

Social Media and Terrorism: Threats and Challenges to the Modern Era

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Abstract

Terrorism, using the social media, has become one of the most concerning issues across the world. There is interplay between home-grown terrorist groups and international terrorist organisations which is playing the central role in accelerating the situations. Terrorist organisations are using social media platforms for recruiting, training and communicating with their followers, supporters, donors, as it is cheaper, easier, faster and effective method of communication. The members of the terrorist organisations are spreading their ideological thoughts, propaganda and their activities, not only to South Asia but also to the world, using social media platforms. Through qualitative analysing, this article will find out how terrorist groups are using social media platforms, especially in South Asia, threatening the peace and security of the countries. While discussing the present conditions of the South Asian countries, this article emphasises on Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. This article will also explain some policy recommendations that can be very useful for the fight against terrorism in the social media platforms.

Keywords

Social media, terrorism, Islamic State or ISIS or IS, Al-Qaeda, South Asia

Introduction

Away from the physical battlefield, the terrorist organisations are creating virtual one in the cyber arena to spread their ideology across the world. The use of the social media platforms by the terrorist organisations has been increasing significantly,

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becoming one of the important ways of communicating, recruiting and trading with the members and followers of such terror organisations across the world. As a result of this, the terror groups are becoming more organised and dangerous by threatening the world's peace and security. In the recent years, the massive number of terrorist incidents is a warning sign of the future threats of the terrorism. The aim of this article is to identify the threat of terrorism in the twenty-first century and to explore the role of social media for the increasing number of the terrorist incidents across the world, particularly in the South Asian countries. While doing so, this article will describe the concept of terrorism in the light of scholarly opinions and legal provisions. This article will also evaluate the threat of terrorism that exists in this present time and its relationship with the social media. This article will also analyse the use of social media by the terrorist groups across the world, especially to the South Asian countries, that is, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, and the way they use the social media as a weapon to operate their terrorist activities. Finally, this article will discuss some policy recommendations which could be effective in the fight against terrorism in social media platforms.

Terrorism Threats in the Twenty-first Century

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon to the world but the modern era of terrorism has begun at the end of the twentieth century onwards (Combs, 2016). Since then the terrorist groups have frequently started their terror activities around the world and beyond the territorial boundaries. Countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan became the most highlighted countries for home-grown terrorist organisations, and from where those terrorist organisations operate their activities. And after the deadliest attack on 9/11 by the Al-Qaeda, world leaders have realised the threats of the terrorist in the world (Ganor, 2009). Moreover, the world also came to know that the members of the terrorist organisations are using hi-tech technologies and new technique in their missions or operations. In recent days, after the formation of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the threats to the world became more significant, as it is a better organised and desperate terrorist group. They are using suicide attacks on their enemies and using advanced technology in their missions, including the various Internet platforms. Through various social media platforms, terrorist groups are recruiting people, training members, communicating with their followers and donors, and updating their activities, which can be treated as unconventional terrorism.¹ Thus, it is essential to discuss what terrorism actually means to the scholars.

There are different thoughts and opinion in defining terrorism. 'Who is a terrorist?' is also a matter of controversy. One school of thought believed that it depends upon the 'subjective outlook of the definer' (Laqueur, 1987). An objective definition of terrorism is necessary in order to identify who are the terrors. Therefore, the role of the international law is crucial to provide a correct and objective definition of terrorism. Although a terror organisation cannot claim to be freedom fighters under the normative principle of law (Ganor, 2002). Claude Berrebi, however, considered that the word 'terrorism' is wide and it may be

difficult to define terror in the view of one country. Claude Berrebi then referred the definition which was provided by the US State Department as, ‘the term “terrorism” means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience’ (Berrebi, 2007). Under Section 1 of the UK’s Terrorism Act (2000), terrorism means

the use of threat of action where, the use or threat is designed to influence the government (or an international governmental organization) or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious (racial) or ideological cause.

The interpretation of terrorism seems widely defined in this section. Thus, it may be easier for the UK government to cover all the terrorist incidents under this section. However, the terrorist organisations are responsible for frequently occurring incidents, and their followers are present all over the world.

