

Influence of Social Media in Promoting Radicalization, Extremism and Terrorism in Pakistan: Case Study of PTI and BYC

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Abstract

Social media can be subsumed in the pandemic metaphor that encompasses the proliferating environment for radicalization, extremism, and terrorism like parasites. The research problem examined in this study pertains to the ambiguous causal influence of social media in promoting extremist behaviors within particular social and political contexts, especially in Pakistan. Several studies have reported social media as a platform for the above-listed activities; however, a causative link between social media and the facilitation of indecent activities remains to be established. This study reports several factors that are facilitating digital spaces for terrorism, extremism, and radicalization by working on an investigative approach. It employs a mixed-methods approach, which combines both qualitative interviews with social media users and experts, as well as quantitative analysis of social media content and engagement metrics. Moreover, this paper examines case studies of PTI and BYC and the tactics they employ to achieve their desired results. Through a systematic review that incorporates both qualitative interviews and quantitative data analysis, the study examines the patterns of social media engagement, the correlation between social media and real-world practices of radicalization, and, foremost, the role of algorithmic magnification. The finding indicates that digital environment aids radicalization with diverse patterns observed across individuals depending on their locations and socio-political backgrounds. Namely, the behavior patterns of different individuals and groups, as well as their engagement with extremist content and the algorithmic propagation of such content, vary, manipulating the trajectory of radicalization in inimitable ways. This highlights the multifaceted nature of the digital front and its impact on extremist behaviors while necessitating tailored interventions and stringent policy response. The results underscore past studies that have been lacking and relate social media to a theatre of propaganda, as this carries a cofactor of digital radicalization, extremism, and terrorism, which has implications for societal stability. It also highlights the imperative for tailored policy actions to combat digital radicalization. The paper recommends that authorities prioritize algorithm accountability, regulate political

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digital campaigns, and invest in counter-narrative initiatives to maintain societal stability and prevent the misuse of internet platforms.

Keywords: Non-Kinetic Warfare, Digital Terrorism, Algorithmic Magnification, Digital Warriors, Polarization

Introduction

In the wake of the 2016 US presidential elections, it was revealed to the world how one could utilize social media as a strategic weapon in the hands of foreign and domestic actors who overturned the results of the Trump court by prying on unique characteristics of social media such as its outreach, its ability to target demographic groups and politically motivated citizens (Calvo et al., 2023). The behaviour of voters and public opinion was influenced by a designed narrative that was then significantly disseminated (Flamino et al., 2023). So was the case of the Imran Khan's party (PTI) and Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) who, by mapping the case study of the 2016 elections, were able to target their domestic audience, mainly comprising 60% of Pakistan's youth, furthering the gap of reconciliation while fueling polarization in an already diverse fragmented society (Van Bavel et al., 2021).

While social media platforms have become integral to youth's lives, they are not without risks. These platforms can serve as catalysts for fostering extremist and radical environments, particularly when targeting impressionable youth (Peng, Lock, & Salah, 2024). This research paper investigates into the influence of social media on Pakistani youth, who are vulnerable to manipulative narratives. The paper uses qualitative methodology to analyze the case studies of PTI and BYC, highlighting their social media campaigns and engagements in political discourse contexts that may have favoured radicalization pathways for youth (Koc-Michalska et al., 2023). The paper thoroughly analyzes trends observed in individuals, unique locations, and districts.

Theoretical Framework

The emergence of social media as a powerful tool for communication has transformed how individuals and groups interact, share ideas, and mobilize. While it provides a platform for democratic engagement and discourse, it also facilitates

the spread of radical ideologies and violent extremism. This theoretical framework will apply the Public Sphere Theory to analyze the influence of social media on the radicalization processes of groups such as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC). The lack of effective government intervention and interest in addressing the grievances of these groups contributes to their radicalization campaigns, as they exploit social media to amplify their narratives and mobilize support (Heck, 2016). This approach integrates Social Identity Theory and Echo Chamber Theory alongside Public Sphere Theory to enhance the comprehension of radicalization. Social Identity Theory elucidates how individuals draw significance from group affiliation (e.g., PTI or BYC), amplifying in-group loyalty and out-group antagonism. Echo Chamber Theory highlights how algorithmic filtering on social media perpetuates preexisting opinions, constraining exposure to divergent perspectives and intensifying polarization.

