Visual Propaganda on Social Media: Narratives of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan

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Abstract

The article analyses content of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) official social media channel 'Umar Media' and enlists the visual core narratives of the content. The study suggests that majority of content depicts a tailored interpretation of Islam to justify the brutal actions and label Pakistan as an infidel state calling for its destruction. The TTP has been able to exploit the religious narratives and exhibit a fabricated representation of the state which is critical to comprehend the peril of online radicalization and recruitment to develop an effective mechanism to counter TTP's public appeal.

Key terms: Tehreek e Taliban, Pakistan, Media, Social Media, Visual Propaganda.

Introduction

Information variation and communication rank amongst chief objectives of all terrorist organizations. Religious Terrorist groups like Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have been broadcasting their ideologies through various means to justify their acts based on violence[1].The use of social media particularly Twitter by these organizations denotes the menacing nexus of terrorist organizations, social networking sites and technology. Social media offers them a major capability to exert explicit impact on their audience through variance of narratives[2]. It enables them to maintain an intricate network of

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[1] Anne Aly, "Brothers, Believers, Brave Mujahideen: Focusing attention on the audience of violent jihadist preachers", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* February 26, 2016.
[2] Levi J West "#jihad Understanding Social Media as a Weapon" *Security Challenges* 12, No. 2 (2016).

communication that entails directives and glorifying stories for operational successes and recruitment. However, the usage of social media by terrorists is not an old phenomenon. In last two decades, presence of extremist elements on social media has multiplied many folds. In 1998, there were only 10 or 15 websites linked to different terrorist factions. However, the number increased greatly when the figure of such sites reached 4,000 in 2005[3]. The advent of new social media tools such as Instagram and Twitter provided them the edge over other means of communication. The ease in content discretion and interactive communication has enticed terrorists to use such communication tools for spreading propaganda to large segment of population. In 2018, Facebook claimed to have removed 14 million pieces of content apparently posted by terrorists[4]. Hence, these new social media applications now provide a significant platform for terrorist recruitment, radicalization, networking as well as passing on instructions and operational plans to their current and prospective supporters.

Social media is also substantial to terrorists for several reasons; most significant is self-preservation. Unlike usual sites entailing domain and costly hosting, Facebook and Instagram offer a vibrant and interactive interface which is cheap and effective. Likewise, privacy of the content and admin approval to join the group made it possible to uphold control

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[3] M. B. Al-Shishani, "Taking al-Qaeda's Jihad to Facebook", February, 2010.
[4] Lisa Vaas, "Terrorists told to hijack social media accounts to spread propaganda", *Naked Security*, Sophos, November 12, 2018, accessed July 15, 2019, https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2018/11/12/terrorists-told-to-hijack-social-media-accounts-to-spread-propaganda/

over content as well as monitor activities and discussions in the group[5]. It aids foremost-resolve of terrorists including recruitment, radicalization and spreading the ideology to enhance their support. According to a media expert, "The Internet is the enabler that acts as a catalyst for the radicalization lifecycle"[6]. Without social media, message dissemination and access range of terrorist organizations will be deeply curtailed. The radical indoctrination now completes in months and, in many cases, less than it. The constructed propaganda helps in locating the prospective recruits who later on are instructed to join exclusive private groups where they are prepared for possible action[7].

Visual Propaganda

Propaganda has been an indispensable tool in warfare; however, with time, the complexity has evolved in it. Jowett and O'Donnell define propaganda as the "Deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and divert behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist"[8]. Media, as mass influencer, is an effective component of propaganda. Many studies suggest that terrorism and media have a symbiotic relationship as terrorists see it as a potential tool to publicize their philosophy. Social media, as part of its newly-

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[5] J. Bumgarner and M. Mylrea, "Jihad in cyberspace", *PoliceOne*, March 23, 2010, http://www.policeone.com/communications/articles/2025862-Jihad-in-cyberspace/.