The notable recent terrorist incidents are the Westminster attack in UK where four people died including a police officer and injured 50 people by a single terror (Vikram & Alice, 2017), London bridge attack where seven people died and 48 were injured (Alexander, 2017), UK’s Finsbury Park attack where one person died and 10 were injured (Horton & Allen, 2017), the Orlando shooting in the USA where 49 people died (Ashley, Karimi, Elliott & McLaughlin, 2016), Brussels Bombings in Belgium where 32 people were slaughtered (Taylor, 2017), Paris attack where 129 people died (Dubuis & Oakley, 2014), the Sehwan suicide bombing in Pakistan killed at least 75 people (*Telegraph*, 2017), the Kabul hospital attack where ISIS militants disguised as doctors and killed 38 people in Afghanistan (Sufi, 2017), the Lio beach attack where gunmen slaughtered 20 people in Somalia (Stanton, 2016), Gulshan attack where 20 hostages were killed in Bangladesh (Marszal & Graham, 2016), and so on.

In most of the incidents of the terror attack, the Islamic State (IS) was found to be linked with the terror incidents (Burke, 2016), the terrorists were found to be communicating with the IS through the social media before the incidents (Oh et al., 2010). Thus, there seems to be a close relationship among the social media, terrorist organisations and terrorist incidents.

Social Media and Terrorism

While scrutinising the relationship between the social media and terrorism, it is important to know what does the term ‘social media’ mean. However, this article will also analyse why and how the terrorist organisations are using social media, which is another concerning issue for this article.

The social media is a group of the Internet or cyber-based applications that allow the creation of user-generated content, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc. However, blogs are the earliest form of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media help to create ‘volume and diversity of available

platforms' for a country. Since an American computer professional Edward Snowden's surveillance programme disclosures about the various Internet platforms and messaging systems, it has opened new frontiers across the world regarding the fast and rapid communication with one people to another, even in groups (Chen, 2016). This Scandal, however, broke in early 2013 that reported in both the *Washington Post* and *Guardian* that the US National Security Agency tapped directly into the servers of nine Internet firms including the social media firms, such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook and Yahoo, to track online communication in a surveillance programme, known as Prism. The leaked documents to the *Washington Post* in this regards suggested that the US National Security Agency breaks US privacy laws hundreds of times every year (*BBC News*, 2014).

When the use of social media became popular among individuals and groups all over the world, it is also evident that various terrorist groups are also using the social media to communicate with each other, including with their followers. International terrorist groups, such as so-called ISIS or IS, Jabhat al Nusra, Al-Qaeda, etc., are using social media to communicate with their followers, other groups and even publish their missions and activity in the name of 'Jihad'² through the Internet, which is a very frightening trend in recent days. The increasing involvements of the jihadist with social networks are increasing the risk of terror attacks around the world (*State of the Art*, 2017). Because of the increasing number of the use of the social media platforms by the extremist and terrorist groups, the social media companies are under tremendous pressure by the government of different countries or other international organisations to remove, monitoring the terrorist activities in their platforms. Police and other intelligence organisations in the world also work actively monitoring various social media platforms and websites, and removing offending accounts or materials more effectively (Montoya & Hofstetter, 2014), which leads to frequently changing the account and the online habits of the terrorist groups (Hussain & Saltman, 2014). As a result of this, monitoring terrorist activities are becoming more challenging to the social media companies and the security agencies across the world. In this regards, the first question comes in our mind is why the terrorist organisations are using social media platforms for their terrorist activates?

Why Social Media?

With the increasing number of Internet users across the world, social media are becoming the most favourite communication tool for providing one's views or comments and share information whether personally or in a group. Moreover, there are lot of privacy issues available to the user, such as 'closed group' or 'private conversation' in different social media platforms and on the other hand, 'open group' or public pages on social media, where different people can share their views, opinions and discussions. Thus, it also became one of the best and attractive ways for the terrorist to make new followers or/and communicate with their followers, always keep in touch with each other from any part of the world.

However, the most favourite and well-known social media platforms are Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google + and YouTube. Until 7 March 2017, there are 1.86 billion users across the world and 29.7 per cent users are aged between 25 and 34 years old (Zephoria.com, 2017). Moreover, there are 400 million Instagram users till 2015, 320 million Twitter users since 2016, 300 million Google+ users till 2013 and furthermore, a total of 1300 billion users of YouTube till January 2017 (*36 Mind Blowing YouTube Facts, Figures and Statistics*, 2017). Those social networks provide different facilities, regarding language, culture, linguistics, etc., which make things easier to communicate with one another. Other social media platforms, such as, Reddit (400 million visitors in 2012) and Tumblr (100 million blogs), are also crucial to express the people's interest and opinions in the social media platforms (Bartlett & Krasodomski-Jones, 2015). Because of these facts, terrorist and terror groups are interested in using the social media platforms to communicate across the world, which is faster, cheaper and easier than any other means. Apart from that, the social media platforms are more user-friendly to distribute information and other resources among the extremist and terrorist and even from the foreign conflict zone they can provide advice, training manuals and videos and operational security information (Carter, 2014).

