on the internet is unavoidable due to technical defaults. This western liberal democratic ideology that considers access to the internet a basic necessity is not suitable for developing societies. Cyberspace facilitated the adoption of radical ideology as diffusion of innovation theory argues that people adopt the ideas from smaller groups to a larger group till almost everyone has adopted the ideology.⁵⁷

The solution to counter the threat on the internet given by various scholars is to control the internet usage of terrorists and remove their presence from social media. The threat could not have vanished because the development of those accounts, groups, pages and channels is continuous. If the authorities block fifty pages/groups, the terrorist organizations will make a hundred more within minutes.⁵⁸ There are two options through which the internet can be made safe from the threat of radicalization and extremism,

⁵⁵An interview with Dr. Arshi Saleem, Head of Department Peace and conflict studies, National defense University, Islamabad. 26th June 2018

⁵⁶Luke Bertram, "Terrorism, the internet and social media advantage: Exploring how terrorist organizations exploit aspects of the internet, social media and how these platforms could be used to counter violent extremism", *Journal for de-radicalization*, 2016.

⁵⁷ "Diffusions of Innovations theory", *YMCAUST*.

⁵⁸An interview with Dr. Arshi Saleem, Head of Department Peace and conflict studies, National defense University, Islamabad. 26th June 2018

one by coercion and the other by persuasion.⁵⁹ Coercion means diminishing the terrorist organizations with the help of hard power, using power in a way that others feel threatened to redo any act which contains violence and people do not look upon the radical ideologies. On the other hand persuasion means convincing the people not to join the terrorist organizations with the help of soft power by enlightening them about the cons of joining such organizations and providing them clarifications about the misperception and misinterpretations about both religion and state.⁶⁰

The ideology of terrorists now has strong roots within the society because it was not addressed at the time when extremist ideology was being marketed, since then it became popular and created a violent narrative of religion. The narrative which will counter this ideology must focus on the ideology that is more convincing, logical and less violent and most importantly has authenticity. But the issue is that these voices are faint in front of the trap set by terrorist organizations. It is important to understand the game played by terrorist organizations and its time that the government and civil society work together to create and make counter-narrative successful. The difficulty is in identifying the sympathizers of terrorist groups and their ideology which are still present in the state and are helping out these organizations monetarily.⁶¹

⁵⁹ An interview with Dr. Khurram Iqbal, Assistant professor, Department of International Relations, National Defense University, Islamabad. 27th June, 2018

⁶⁰ An interview with Dr. Khurram Iqbal, Assistant professor, Department of International Relations, National Defense University, Islamabad. 27th June, 2018

⁶¹ Ibid

Content Analysis

Youth, today, is dependent on mass media for information and clarifications and as mentioned by media dependency theory, people depend on media for their need to be socially stable⁶², supported by the Connectivism theory of learning through networks, according to which in today's world people are dependent on the internet for information because it is faster and has various sources of information which eliminates the chances of bias.⁶³

The terrorist organizations are not using the conventional ways to reach out to people i.e through their websites and pages where they are just posting about violence and the Islamic state working under Sharia law, but they are facilitating youth with the answer to their queries about religion on social media channels and websites which look like normal websites responding to the issues related to religion.⁶⁴ If they find the answer for something and receive a convincing answer they will start to do further investigation on the religious matters through that website or scholar. That person may give them the guideline to access their "other" website or to the dark web where they are free to ask anything without the threat of intelligence agencies checking their web history. Dr. Saleem further explained the need to analyze the content, it is because currently, the Governments provide the cyber security department with a list of organizations to remove mentioned pages and they put their names on their cells and remove/ban them but what is necessary to understand is that the terrorists are clever, they make accounts, pages and

⁶²"Dependency Theory", Communication Studies theories, University of Twente, Last updated: February 27th, 2017. <https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Mass%20Media/Dependency%20Theory/>

⁶³ George Siemens, "Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age", December 12, 2004.