[6] J. Bardin, "Cyber Jihadist Use of the Internet: What Can Be Done?", *Treadstone 71*, 2010, http://treadstone71.com/whitepapers/CyberJihadistUseoftheInt ernet.pdf

[7] P. Holtmann, "No threat at first sight: Invisible terrorist environments on Facebook and Youtube", *University of Vienna*, March, 2011, http://www.univie.ac.at/jihadism/blog/wp-content/ uploads/ 2011/03/Philipp-Holtmann-No-threat-at-first-sight-Invisibleterrorist-environments-on-Facebook-and-Youtube.pdf

[8] Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Sage Publications, 1999).

fangled and sturdiest component, is also the most lethal weapon. In present-day age, it has emerged as a vital part of a terrorist's visual propaganda. It helps in dispersal of strategic content as well as the dissemination of featured visual graphics laying foundation for a comprehensive narrative that later can affect the masses. This narrative building and effective dissemination through social media has helped in the past many terrorist groups like ISIS to validate their actions. Due to its effectiveness and mass reach, ISIS, its affiliates and sympathizers were estimated to have 46,000 Twitter accounts with outreach of more than 200,000 tweets per day. The figure, despite operative control and recurrent content blockage, appears to enhance continually[9]. The narrative, transmitted through social media, is quite significant as not only it helps in building the image of the terrorist organization but also aids in the recruitment. However, for a comprehensive reach, a compact narrative will create a proper impact[10]. Since September 2001, terrorist organizations, through constant outreach, have successfully been able to establish their narrative; a well-defined emblem of *jihad* all over the world especially in western countries.[11]

Visual content, as essential share of communication, has a wider appeal. With visual aid, social media has made its impact more noticeable and prominent as it grabs people's attention and retention for a longer period of

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[9] Berger and Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census", *Brookings Institute,* March 2015.
[10] Kenneth Payne, "Winning the Battle of Ideas: Propaganda, Ideology, and Terror", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, No. 2 (2009), 109-28.
[11] Gabriel Weimann, "Terrorism in Cyberspace", *Woodrow Wilson Centre* (2015), 197-198.

time[12]. All businesses as well as government and corporate sectors are striving to visualize their strategic content for an effective communication. The two-way transmission of social media applications is providing platforms to share visuals to promote key interests through propaganda[13]. It has enabled the conflict ridden parties to engage directly without passing through traditional mass media. Hyunjin Seo, for instance, gives a detailed analysis of visual communication in the areas of conflict[14]. The study maintains that both sides in a conflict use visuals for self-portrayal and advance propaganda against their opponents. Similarly, the recent Syrian war has been a perfect case study for optical propaganda where the visuals of atrocities by government and rebels circulated online on different social media platforms to target, influence and radicalize people.[15]

The practice has now been adopted by extremists all over the world. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) in Pakistan is a test case in this regard. The organization is using visuals against an ethnic community, igniting its emotions as well as making a strong anti-state sub nationalist appeal. Resultantly, PTM had to be cautioned properly on its social media campaign so that it reduces its anti-state narrative dissemination drastically.[16]

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[12] Baruah Dowerah, "Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study", *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* (2012).
[13] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Hyunjin Seo, "Visual Propaganda in the Age of Social Media: An Empirical Analysis of Twitter Images During 2012 Israeli-Hamas Conflict", *Visual Communication Quarterly* (2014).
[15] "Syria war: What we know about Douma 'chemical attack'" *BBC,* July 10, 2018.
[16] "Time is up: DG ISPR warns PTM leadership in press conference" *Dawn,* March 29, 2019.

Social Media and Radicalization

In Islamic extremism, radicalization refers to 'progression towards terrorism in the name of Islam', however it should be viewed in the context of *Salafist* political ideology. The notion of radicalization contrasts from one society, culture and religion to another. For west, it includes denial of fundamental values such as human rights, liberty, freedom and gender equality[17]. Today, amongst the prime concerns in Europe is the rising aptitude of extremism in Muslim youth. According to Rabasa, the major reason behind emergence of hostile feelings in western Muslim youth is 'Identity crisis'. The study suggests that western Muslims struggling for identity quest ultimately ends up with teachings of radical *Salafist* school of thought that offers pragmatic solution to mundane issues. The identity of *Ummah* is offered which provides a strong association regardless of place and nationality to the confused youth[18].