How Terrorist Groups Use Social Media?

Terrorist and terror groups are using social media and other Internet or cyber platforms in many ways, especially for the purpose of operational communication, intelligence gathering, technical information sharing, recruiting, training, etc. Since 1999, the existence of the terror groups on the Internet has been observed and their activities on various forums, such as al-falluja, al-fidaa, al-shmukh, blogs and other social media platforms, are consistently increasing (Hegghammer, 2014). In 2014, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre on their report identified that there are more than 30,000 forums, websites and social media accounts that are promoting terrorism in the USA and abroad. They also found the increasing numbers of the social networking by the extremists, regarding the purpose of recruitment 'the enemy' (Eaton, 2014). Often in the social media platform, extremist groups seemed to create a strong relationship with new profile users, which also work as a public facing gateway to forums (O'Callaghan et al., 2013). It is also notable that many right wing groups in the social media redirect audience towards their forums, continuous detection of the pages or accounts of the members of these on social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook by the security forces and social media companies are one of the significant reason (Spracklen et al., 2016). Many Islamist and extremist forums seem to communicate with each other regarding ideological discussions and propaganda sharing. The IS and Al-Shabaab are the high profile users of social media, especially on the Twitter (Knox, 2014). Moreover, Ogaden National Liberation Front in Somalia, Uyghur Militants in China, Patani Separatists in Thailand, Chechen terror groups in Caucasus, etc., are

also considered as significant users of social media (Vergani & Zuev, 2014). Islamist extremists in the UK and White Nationalists in Sweden are using YouTube to share speeches, propaganda, political events and distribute videos (Ekman, 2014). Although there is a crucial difference that exists between the White Nationalist groups and Islamist terrorist groups. White Nationalists are marketing extremist material as the key propaganda and revenue function (O'Callaghan et al., 2014). On the other hand, the Islamic terrorists with their ulterior intention through social media activity targeted the Arabic and European language speakers, using English (Berger & Morgan, 2015) and most of the time they are targeting the vulnerable individuals (Hussain & Saltman 2014).

However, in a particularly sophisticated manner of Al-Muhajoun (Klausen, Barbieri, Reichlin-Melnick, & Zelin, 2012), the Mujahideen Youth Movement, Al-Qaeda uses their international networks of YouTube channels, especially targeting Western social media users (Bertram & Ellison, 2014). An analysis of using a combination of these measures and community found that the interconnection and activities by the members of the terrorist groups exist within the network, along with the level of influence of different members. A study on the Al-Nusra on Twitter in 2013 has provided insight into the extent to which an organisation can benefit from being re-tweeted by specific regional broadcasters (Prucha & Fisher, 2013). However, Weimann identified that the terrorist who was involved in the recent terror attacks in the Western countries somehow used the social media to gather information before the incidents (Gabriel, 2014). Evan Hohlmann, a cyberterrorism expert, argued that 'ninety percent of the terrorist activity on the internet takes place using social networking tools' (Noguchi & Evan, 2006).

Islamic State and Social Media

The IS is the most active terrorist group in the social media and it uses various platforms of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Viber, etc. The Brookings Centre for Middle East Policy found that between September and December in 2014 around 46,000 to 70,000 Twitter accounts were active IS supporters, having an average of 1,000 followers in each account (Berger & Morgan, 2015). Using social media, IS spreads propaganda across the world. They also recruit members and communicate to their follower and fund donors through social media in different countries, emphasising the 'physical frontier of the holy war' (Prucha & Fisher, 2014). Shiraz Maher explained that, in a study of the International Centre of Radicalisation, IS is active to find possible recruits on the social media platforms and before the recruitment it invites them to join in the more private and closed forum for the further instructions.