The public sphere theory primarily describes a domain of social life where individuals come together to discuss and identify societal problems and influence political actions. In this theory, the public sphere is characterized by open discourse and rational-critical debate, essential for democratic governance (Habermas, 1989). In the digital age, the public sphere is divided into several counter-publics, where speech is frequently influenced not by logic, but by emotional appeals, group allegiance, and algorithmic enhancement. This transformation is especially evident in the utilization of social media by PTI and BYC, whose discussion forums resemble digital echo chambers rather than Habermas's ideal of rational conversation. The emergence of social media has transformed the dynamics of the public realm, presenting both possibilities and problems for political involvement (Kausar, Tahir, & Mehmood, 2021).

Social media platforms have democratized access to information, allowing marginalized groups to voice their grievances and mobilize support. However, this democratization can also lead to the spread of extremist ideologies, particularly in environments where governments fail to address the root causes of discontent (Harlow & Mohamed, 2011).

The interplay between social media and radicalization is particularly evident in the cases of PTI and the BYC, where both groups have utilized online platforms to articulate their narratives and attract followers.

A critical aspect of the radicalization process is the perceived neglect and disinterest of the government in addressing the concerns of marginalized groups. In Pakistan, both PTI and BYC emerged as responses to grievances related to governance, representation, and socio-economic disparities. The government's failure to engage with these issues has fostered a sense of alienation among their supporters, making them more susceptible to radicalization (Margetts & John, 2017).

For instance, the PTI has capitalized on widespread disillusionment with traditional political parties and government institutions. Social media has become a vital tool for PTI to mobilize support, organize protests, and disseminate information. Their online campaigns have successfully framed their narrative as a legitimate struggle against a corrupt system, appealing to a younger demographic that is increasingly disenchanted with the status quo. Empirical proof encompasses the extensive utilization of hashtags like #ImportedGovernmentNamanzoor, which trended internationally on Twitter/X, accumulating millions of impressions with 100 million individuals tweeting it. The prevailing tendency is Pakistan (Asia News Network, 2023). These hashtags not only condemned the administration but also advanced a binary narrative that depicted dissident voices as traitors, steering political discourse towards violent conflict.



Similarly, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee has emerged as a response to the long-standing grievances of the Baloch people, including issues related to missing persons, resource exploitation, political marginalization, and human rights abuses. The Baloch youth, feeling sidelined by government policies, have turned to social media as a platform for activism and dissent. The lack of governmental engagement

with Baloch concerns has allowed extremist narratives to take root, as they find validation in the absence of effective communication channels with authorities.

On the other hand, PTI and the BYC both propagate extremist views that pose threats to government stability and contribute to societal polarization. The narratives promoted by these groups often exploit societal grievances, fostering division and resentment among various factions within society. Social media serves as a crucial vehicle for disseminating these extremist ideas, amplifying their reach and impact. Whereas, social media platforms provide an accessible space for both PTI and BYC to articulate their complaints, allowing them to bypass traditional media narratives that may not align with their perspectives. This democratization of discourse facilitates the rapid spread of their extremist views (Asia News Network, 2023).

The role of social media in the radicalization process cannot be modest. Social Media plays a Catalyst role for radicalization and polarization. Platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, and YouTube enable groups like PTI and BYC to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, allowing them to disseminate their messages directly to the public. This direct communication fosters a sense of community among supporters, who may feel isolated from mainstream political discourse. However, this internet companionship frequently transforms into moral panic and demands for conflict, making political activism and extreme extremism impossible to distinguish. PTI's internet reporting following the May 9 events sparked demonstrations and military base assaults. This illustrates how internet chatter may lead to real-world violence. Moreover, social media facilitates the creation of echo chambers, where users are exposed predominantly to information that reinforces their existing beliefs. This phenomenon can amplify radical ideologies, as individuals seek out and engage with content that aligns with their grievances and frustrations. For instance, PTI's online presence has enabled the spread of narratives that delegitimize opposition parties and frame the government as an adversary, further entrenching radical views among its supporters (Rane & Ewart, 2019). A clear route from speech to radical identity formation is seen in content studies of PTI-affiliated accounts that frequently spread conspiracy theories, demonize political rivals, and advance anti-institutional sentiments.