The rudimentary assumption of the *Salafi* thought is based on a strong appeal against western atrocities committed against the Muslims and the alliance of Muslim rulers with the west. Hence, radical resentment is not personal rather it rages against the embedded phrases in the narratives. The very postulations are being used and are still in practice to radicalize, recruit and train their prospective followers. Social media offers a greater opportunity for dissemination of the narratives and extremists take no time in grabbing the opportunity to exchange views on political, cultural and social domains. Today, the Islamic radicals have become shrewder in the

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[17] Angel Rabasa and Cheryl Benard, *Eurojihad: Patterns of Islamist Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*, (Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[18] Ibid.

usage of technology and enhancing its impact for creating a greater appeal. The researchers like Rabasa and Benard maintain that its major part consists of a connector and an identifier who encourage potential terrorists. Once the target is spotted, the rest takes place through personal influence and interaction[19].

In Pakistan, the extremist content came to spotlight in 1980s after the invasion of USSR on Afghanistan. Pakistan pledged to support Afghans which propelled it towards *Jihadi* organizations through western support. The *Jihadi* literature was one of the most crucial documents of the time. Various publications of different languages were initiated by *Jihadi* organisations spreading the narrative of one *Ummah* and Global *Jihad*[20]. However, with evolving technology and government restrictions, the focus later shifted towards social media. It is believed that Al Qaeda was amongst the first militant organizations to establish its foothold in the digital media domain. Many websites were initiated by the group with focus on spreading narratives and its achievements[21]. The advent of social media and interactive communication gave these organizations freedom to interact, engage and recruit people. However, after the state action against radical Islamic organizations, they camouflaged their digital identities. Facebook, as the most frequently used social media platform, has now emerged as hub of all extremist activities. Amongst the major strategies of the terrorist organizations nowadays is to create a Facebook page for a

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Kiran Hassan, "Social Media, Media Freedom and Pakistan's War on Terror", *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 107, No. 2 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2018.1448339.

[21] Zafarullah Khan, *Cyberia: A New War Zone for Pakistan's Islamists*, (Georgetown University Press, 2014).

good cause attracting mass following. Later, they start posting ideologically inspired extremist content on it. The digital traffic and web followers promote the page admin and facilitate it to reach to masses in a limited time frame without violating any policy.[22]

Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The Taliban movement was launched in Afghanistan by Pashtun students of Afghan descent studying in Pakistani religious seminaries against civil war that swamped the country after soviet withdrawal. Taliban made their presence felt by capturing Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan in 1996. For a war torn country, the movement was seen as harbinger of peace, hence its popularity increased and crossed international borders[23]. As Taliban consolidated their regime in Kabul, they started revealing orthodox notions and rigid religious interpretations that belittled their entire rule. Mullah Umar, supreme leader of the movement, met Usama bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda. Similar to a strict ideology of Al Qaida, Taliban imposed an orthodox version of Islam in Afghanistan. The process disturbed the tranquillity after the successful transition of Taliban rule in the centre. Many strict Islamic laws were later on imposed by *Amr bil Ma'ruf wa Nahy an al Munkar* (Department of Promotion of Virtue and Eradication of Vice) which ensured its implementation. The Taliban later expanded their control to areas of other ethnic minorities including Tajik and Hazaras and effectively ruled the country from 1996 to 2000. The presence of Al Qaida and other Islamic radicals were deeply ostracized by

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[22] "Understanding the Militant's media in Pakistan outreach and impact", (Pak Institute of Peace Studies, 2010).
[23] Ashok K. Behuria, "Fighting the Taliban: Pakistan at war with itself", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 61, No. 4 (2007): 529-543.

international community. Many sanctions were imposed, however, these measures did not help and the country remained entrenched in the claws of the radicals who were following an extreme rightist version of Islam.