In this regards, in 2011, Al-Qaeda also launched 'Jihadist Cloud' and members of the jihadist forums are encouraging the development of 'media mujahidin' since then (Prucha, 2016). Every day a huge quantity of propaganda is posted on Twitter and Facebook from the UK, the USA, Saudi Arabia, India and Russia apart from Syria and Iraq. According to Berger and Morgan, at least 46,000

Twitter accounts had been used in between September and December 2014 by the IS supporters (Berger & Morgan, 2015). However, the main purpose of the terrorist or extremist groups on the social media, especially on Twitter, is to strengthen the group's unity and spread the propaganda among the public (Prucha & Fisher, 2014). The IS is also using video content in recent years to telecast propagandas and inhuman activities, such as beheading their enemies head, on the media. In the middle of 2014, Al-Hayat³ released the war flame that lasted for one hour. Through the video contents on the social media, the IS expressed its brutality in the name of Islam (Winter, 2015). The most surprising insight is the online behaviour of the IS across the world, as how it is operating and maintaining its activity on the social media, which can be treated as a challenge to the peace loving nations. If the authority shuts down any suspected Twitter or Facebook account of a terrorist group, immediately they open another account and all their friends and followers are moved to the new account (Neumann, 2013). However, the accounts of the IS members are being monitored under an operation, called 'swarmcast' in order to disseminate content across multiple platforms and dispersed networks that actively react to account deletions by creating new accounts and reconnecting rapidly with other members of the community (Ali, 2015).

The report of JM Berger and J Morgan on IS's Twitter account activity is that the account suspensions have concrete effects in limiting the reach and scope of ISIS activities on social media. This report also indicated the success of suspension of the terrorist group's social media and other Internet platforms that significantly reduced its supporting networks across the world, but failed to prevent re-assembling the networks again and again. As a result of this, they remain active and online with a small amount of audience. In addition to that, the terror groups are tampering the social media networks, called social engineering, which helps them to have several undetected conversations and discussions to the network provider authorities (Berger & Morgan, 2015).

However, tampering of the Internet platforms helps the terror groups to continue their operational discussions on any terrorist incidents or attacks across the world (Amble, 2012). In many video clips, IS shares its arms, arsenals and other weapons in order to demonstrate its strengths and powers to the international community, which also inspires its supporters and followers. It has found that the IS's online campaigns, messages or comments are for the intended audiences, whether domestic or international (Schake, 2014). For example, the Norwegian terrorist, called Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people in 2011, has written down a manual to his followers in the intent platform which is a hidden Internet platform (Andrew, 2011). A Tor Hidden Service is also believed to have been used by Al-Qaeda leaders Ayman al-Zawahiri and Nasir al-Wuhayshi to discuss high-level strategy, a communication that, when detected, led the USA to temporarily close down 21 embassies (Institute for National Security Studies, 2014). There is also some evidence that IS sympathisers are familiar with the various opportunities of encryption software (Bartlett & Krasodonski-Jones, 2015). Thus, in many other ways, the terrorist organisations are tampering the Internet platforms including the social media platform in order to communicate for their terror activities to other members of the group.

Terrorist Incidents in South Asian Countries and Threats of Social Media

In recent years, several terrorist incidents are occurring in South Asian countries. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are the countries where the terrorist incidents are occurring often. This article, however, does not include the reports and analysis of Afghanistan's condition of terrorism, as it is a country of Central Asia and South Asia. However, the other South Asian countries are out of the ambit of terrorism and the terrorist incidents are hardly seen in those countries (Satp.org, 2017). Table 1 shows the fatalities of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in Terrorist incidents during 2016 and 2017 (till 3 December).

According to Figure 1, the number of the deaths in terrorist activities in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan are 98, 515 and 898, respectively, during 2016 and 66, 385 and 488, respectively, in 2017 (till 3 December). This is a clear indication

Table I. Total Number of Fatalities in the Terrorist Incidents in 2016 and 2017

Country	Fatalities in 2016	Fatalities in 2017 (Till 3 December)
Bangladesh	92	66
India	515	385
Pakistan	898	488

Source: South Asia Fatalities: South Asia Terrorism Portal.