In the case of the BYC, social media serves as a platform for articulating historical injustices and criticisms, often using emotive language and imagery that resonate with the experiences of the Baloch people. By framing their struggle as a fight against

oppression, BYC has successfully garnered support and sympathy, making radicalization a viable option for those who feel marginalized and ignored by the state.

Moreover, both groups effectively use social media to mobilize supporters for protests and demonstrations. Calls to action are disseminated widely, encouraging individuals to participate in collective actions that may escalate into violence. For instance, PTI has utilized Twitter and Facebook to organize large-scale protests, framing these events as legitimate expressions of public dissent. Social media enables the manipulation and distortion of information, allowing PTI and BYC to present skewed narratives that serve their agendas. Misinformation about government actions, rival parties, and societal issues can be spread rapidly, reinforcing extremist sentiments and polarizing public opinion (Voss, 2018).

Furthermore, both groups often employ emotionally charged content, such as videos and graphic imagery, to evoke strong reactions among their audiences. These emotional appeals can galvanize support and encourage individuals to adopt more radical positions, particularly when they perceive their identity or community to be under threat (Voss, 2018). One example of how social media promotes emotional mobilization is the use of emotionally charged slogans and martyrdom imagery in BYC campaigns, which have been connected to higher online engagement and involvement in in-person protests.

This research finds out implications for policy makers and suggest proper government intervention in handling such complex issues. The insights gained from applying Public Sphere Theory to the cases of PTI and BYC underscore the urgent need for government intervention in addressing the underlying issues that contribute to radicalization. Government must recognize the importance of engaging with marginalized communities through inclusive dialogue, transparency, and accountability.

Effective communication strategies that utilize social media can help bridge the gap between the government and these groups, fostering an environment conducive to dialogue and conflict resolution (United Nations, 2016). By addressing grievances and providing platforms for constructive discourse, government can mitigate the appeal of radicalization and counter-extremism narratives.

In parallel, the influence of social media on radicalization, extremism, and terrorism presents both challenges and opportunities for contemporary societies. On one hand it provides the rights of free speech to the individuals, while on the other hand creates a room for such destabilizing actors. By employing Public Sphere Theory to analyze the cases of PTI and the BYC, it becomes evident that a lack of government interest in addressing grievances has allowed these groups to exploit social media for radicalization campaigns. To counter this trend, government must proactively engage with sidelined communities, ensuring that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. Only through open discourse and meaningful engagement can societies hope to mitigate the risks of radicalization and build a more inclusive public sphere (United Nations, 2016).

Case study of PTI

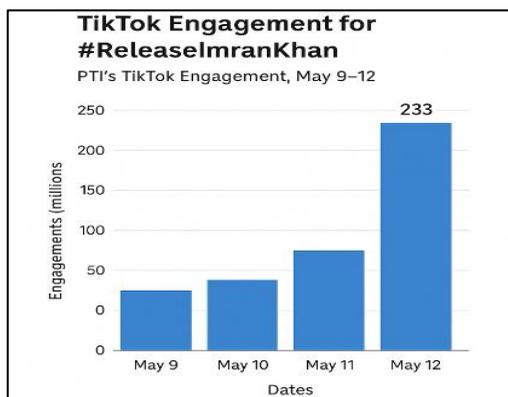
Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister and current detainee 804, rose to power as the chairman of PTI with a firm commitment to combat corruption and improve governance. However, his journey took an unforeseen turn in April 2022 when he was ousted through a no-confidence motion in the National Assembly, a vote he lost (Jan, Rehman, Ali, & Basit, 2023). Despite this setback, Khan attributed the motion to a 'foreign conspiracy' and US involvement. He faced a series of legal challenges that led to his arrest in April 2023 (The Security Distillery, 2023). His steadfast supporters viewed these charges as tactics to diminish his party's influence, seeing the legal actions as politically motivated oppression.

His political rivals may have seen Khan's arrest as the end of his political journey, but the reality was quite different. Khan's political landscape has become more turbulent since his ousting, creating a division in Pakistan's politics that was further aggravated by the responses and sentiments of Khan's supporters, mainly on social media. PTI's digital potential was highlighted in the February elections, where disruptive technologies were utilized to influence the behaviour of voters and then to shape the political dynamic of Pakistan (O'Neil, 2016). The February 2024 elections clearly illustrate Khan's relationship with social media, transforming the norm of traditional political campaigns towards modern political ones.