The twin towers attack in 2001 jolted the Taliban reign. The US attack in the same year forced Taliban to withdraw from major cities and seek hideouts in the peripheral areas. The groups of Al Qaeda and Taliban sneaked into Pak-Afghan tribal areas. Later on, these groups, belonging to different ethnicities, settled there. Al Qaeda decided to spread its influence in Pakistan that was later minimized by Pakistani state through operations and arrests. The Taliban in Pakistani bordering areas engaged the allied forces through guerrilla tactics[24]. Meanwhile, religious-ideology-inspired-madrassas mushroomed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tribal areas, Sindh and Punjab further producing their sympathizers and followers. These madrassas were initially set up in Zia's regime to accommodate growing bulge of Afghan refugees which were subsequently converted to centre of ideological indoctrination.

The renegade militants hiding in border areas of Pakistan established a local chapter of Taliban to maintain rule of Islam in the area. It turned into a deadliest militant organization in 2007 after Baituallah Mehsud took command and named the organization as 'Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan'. Today, as an aide of Al Qaeda, it has close relations with Afghan Taliban. However, unlike their counterparts in Afghanistan, they have made efforts in attacking state of Pakistan and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) by tagging them as mercenaries and allies of the west. Along with their footprints in major cities, TTP seems to have presence in tribal areas and

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[24] Behuria, "Fighting the Taliban".

extending its influence to Balochistan and other regions including urban Sindh[25]. The emphasis of the organization pivots around three points;

1. Reinforcing *Shariah* law in the country
2. Combating allies and the United States in Afghanistan unless they retreat.
3. Fighting a defensive battle against Pakistani LEAs.

Ultimately, the organization wants to replace the Pakistani government and establish *Shariah* law all over the country. To counter its activities, Pakistan Army has launched many operations since 2014 which have weakened the capacity of the organization. However, it remains a potent threat in the country.[26]

Umar Media of TTP

After 2014, TTP appeared on internet through their official channel 'Umar Media'. However, due to government actions and blockage of content, the activities of TTP and Umar media are primarily not visible. According to a recent report, TTP now has focused on print material and personalized e-communication channels such as WhatsApp to avoid government disruption. Despite odds, Umar media is still its official channel and the disseminator of its philosophical narratives. Government of Pakistan and the Ministry of Interior are striving to tackle the hate speech and extremist content on social media. However, attacks like Safoora Goth and the surge

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[25] Roohan Ahmed, "CTD arrests key commanders of TTP", *SAMAA News*, January 29, 2019, https://www.samaa.tv/news/2019/01/ctd-arrests-key-commander-of-ttp-fazlullah-group-in-karachi/.

[26] Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), "Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan", *Stanford University,* (2018), https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/tehrik-i-taliban-pakistan.

in online extremism cases indicate that strategy of TTP has evolved into a complex mechanism that requires combined efforts from state and society. Many recruitment cases have been reported in the past and the situation is grim as Pakistan is on the verge of a nightmare in the form of returnees from Syria and Iraq who had been radicalized and recruited mostly online for various *Jihadi* purposes[27].

Given significance of visuals on social media platforms for fulfilling TTP's agenda of recruitment and spreading ideology, the study analyses visuals of Umar media posted from January to November (2018) on twitter. The content has been retrieved from internet achieves. Majority are in Pashto with English subtitles except few statements which are issued in Urdu and Arabic. The study tends to shed light on the key narratives off TTP's visual propaganda to point out the most effective online recruitment mode.

Method

The content analysis as a methodology has been incorporated to retrieve narratives from visual content shared by Umar media on Twitter. By definition, "the content analysis is a method of analyzing written, verbal or visual communication messages. Its analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data"[28].

The period January-November 2018 was chosen as the visual propaganda by TTP was rigorous at that time. Moreover, many prominent online

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[27] "Iran lures Pakistani Shias to fight its war in Syria", *The Arab Weekly*, September 16, 2018, accessed June 24, 2019, https://thearabweekly.com/iran-lures-pakistani-shias-fight-its-war-syria.

[28] Stephen Cavanagh, "Content analysis: concepts, methods and applications", *Nurse Researcher*, (1997).

recruitment cases emerged in the period highlighting the success of penetration of extremist content among urban middle class. A total number of eleven videos from the period were recovered and analysed. The visual content was examined repeatedly to classify the major narratives.