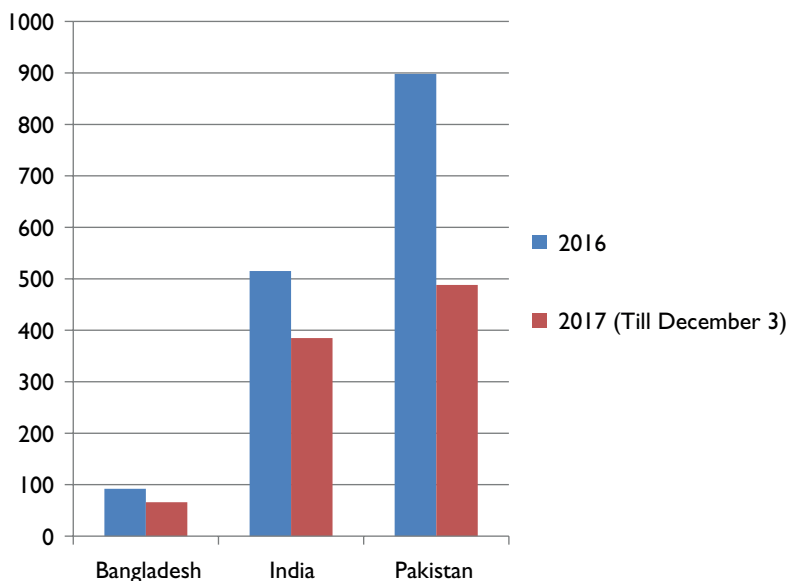


Figure I. Deaths in Terrorist Activities

Source: South Asia Fatalities: South Asia Terrorism Portal.

Note: y-axis stands for number of deaths and x-axis stands for name of the countries.

that the numbers of the deaths in the terrorist incidents are decreasing, especially in case of Pakistan total number of fatalities in the terrorist incidents are significantly lower than the previous year, but the risk of the terror attacks still remains.

However, it is also notable that in those terrorist incidents the terrorist groups are using social media platforms for communicating, recurring, training and other purposes as described earlier. Following sections in this article will show how the terrorist groups are using social media platform in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Bangladesh

In South Asian countries, the threats of terrorist attacks are significantly considerable. According to the Report of the US Department of State, in 2016, there were 18 terrorist attacks in Bangladesh (United States Department of State, 2017). However, in 2015, after four days of killing of a foreign blogger, Avijit Roy, an on-duty policeman was killed by the IS terrorist in Bangladesh. Having claimed the responsibility for the attacks, IS said that 'in a security operation, Allah enabled the soldiers of the state in Bangladesh to attack a police checkpoint. The soldiers of the caliphate withdrew safely.' The SITE Intelligence Group⁴ has confirmed that IS was the responsible for the terrorist attacks (*Asia Times*, 2015). Moreover, SITE also stated that two foreigners, Italian aid workers, were killed by the IS in Dhaka, in its earlier report (Biplab, 2015).

The post and telecommunication minister of Bangladesh, Tatana Halim, acknowledged that the militants are using the social media in Bangladesh (*Asia Times*, 2015). The prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, has also acknowledged in the parliament that few individuals are misusing the social media by using it in criminal activities. As a result of this, the government temporarily blocked WhatsApp and Viber and started monitoring the social media. In 2015, the US country's report on terrorism also mentioned that the terrorist groups or organisations started spreading their radical ideologies to the followers of Bangladesh through social media. In November 2015, the IS online magazine *Dabiq* explained the activities and future attack plans in Bangladesh that was published in the article titled 'The Revile of Jihad in Bengal'. Even though Bangladesh has joined the White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism and Bangladesh participated in the Saudi-led Islamic Counter-terrorism alliance in November 2015 (United States Department of State, 2016), few highlighted terrorism incidents took place in Bangladesh since 2016 by the IS as they have claimed responsibility for those terrorist attacks.

The Gulshan attack (Holy Artisan Bakery), in 1 July 2016, was the most horrific, where 20 hostages and two policemen were killed by the terrorists and most of the victims were foreigners. Approximately, after 12 hours of operation by the Special Forces five terrorist were killed (*BBC News*, 4 July 2016). Most of the terrorists were students; five of the terrorists of those incidents were from elite families, Western-educated, and trained by the IS (Aditya & Serajul, 2016). Bangladesh government was questioned about its position after the Holey Artisan attack on 1 July 2016, regarding IS's presence in Bangladesh. The local terrorist

group, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), said nothing about this attack, but IS claimed and acknowledges the responsibility of the attack (Geeta & Ellen, 2016). If we compare the nature of the attack the Holey Artisan it seems to be not completely different from the attacks by IS in Paris, Istanbul or Brussels.

However, the claim of IS for the attack has been denied by the Home Minister of Bangladesh, Mr Asaduzzaman Khan, and he claimed that the terrorists were a member of JMB. This denial syndrome spread all over the several political leaders of the running government and they blamed that the attacks were made by opposition political parties, such as Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jammaat-e-Islami (JI). Through SITE intelligence website of Syria, IS published a video on 6 July 2016, where Bangladesh government was warned by three Bengali speakers saying: 'What you witnessed in Bangladesh... was a glimpse. We will repeat, repeat and repeat this until we achieve our goal to establish Sharia throughout the world.' Thus, the Gulshan Attack makes it clear about the transnational terrorist activity, where the Bangladeshi terrorists are following the ideological footprint of the IS (Khan, 2017).