⁶⁴ Ibid

groups with different spellings or with little name change and it does not come under the list of ban pages that is why it is necessary to analyze the content before removing or banning the pages.⁶⁵

To deal with such a situation, it is necessary to form small units that are continuously analyzing the content on social media and removing those pages. One way to counter rising extremism by analyzing the content through social media is given by Dr. Hany Farid in collaboration with Counter Extremism Project (CEP), which is *eGLYPH* technology.⁶⁶ The *eGLYPH* technology is based on the objective of removing messages, audio and videos on social media websites containing any message of violence and extremism before it gets viral.⁶⁷ Each message, audio and video has a digital fingerprint on it, *eGLYPH* scans that fingerprint and automatically reports to the social media authorities. They then take the action accordingly. This software was ready to use in 2015 but is only used in some services in the United Kingdom and Germany.⁶⁸ No social media channel has adopted this technology to counter radicalization through their channels.⁶⁹

Curriculum and Madrassa Reforms

Radicalization, extremism and terrorism cannot be combated unless both the government and society join hand in hand to counter extremism. If the government is bringing reforms and society is not ready to adopt them then

⁶⁵An interview with Dr. Arshi Saleem, Head of Department Peace and conflict studies, National defense University, Islamabad. 26th June 2018

⁶⁶Counter Extremism Project Unveils Technology to Combat Online Extremism”, *Counter extremism project*.

⁶⁷How *eGLYPH* Technology works”, *Counter extremism project*.

⁶⁸Marc Ginsberg, “Silicon Valley is dragging its feet combating online terrorism”, *Huffington post*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*

no matter how good these reforms are, they will not succeed. Youth from educational institutions is prone to join radical organizations than illiterate people. Youth is the favorite target of terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda.⁷⁰ These organizations trapped medical students like Noureen Laghari and Muhammed (an IT graduate from Peshawar) and even inspired a school principal. The reason why students from professional educational institutes are more inclined to be radicalized and recruited is that the current curriculum focuses on a technicality rather than philosophy.⁷¹

Bringing Madrassa reforms will challenge the impression that Madaris are breeding/violent extremism. The reforms will help in bridging the gap between the two extremes.⁷² Since 1947, the reforms centred on bringing equivalence between the madrassa students and contemporary studies students, it is now a need of the hour to bring structural reforms.⁷³ The issue of madrassa registration has always been under discussion in the political sphere and has caused security concerns in the past, therefore madrassa registration must not be voluntary but mandatory.⁷⁴ Although the National

⁷⁰ An interview with Dr. Khurram Iqbal, Assistant professor, Department of International Relations, National Defense University, Islamabad. 27th June, 2018

⁷¹ Ibid. An interview with Dr.

⁷² Dr. Fazal Rabbi and Dr. Shahid Habib, "Discourse on Madrassa Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges to state narrative and its implications", *Al Bairah*, Vol 8, no. 1. (Available at: (<https://numl.edu.pk/journals/subjects/156775385912-01-134-ENG-V8-1-19-Formatted.pdf>))

⁷³ Shafiq Qurban, Politics of Madrassa Reforms and changing trends in Education policies in Pakistan: A case study of Musharraf regime", *Journal of Political Science & Public Affairs*, vol 9, no 8. (Available at: <https://www.longdom.org/open-access-pdfs/politics-of-madrassa-reforms-and-changing-trends-in-education-policies-in-pakistan-a-case-study-of-musharraf-regime.pdf>)

⁷⁴ Dr. Fazal Rabbi and Dr. Shahid Habib, "Discourse on Madrassa Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges to state narrative and its implications", *Al Bairah*, Vol 8, no. 1. (Available at: (<https://numl.edu.pk/journals/subjects/156775385912-01-134-ENG-V8-1-19-Formatted.pdf>))

Action Plan does talk about the madrassa reforms, the practical implementation is far from the theory.

It is vital to incorporate peace education in the curriculum reforms as peace education not only focuses on the content quality of the curriculum but also enhances teaching quality. It can help in addressing the stereotypes towards other sects and faiths and can provide the basis for inter-sect and inter-faith co-existence through “negotiations, reconciliation, international solidarity, social justice, intercultural learning, sustainable development and harmony”.⁷⁵ The curriculum and madrassa reforms will address the root cause of the problem with sustainable peace rather than kinetic solutions that leave room for the re-emergence of violent conflict.