Categorization of Narratives

Following coding scheme has been employed to categorize the online media content. The Grounded theory approach was adopted in streamlining the prominent narratives. Constant comparative method was put to practice in which all visual contents were examined comprehensively.[29] Later on, narratives were identified and divided into four categories as enumerated below:

1. The righteous apostle of Allah
2. Avenging Evil to Establish Islam in Pakistan
3. Setting Personalized Battlefields in the Age of Graphics
4. Mortality salience

The content distribution of narratives in the videos is given in Table 1:

Narrative	Duration (Min.)	Percentage
Righteous Apostle of Allah	122	47
Avenging Evil to Establish Islam in Pakistan	67	26
Setting Personalized Battlefields in Age of Graphics	20	7
Mortality Salience	52	20
	261	**100**

Table 1: Narratives in Umar Media Videos

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[29] A. Bryant and Charmaz, *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, (Sage Publications, 2007).

The same has been depicted in graphical formation where y-axis indicates the duration (in minutes) and x-axis signifies different categories of narratives.
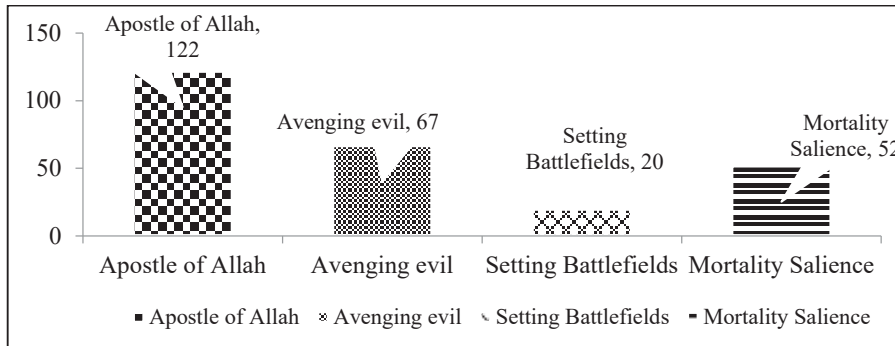
Graphical representation of Table 1

The 'Righteous apostle of Allah' covered the visuals relating to portrayal of Pakistani Taliban as harbinger of *Shariah* and righteous amongst all. The 'Avenging Evil to Establish Islam' encompasses visual rhetoric against state of Pakistan and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) as western operated mercenaries to destroy the Islamic identity of the society. Whereas 'Setting Personalized Battlefield in the Age of Graphics' covers the visual content directed towards youth; western Muslims in particular, showing a glamorized version of battlefield and offering a better experience than the virtual reality platforms.

Lastly, 'Mortality Salience' skirts around visual content concerning glorification of *Mujahideen* and suicide attackers in particular who have been given significant importance as the main element of the organization's war against the state and LEAs.

Prominent Narratives in TTP Propaganda Videos

In view of prominent narratives in visual content of Umar media (as shown in the table 1) 'Righteous Apostle of Allah' has been the most prominent narrative taking a major share of 47 per cent followed by 'Avenging Evil to Establish Islam in Pakistan' (26) and 'Mortality Salience' (20) respectively. Whereas, 'Setting Personalised Battlefields in the Age of Graphics' constitutes about 7 per cent of the total content viewed.

1. **Righteous Apostles of Allah** Among primary narratives indoctrinated in the visual contents is the portrayal of Pakistani Taliban as 'Righteous Apostles of Allah'. The narrative is set through various methods inciting emotional appeal to the viewers. Most of these videos start with recitation of three *surahs* including Tauba, Muhammad and Anfal that contain directives about *jihad* and verdicts regarding warfare[30]. The *Quranic* recitation about *jihad* with visuals of battle preparation by Pakistani Taliban have been used to establish that TTP is following *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad and the instructions of Allah by