After that, another terror attack occurred in the Sholakia on the Eid prayer time (Sholakia attack) (Saad & Jon, 2015). Similarly, on 7 July, a terror attack was organised with crude bombs and gun shooting before the morning Eid prayers in the Sholakia Idgah of Kishoreganj district, Bangladesh. Sholakia has the biggest Eid congregation in the country with at least 20 million people attending the Eid prayers. Both the incidents in Gulshan and Sholakiawere were organised forms of terror attacks, by a section of Bangladeshi Islamists who have adopted extremist methodology to target civil society members, religious minorities (Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Bahais), Ahmadiyas, atheist bloggers, the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community and progressive political activists.

India

India is another South Asian country where the terrorist groups are trying to spread their ideology and occurring terrorist incidents. For example, on 28 October 2017, Ishaq Ahmad Dar, a policeman who joined a terrorist group called Lashkar-e-Taiba, posted his picture with AK 47, which became viral on the social media platforms (Masoodi, 2017). Thus, social media is becoming a useful tool of spreading their ideologies and propaganda in India. On the other hand, recruiting members is one of the most significant goals of the terrorist groups. Most recently, Hizbul Mujahideen, a terrorist group in Kashmir, has recruited 50 young people and social media played the vital role in this process (Sharma, 2017). On 25 October 2017, Arzoo Basher Najar, 20-year-old member of Hizbul Mujahideen, was arrested and said that he was using Facebook to connect with other people for recruiting them in his terrorist group. He also told that social media was for signing up of terrorist group and then they are trained locally (Sharma, 2017). From these facts, it is clear that terrorist groups are using social media platform for terrorist activities in India.

In an open debate on 'Countering the Narratives and Ideologies of Terrorism', Sayed Akbaruddin, India's Permanent Representative to UN at the UN Security Council, said that the social media platforms are being misused 'to disastrous effect' by terrorist groups, which needs to be monitored carefully with due safeguards for freedom of expression. He added that 'The Hydra-like monster of terrorism continues to spread across continents in developing and developed countries alike, aided by the targeted propaganda of hatred over the ever growing social media networks that were designed to bring people together' (NDTV, 13 May 2016). The role of the IS and Al-Qaeda in such activities was also the concerning factor in this regards as they are significantly recruiting foreign fighters that increased the threats of terrorist incident not only in India but also across the world through misinterpreting and misrepresenting of religion to justify violence (NDTV, 13 May 2016). A significant number of the terrorist are receiving training and logistic support in the terrorist camp for occurring terrorist incidents in Asia, Europe, USA, Middle East, Africa and elsewhere (NDTV, 13 May 2016).

Recently, the Defence Minister of India, Niemala Sitharaman, in the 4th Defense Minister Meeting of Association of Southeast Asian Nations said that the terrorism and radicalisation through social media poses a 'serious' security threat to all countries and thus she urge for the collective action against this 'transnational phenomena' using social media platforms. She also expressed the zero tolerance policy against terrorism (NDTV, 24 October 2017).

Pakistan

As a South Asian country, Pakistan is under a big threat of terrorist incidents, as the terrorist organisations are increasing their activities, such as recruiting, training, etc., in Pakistan. The IS and Taliban terrorists are jointly operating terrorist activities not only in Pakistan but also in other countries (NDTV, 14 November 2016). The Balochistan attack on October 2016 was one of the concerning incidents in this regard, where more than 59 people were killed and 100 others were wounded (*BBC News*, 25 October 2016). The IS later claimed responsibility and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's spokesman Ali Bin Sufyan said they partnered with ISIS to carry out the assault. Counter-terrorism officials in Pakistan say that ISIS has begun reaching out to local militants through its rich social media presence (NDTV, 14 November 2016).

In the conference of 'Social Media and Pakistan's War on Terror' at Information Technology University, Dr Kiran Hassan said that 70 per cent of the people of Pakistan have access to the mobile phone where 25 per cent of them have access to the social media through their mobile phone and apart from the other print and electronic media, social media became an important factor. Referring to former army chief of Pakistan, she argued that social media became a platform for militancy in Pakistan. She added that 'there is vast presence of social media accounts by banned organizations without any control' (*The Nation*, 24 August 2017). The Sindh Province Counter-Terrorism Department found out more than 70 social media accounts that directly affiliated with IS (Shakil, 2017).