Media Dependency Model and De-Radicalization

The media dependency theory elaborates the relationship between the effects of media content and the audience in developing an opinion about something.⁷⁶ It explains the process of media dependency, starting from conscious or unconscious interaction to greater addiction to media for information that causes cognitive, affective and behavioral effects on people.⁷⁷ The process of radicalization starts either with selective exposure to the information or with accidental exposure. The accidental exposure results in either dependency or deactivation from media. If it is dependency, it leads to cognitive and then affective arousal. Cognitive arousal means

⁷⁵ Zahid Shahab Ahmed, “Peace Education in Pakistan”, *USIP Special Report*, no. 400, March 2017. (Available at: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-03/sr-400-peace-education-in-pakistan.pdf>)

⁷⁶ “Dependency Theory”, Communication Studies theories, University of Twente, Last updated: February 27th, 2017. <https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Mass%20Media/Dependency%20Theory/>

⁷⁷ Ibid

giving attention to the relevant and new information and then affective arousal is a strong liking or disliking of this information or idea. The higher the arousal the more involvement of the person in that idea, which leads to a change in attitude, behavior and opinion. Whatever perception is exhibited by the organization is embraced by the audience as it is.

The terrorist organizations are successful because they make people dependent on themselves for knowledge on social media, then they convince them to create a perception of liking towards certain things and disliking towards others such as the people joining ISIS and sister organizations are against the Westphalian system of governance, they only consider a particular type of governance legitimate. People are convinced to join such organizations because they are responding to every question, whether related to religion or the system of governance.

This model of media dependency could be used for de-radicalization purposes because it not only involves addressing the structural issues but also social and psychological aspects, which leads to complete de-radicalization. Accidental and conscious observation may occur for the de-radicalization purpose but what needs to be addressed is whether this observation turns into media/channel dependency or not. To make people dependent on the channel, it is important to involve in sharing such information in which they are already showing interest, but with a different perspective and then changing the discourse in a way that creates strong liking and disliking for the opposite ideology, convincing them with the facts in favor of the absence of violence and Westphalian system of governance.

The people who buy their ideology are unaware of the consequences of their actions, if they are shown the full picture, at least the sympathizers of their ideology will be less in number. Terrorist organizations are against the western system of governance but in reality, they are dependent on the economic system proposed by the west and have high stakes in it.⁷⁸ Not only this, the incorporation of peace education at the school as well societal level will encourage people to stand against violence. Once they start finding flaws in one thing they will start to research the ideology presented by the terrorist organization and will negate any violent ideology.

Cognitive	Affective	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter narrative • Campaigns on Social media • Peace education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factual and logical explanation • Awareness of consequences of actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-violence • Harmony • Integration

Conclusion

The nature of conflict has changed over time, from inter-state to intra-state, from known actors to unknown and from legitimate actors to illegitimate actors.⁷⁹ The new type of conflict cannot be resolved through conventional means that include the use of force or international pressure on the opponent, because in terrorism the actor is hidden and he may be present within the society. The obstacle in controlling the growing radicalization is that the

⁷⁸An interview with Dr. Khurram Iqbal, Assistant professor, Department of International Relations, National Defense University, Islamabad. 27th June, 2018

⁷⁹ Ms. Saba Noor, Lecturer department of Peace and Conflict studies, NDU

authorities are still using the old ways for conflict resolution or de-radicalization. At this stage of extreme radicalization, the nature of conflict resolution needs to be changed. New methods and techniques are needed to counter the threat posed by terrorist organizations. It is a need of the hour to acknowledge and accept the socio-cultural differences and develop socio-cultural sensitive de-radicalization strategies and policies. De-radicalization is a process in which people set their previous ideologies apart and adopt a new ideology that is less extreme than the present ideology.⁸⁰

The research finds that the terrorist organizations use the internet in five ways, they radicalize people by spreading propaganda in the form of posts, photographs, videos and magazines that are easily available online, then recruit them, give them training on how to carry out any terrorist activity or further recruit people, to raise funds for their organization and lastly to carry out cyber-attacks to hack accounts and identity theft to remain anonymous. They are using religious references to radicalize people and due to little awareness of religion, people fall into the trap set by extremism.

Current counter-extremism policies lack the importance of the need for safe and protected internet usage. An analysis of the above discussion states that banning terrorist organizations sites is not a viable solution. It is time to realize that the use of hard power over the terrorist, whether it is physical or virtual, will only result in more destruction. The key to handling violence is the persuasion of radicalized people. The rise in extremism is not only because of unsafe and unprotected internet but because of the seeds of hatred, which were planted through the curriculum. To counter this, it is

⁸⁰B. Doosje, A. W. Krulanski, L. Mann, A. R. Feddes, "Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization", *Current opinion in psychology*.

necessary to bring reforms and inclusion of peace education in the curriculum, so the next generation could be saved from extremism. The research concludes that it is mandatory to give due attention to the internet immediately, to mitigate the influence of terrorist organizations.

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