Image showing TTP fighters praying in Battlefield

receiving essential military trainings for battle against the enemy of Islam. The emotional appeal is further intensified by showing TTP members offering prayers and seeking Allah's help as well as performing basic

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[30] Aboul-Enein Sherifa Zuhur, "Islamic Rulings on Warfare", (October, 2004).

rituals of Islam during training even in harshest of climates[31]. The use of white and black flag in the meetings along with scenes of *shahadah*, the basic component of Islam, refers to a *Hadith* about end of times stating, "The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "When the black flags come from Khurasan, go to them, for among them is the Caliph of Allah, the *Mehdi*[32]". The *Hadith* is amongst several prominent prophesies of the end of times revealed by Prophet Muhammad describing an Islamic army that will rise from *Khurasan* (areas constituting major part of present-day South Asia) that will later aid Jesus and *Mehdi*, the promised Messiah in the final battle against evil. Hence to further strengthen the association, the TTP even named its sniper division as 'Helpers of *Mehdi*'[33].

It is pertinent to mention that TTP does not consider this battle as temporary that will end after victory against Pakistani state rather it establishes that it is indeed the battle for victory of Haq (truth) in the world. Hence their present defeat and government's hostile actions are ephemeral, TTP's victory is destined; both in this world and hereafter[34].

2. Avenging Evil to Establish Islam in Pakistan

Another narrative incorporated in visuals is that Pakistani state and its affiliated LEAs are forerunners of western agenda in the region and are responsible for atrocities against Muslims all over the world. Videos of mosques destruction and killings of the religious scholars such as Mufti

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[31] "Hata la takun fitna: New message from TTP; Until there is no discord #3", *Umar Media*, April 13, 2018, video.

[32] Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad and 'Abd Allah al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, *al-Mustadrak 'ala al-Sahihayn*, 1st ed. (Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990).

[33] "Almodoun lil qital: New message from TTP; The stomach for Fighting #2", *Umar Media*, December 27, 2017, video.

[34] Ibid.

Shamizai[35] have been incorporated in it, blaming Pakistani army and the state for all such actions. The issues highlighted in this regard are

destruction of Jamia Hafsa in Islamabad and the kidnapping and handing over of Dr.Afia Siddiqui to United States. Words like *munkar* (apostate), *taghooti taqat*[36] (Evil force), *kuffar* (Infidels) and Naapaak Fauj (Immoral Army) have been used

Image from the video showing state of Pakistan as US ally

frequently in both speeches and religious hymns. In a widely recited Urdu hymn, the phrase *'Fouj shariat ki Munkar hai, Deen islam ki dushman hai*[37]*'* (Army is apostate and the enemy of Islam) has been repeated various times by ranking leaders of TTP. The argument is enhanced further by repeating statements like *'Ye Ghulam hai dollar k'* (these are seekers of dollars) establishing Pakistan LEAs as paid mercenaries. Hence to avenge atrocities against Muslims and to destroy Pakistan, *jihad* is cited as the only solution.

To validate *jihad* against LEAs, concept of '*murtad'* has been used frequently for the soldiers and members of LEAs. A *murtad* (apostate) is defined as 'the conscious abandonment of Islam by a Muslim in word or through deed', which is considered as a heinous crime in Islam punishable

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[35] "Religious scholar Shamzai shot dead*"*, *Dawn news*, May 31, 2004, *https://www.dawn.com/news/394536*.
[36] "Hatta la takun fitna: New message from TTP; Until there is no discord #2", *Umar Media*, October 21, 2018, video.
[37] Ibid.

only by death sentence[38]. Hence, by labelling Pakistani soldiers as *murtad,* TTP justifies the killing of Muslim soldiers in the name of *jihad* (*Qital*)[39]. Moreover, TTP considers it the only viable and approved way of warfare in the region. According to leaders of TTP they will continue the struggle till the destruction of the Pakistani state and wiping out of evil from the country as indicated in a video '*Hatta la Takun a Fitna'* (Till the chaos ends).[40]

3. Setting Personalized Battlefields in the Age of Graphics

Technology, today, is considered as modern day revolution, transforming world into virtual reality. However, introducing violent content especially in video games comes as the biggest peril. The psychological transformation through

Image from the video showing TTP fighter using heavy weapons against Pakistan Army

violence based video games has been established by many researches[41]. Once a person becomes an addict of violence, he/she seeks comfort in it in practical life. This premise is being exploited by the terrorist organizations as well.