However, the Government of Pakistan banned at least 41 of the 64 terror outfits in social media platforms, including the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Open support of the terrorist groups was evident from the pictures of using weapons and training, and from the examination of some user profile of social media sites that were linked with these banned outfits (NDTV, 30 May 2017).

On the other hand, under National Action Plan (NAP), the Government of Pakistan is planning to block Uniform Resource Locations (URLs) and websites of proscribed organisations. Apart from that NAP is also considering counter-terrorism measures, that is, consolidation of National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the formation of effective counter-terrorism forces (CTF) (Shakil, 2017). In March 2017, the Ministry of Interior took initiatives to block 937 URLs and 10 websites of banned organisations under the NAP's Project. The law enforcement agencies of Pakistan has registered 17,562 cases under NAP project, for hate speech, extremist literature and misuse of loud-speakers where 19,289 suspected were arrested by the law enforcement agencies (Shakil, 2017). The Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority are also working alongside with the Interior Ministry under NAP. Although Human Rights watch expressed deep concern over the 'abusive state monitoring of internet activity' which can be the amount of a violation of the freedom of expression where G.B. Shah Bokhair, a Pwshwar-based security analyst and columnist, argued that it is nearly impossible to control digital communication. He added that 'various social media including Facebook, Twitter, Skype and other applications have made such significant and rampant inroads in our daily lives that they cannot be controlled'. He also mentioned that the terrorist groups are deceiving people by falsely justifying their activities in the social media platforms (Shakil, 2017).

Future Threats of the Social Media Terrorism

With the increasing numbers of the home-grown terrorists, inspired by the international terrorist organisations, the threats of the terrorist incidents have significantly been increased in last few years and social media is accelerating these situations. Because of the social media, the terrorists are getting more organised and frequently the occurring terrorist incidents, especially targeting not only to the Western world but also other counties, such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan in South Asia. As there is no universal convention or regulation that may control the cyber world, especially in the fight against social media terrorism that leads the world to uncountable increasing numbers of enmities all across the world. The home grown small terrorist groups are joining with other international terrorist organisations and involving in the various terrorist activities, and social media has central role in this process, which is making the situation more dangerous and challenging the peace and security of the world.

Policy Recommendations

Certain strategies and policies can be useful to control and prevent the extent of the terrorism using social media.

Introducing New Laws on Social Media Terrorism

Having the above discussion, it is worthy to recommend that the urgency to enact a law on social media terrorism is crying need not only for the South Asian countries but also to the Western countries, and while doing that the governments can consider the recent USA's 'The Combat Terrorist Use of Social Media Act 2016' (Johnson, 2016) and the UK's 'Investigatory Power Act (2016)', in the fight against terrorism. Alongside the Acts, the right to freedom of speech, right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy need also need to be considered by the countries, which is one of the vital issues in order to uphold the human rights across the world.

Campaigning against Terrorism Using Social Media

The campaigning against social media terrorism can be a very effective strategy, by the governmental and non-governmental organisations, as the numbers of the social media users are significantly increased with the technological advancement of a country. Increasing awareness among the people of the country is the most appropriate tools, by which the government can easily track down the suspected individual, who is trying to influence people in the social media platforms and take proper stapes against him or her. This can be more effective and beneficial approach, as it may not be possible to prevent and control terrorism using social media in single-handed by the government without the help of the general conscious people of a country. This could be very useful to the South Asian countries and the terrorist organisations are misinterpreting and misrepresenting the religious justification of their actions, which can be clarified through campaigning against terrorism using social media.

Special Intelligent Units Tracking the Terrorism in Social Media

In most of the South Asian countries, the special intelligent units, including experts and researchers, need to be introduced and/or extend the scope of the works, apart from the anti-terrorism agencies, particularity to prevent and control the terrorism using social media. For example, the Government of Bangladesh, recently, has introduced the Digital Security Act 2016 (The Digital Security Act, 2016) in order to prevent and take action against cyber-related crimes, using

computer, computer system or network, mobile or any kind of digital communication networks whether voice or data. This Act also emphasises to establish Digital Forensic Lab for investigating the cyber-related crimes. Moreover, the Bangladesh Cyber Emergency or Incident Response Team will be established in order to provide security and monitor the cyber-related crimes under this Act. But the functions and affords of the Digital Security Agency and the Cyber Emergency or Incident Response Team with regard to the control or prevent terrorist activities in the social media is not clearly mentioned in this Act. Thus, the Government of Bangladesh needs to establish Intelligent Special Units, who will be responsible to effectively and lawfully monitor the social media terrorism in Bangladesh, and outside the country.

