

Chapter 39

The Communicating and Marketing of Radicalism: A Case Study of ISIS and Cyber Recruitment

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ABSTRACT

This article considers social media as a radicalization venue within the context of terrorism. The 2016 extremist/terrorist attack in Orlando, Florida showed the potential of an ISIS type extremist organization to leverage social media toward a lethal outcome within American society. While the ISIS organization originated overseas in a culture of which mainstream American society is unfamiliar, it is in many ways remarkable the level of success they quickly achieved connecting globally. Their efforts reflect the potential of social media to market a message of radicalism worldwide toward generating murderous converts who are willing to travel to join the fight or attack at home. Given these notions, this article considers the use of social media as an extremist cyber-recruitment tool.

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INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, June 12, 2016, about 2:00 A.M., Omar Mateen, age 29, entered a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, and committed one of the worst acts of terror and hate to occur in the United States since the attacks of September 2001. Within three hours, Mateen was killed as the result of his final confrontation with law enforcement officers. Mateen, a New York born resident of Florida, claimed in a 911 call to local law enforcement during the attack to be acting in support of the Islamic State (ISIS). During the conversation, he invoked the names of the Boston marathon bombers. When his murderous rampage was over, at least 100 people had been either killed or seriously injured. Soon after the attacks, ISIS claimed responsibility for the shooting through a statement on its Amaq news agency. The questions quickly asked pertained to the motivation that led to Mateen's attack. What fueled his extremism? What had served as a platform for radicalization? Was it something within him, fueled by his family, inculcated within his mosque, or inspired by messages easily found on the Internet?

After radicalization, other attempts to support extremist ideology may be quashed before lethality occurs. For instance, in Mississippi, two former Mississippi State University (MSU) students attempted to flee the United States and join the ISIS extremist/radical organization. Both had viewed propaganda videos on the Internet, and one of them expressed the desire (via Tweeter) to visit ISIS territory overseas (Green, 2017). Their endeavors were short-lived because the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested them when they attempted to leave the country (Green, 2017).

Extremist influences are unconstrained by geography. Given the advent and proliferation of the Internet, extremist organizations may access a global community with their respective ideologies. The motivations underlying criminal endeavors within the virtual world often parallel similar motivations that exist within physical reality (Doss, Henley, & McElreath, 2013a; 2013b). Thus, individual or group motivations may contribute toward some illicit behaviors within society. Given these notions, this article examines the leveraging of social media whereby individuals become sympathetic to extremist causes, and follow through toward some forms of supportiveness for the extremist entity. This article examines these notions via the lens of the ISIS extremist organization.

FRAMEWORK

Chatfield, Reddick, & Brajawidagda (2015) introduced an extremist network communication framework that incorporated social media as its technological foundation. Within the paradigm, social media networking facilitated extremist propaganda, radicalization, and recruitment with respect to the overall goals of the extremist activities (Chatfield, Reddick, & Brajawidagda, 2015). Social media platforms invoke iterations of the communications cycle (Schreck & Keim, 2013). Typically, the communications cycle involves processes of crafting, encoding, transmitting, receiving, decoding, and providing feedback for intended messages throughout a continuum permeated by various forms of noise (Doss, Glover, Goza, & Wigginton, 2014). Within the context of the communication process, social media may be used to personalize messaging and communicating between participating entities whereby feedback responses may be generated (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Radicalization involves a human process wherein someone experiences a changed mindset and behavior. Blackwell (2016) considered radicalization with respect to human needs and Maslow's Hierarchy. Blackwell (2016) indicated that ISIS was successful in its radicalization effort because it responded to

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