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[38] Rudolph Peters, "Apostasy in Islam", *Die Welt des Islam* 17, No. 1 (1976): 1–25, doi:10.2307/1570336.
[39] "New message from TTP: Healing Balochistan #2", *Umar Media*, March 29, 2018, video.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Patrick M. Markey and N. Markey, "Violent Video Games and Real-World Violence: Rhetoric Versus Data", Psychology of Popular Media Culture 4, No. 4 (October 2015): 277-295.

By presenting youth a first-hand experience of battlefield, terrorist organizations such as ISIS have been quite successful in recruiting westerners and executing the lone wolf incidents all over Europe and North America[42]. The same phenomenon is replicated by TTP. Visuals containing use of heavy military equipment against LEAs followed by guerrilla and sniper trainings of militants are broadly incorporated in the videos[43]. By presenting scenes of battlefields and display of latest weaponry and equipment, TTP is giving a blatant message to youth worldwide to join them for a more personalized experience. In a way they are guaranteeing that it is more thrilling and exciting than virtual reality.

4. Mortality Salience

The issue of martyrdom has been pivotal in Islam. For a staunch Muslim, death is ultimate success and if it comes in struggle for Islam, it becomes the ultimate triumph. Hence acknowledging that the world is short-lived, and real life lies after death, one strives to do deeds that are required to make life better in hereafter. From this premise, concept of 'Mortality Salience' takes root. Knowing world is temporary and death is inevitable, modulates one's mind and makes him question his/her beliefs. The calamity worsens in case of urban Muslims especially ones residing in west who are in a tight spot due to their quest for identity. The situation is used by Islamic terrorist organizations who offer them an identity and a base. Belgian expert on terrorism explained this phenomenon as, "The terrorist organizations are giving them what the Belgian government can't

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[42] Ahmed Al-Rawi, "Video games, terrorism, and ISIS's Jihad 3.0", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, No. 4 (2018): 740-760, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2016.1207633.
[43] "Hatta la takun fitna", *Umar Media*, October 21, 2018, video.

give them – identity, structure. They don't feel Moroccan or Belgian. They don't feel part of either society".

TTP has now adopted the same notion for the propagation of their agenda. The militants have been glorified and made symbol of success and tranquillity. In many videos, people associated with TTP calls others to join the same cause

Visual from the video stating struggle against the state of Pakistan light and asking others to make it a life purpose

as it is the best of both worlds. The suicide attackers, as the main component of the organization, are highlighted and shown as the prestigious position holders. The message is reinforced by showing their routine and proximity with the important leaders and their support by religious scholars. They have also been hailed in the religious hymns. Termed as '*Ghazian*' (victors) and '*Fidayeen*' (those who sacrifice their lives for Allah), the suicide attackers are eulogized as occupying a most prestigious position among rank and file of TTP[44]. In almost all videos, the LEAs of Pakistan are shown as tyrant and *jihad* against a tyrant is deemed necessary and vital. The notion is further supported by media statements of former government/military officials who describe the atrocities of the state and question the legitimacy of their actions[45]. Hence, it makes an

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[44]　"(Ibtal Ummat) New message from TTP; Champions of the Nation #2", *Umar Media*, February 14, 2018, video.
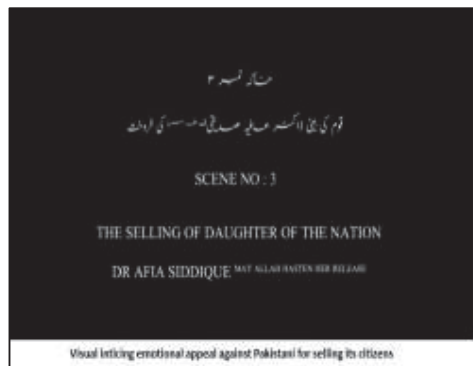
[45] "Fatarbisu: New message from TTP; Then Wait #2", *Umar Media*, February 4, 2018, video.

appeal to an ordinary person seeking the true meaning of Islam who can easily fall in TTPs' trap of limited interpretation.