Newly Developed Technological Instruments and Adequate Training

In order to deal with the social media terrorist, the government needs to ensure that the law enforcement agencies and intelligent units are well equipped with the technological instruments in the fight against terrorism and also need to ensure that these agencies are lawfully using those instrument by protecting individual right to privacy, freedom of expression and freedom of speech. On the other hand, the government also need to take initiative for the adequate training facilities to these agencies and intelligent units, so that they can effectively deal with any situation regarding preventive measures against the social media terrorism, in case of the emergency situations.

Strategies and Policies

The governments of the South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, are emphasising on the cyber security measures in the commercial development and cyber terrorism incidents. Because of not having emphasised on the terrorist activated in the social media, it is becoming more challenging to the governments and increasing the risks of more terrorist incidents. Therefore, the governments need to take both the short-time strategies to tackle the present threats of the terrorism using social media and long-time policies to prevent and control the social media terrorism in the long run.

Joint Work with the Social Media Companies

The cooperation with the social media companies against any kind of terrorist activities in the social media platforms is crucial, in the fight against terrorism. It is one of the significant issues for the South Asian countries as a huge number of people of the South Asian countries are using various social media platforms.

However, the relationship of the Government of Bangladesh with the social media companies is not promising. In several incidents, the Government of Bangladesh has blocked the activities of social media sites, such as Facebook, Viber, etc. (*bdnews24*, 2017). But many people had access during that time through proxy link. In this regards, the government needs to compel the social media companies, such as USA, and develop a close relationship, like UK, to work together in the fight against social media terrorism (Mastoianni, 2015). Though every social media company have their own privacy policies, all of them are willing to act against any kind of terrorist activities in the social media platforms. Therefore, the governments of South Asian countries, especially the Government of Bangladesh, need to find a middle way, in the cooperation strategies, with the social media companies alongside with considering the privacy issues of the individuals.

Collective Action and International Cooperation

In the fight against terrorism using the social media platforms, it is important to take mutual and collective actions by the international organisations alongside with the peace loving nationals. The UN has recognised the fact that the terrorists are using Internet in the terrorist activities (Wu, 2015). The UN has expressed its inability to pass a treaty that may regulate the Internet or social media across the world at World Conference of International Telecommunication on 2012 (Wu, 2015). On the contrary, the The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has adopted new strategies focusing on the threats of cyber terrorism in 2011. Thus, the regional collective cooperation is more effective in the fight against social media terrorism; for example, the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) can play a vital role to control and prevent the terrorism by using social media in the South Asian region. With the collective actions of the domestic, regional and international organisations, it is possible to face the threats of the terrorism using the social media, which is one of the most concerning factors of the world in present time.

Conclusion

The social media plays a vital role in spreading terrorist with increasing numbers of the terrorist activities. By using and tempering different social media platforms, the terrorist groups are, especially the ISIS and Al-Qaeda, communicating with their followers and donors, recruiting the new members from across the world, providing training materials as this is the faster, easier, cheaper and most effective communication method in the development of the technology. The increasing number of the terrorist activates, using social media, is threatening the world's peace and security of the world and South Asian countries are not an exception to this. An international regulatory mechanism is essential to control the terrorism in the social media platforms. Without raising awareness among the people against

the social media terrorism, it will not be possible to win the fight. Introducing special legislation with a great care and efficiency and proper implementation of such legislation can help to prevent and control the terrorist incidents significantly, as it is possible to get previous alert for the security unities regarding the movements of activities of the terrorist groups both domestically and internationally. Finally, collaborated work of the social media companies, government and general people can bring a remarkable change in the society to uphold the peace and security of the world.

Notes

1. Unconventional terrorism includes beheading hostages, using unconventional and hi-tech weapons, suicide bombing of police stations, security forces camps, using countries' resourceful infrastructures and natural resources, cyber terrorism, etc.
2. A fight against the enemies of Islam on the order of god or Allah, as terrorists believe, which has been wrongly interpreted by the terrorist groups and organisations.
3. Al-Hayat is a media wing of IS.
4. SITE is a US intelligence group that monitors the Islamic exterminate and terrorist activity on the internet or cyber platforms.

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