Significant narrative for recruitment of TTP

The narratives proposed by TTP in Umar media videos are substantial and seemingly successful in recruiting prospective candidates for various activities. These narratives are in-line with historical perspectives and religious acknowledgements to give their propaganda legitimacy and their heinous brutalities justification. In a critical historical discourse of the narratives cited in the videos and confessions from inspired *Jihadis*[46], it seems obvious that 'Mortality Salience' narrative in TTP videos ranks above all in influence. Questioning the very premise of identity and the mortal reality of the social life, it accentuates the emotional appeal and the notions of mayhem.

In case of western Muslims and people from urban middle class of Pakistan, identity crisis is a major concern. Caught amid the struggle of modernity and religion, the confusion seeps into their behaviour. The terrorist organizations such as

SCENE NO : 3

THE SELLING OF DAUGHTER OF THE NATION

DR AFIA SIDDIQUE MAY ALLAH HASTEN HER RELEASE

Visual inticing emotional appeal against Pakistani for selling its citizens

TTP target them by establishing depiction of strong identity and structure. By showing disillusioned youth a view that lies beyond the traditional concept of nation and identity, leads ordinary people and draws attention

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[46] Raza Rumi, "Interview with a suicide bomber", *Huffington Post*, October 6, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/an-interview-with-a-suicide-bomber_b_10387052.

towards ideology of terrorists. TTP has incorporated the very principle in its visual contents. Recent incidents of online radicalization and the involvement of urban middle class in the incidents such as Safoora Goth and the lone wolf attacks in US indicates that the threat has evolved into a complex state and it will become ominous if not curtailed effectively.

Conclusion

Although TTP calls itself harbinger of Islam and proponent of unity of Muslims, the very notion appears blemished as its activities are marred by violence and barbaric acts which are against the teachings of Islam. The culture of tolerance and compassion appear to be reversed by *Takfeeri* interpretations under which minorities and adversaries are victimized and exterminated. Termed as *kafir* (infidel) and *murtad* (apostate), Muslims and Non-Muslims are equally persecuted, and all is justified through selected works from *Ahadith* and Quran.

The tempting 'Mortality Salience' appeal, incorporated in visuals by TTP, seems promising to prospective recruits as it tends to answer most of their queries. The narrative of 'Avenging Evil to Establish Islam in Pakistan' reinforces brutal activities by labelling the state of Pakistan and LEAs as working on behest of the west. This perception is appealing to people from Pashtun belt whose immediate relatives or distant family members have lost their lives due to US intervention in Afghanistan. The Islamist narrative of 'Righteous Apostle of Allah' indicates a familiar version to the viewers in Pakistan who see themselves as citizens of a country created in the name of Islam. The influence of TTP's visual content depends upon religious exposure and personal affiliation with the organization. However,

a clear majority in Pakistan has overwhelmingly rejected the narratives of TTP due to extent of brutalities committed in the past years. Still, belief in mortality apotheosis, confusion of identity and the religious attachment is vital for Pakistani youth who are caught amid the identity crisis in present age.

The visual propaganda of Umar media can be highly beneficial for TTP as it can easily instigate feelings of discontent against the western intervention in the Islamic world including Pakistan. Moreover, it exploits anger and fear of ordinary Muslims as well as manipulation of identity and culture, presenting the violent and brutal narrative as a just and a most viable solution.

Today, the concerns of ethnic and religious communities need to be addressed on priority basis in the country. Also, the government should take effective steps to limit the reach of common citizens to extremist contents. Moreover, LEAs and intelligence agencies should work on countering the narratives and ideologies of the terrorist organizations rather than relying on hard core measures alone. If addressed rightly, counter narratives can curtail the developing menace of online extremism which will otherwise increase to ominous proportions.

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