This shift has transformed the channel of political communication in Pakistan. Youth were among the top users of such channels. Platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok were seen as vital tool for the 2024 political

discourse. Imran Khan effectively bypassed traditional media channels by utilizing social media to engage with voters and mobilize support for his campaigns, virtual Jalsas, and political rallies. As of the 2023 polls, the number of social media users in Pakistan has reached 114 million. It is important to highlight that 65% of Pakistan's population is under the age of 35, which significantly aided Khan's political campaigns by utilizing social media channels as a powerful tool for engaging primarily with young voters (Pakistan Telecommunications Authority, 2024). Notably, half of his supporters are GenZ and millennials. Khan's social media team maintained his strong online presence with aggressive social media posts, tweets, and clone videos created with the help of generative AI (Eurasia Review, 2024).

One well-known example is the hashtag #ReleaseImranKhan, which had 233 million views on TikTok. PTI's TikTok had substantial interaction (views, likes, shares) from May 9 to May 12. These postings addressed the complaints of young people in Pakistan who are facing unemployment, corruption, and a lack of justice. In addition to receiving millions of views, remarks, likes, and support throughout his presidential campaign, Khan fills this victim vacuum.



Khan's social media campaigns were not just a tool for his political survival; they were a catalyst for increased political participation in Pakistan's history, especially among the younger masses. This amplified and improved political participation in Pakistan's political history. The PTI's social media giant outperformed Khan's rivals in their digital ventures. Their narrative was far more influenced and seen by the masses than by their political opponents.

The events of 8th October 2023 represented a momentous shift in Pakistani politics. In the bi-elections, PTI emerged victorious in 15 out of 20 seats contested in Punjab, leading to a notable shift in the provincial assembly (Hussain & Fraser, 2022). These elections were a direct result of the expulsion of PTI's MPs, who had pledged their allegiance to Hamza Shahbaz as the chief minister of Lahore. In contrast, PML-N secured a minimum of 4 seats, with one seat won by an independent candidate. This electoral outcome demonstrated PTI's ability to sway public opinion in its favor, mainly through its effective use of social media. Its success in these elections was a testament to their ability to garner significant support following Khan's ousting as prime minister in April.

February 2024 was a mirroring image of what was seen in the 2023 bi-elections, a significant victory for PTI attributed to its strategic use of social media platforms. PTI gained the traction of a younger audience and a broad demographic win for Khan's party. By harnessing digital media, PTI was able to penetrate key voter segments (Arab News, 2024). Khan's social media warriors disseminated their messages, countered the opposition narrative, and mobilized support through platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, and TikTok. With a tactical yet strategic approach, PTI leveraged targeted advertising and utilized algorithmic analytics to maximize engagement with a target audience. As per the reports of the Digital Pakistan Foundation, the social media posts of the Khan party were able to receive 1.2 billion impressions, increasing the engagement rate to 30%, which was more than any other political party. These were the results of months leading up to the 2024 elections. PTI used real-time and live-streaming updates to maintain a continuous and transparent connection with the public (Khawaja, 2024).

This digital-centric and proactive approach instilled their promise of forward-thinking and reformation in voters' minds. Moreover, quick responses to misleading information cemented the Khan party's image as progressive and visionary. Hence, it proved how PTI's extensive and effective use of digital strategy led to its electoral success (Arab News, 2024).

However, the shaping of minds that started from goodwill led to the political radicalization of Pakistan's youth. The relentless and hardcore strategy employed by PTI created a polarized environment characterized by fervent radical populism, resulting in a continuous and never-ending rift between generations. In addition, newly formed political tribes, including PTI and PML-N, now communicate using a

lot of this environment. One of the attributes of this environment is a workforce that includes various age groups. PTI prayed to specific age groups with a traditional message that they defined through the lens of its enemy, i.e. PMLN. He utilized cosmopolitan culture to augment his strategy further, tactically encompassing the educated masses.

One of the drawbacks of Khan's strategy was his autocratic tendency. His aura was capsuled around a personality theme of whatever I am saying is right with an argument that corruption needs to be rooted in and that good governance is required (Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University, 2024). This led to a disruption in a diverse society. In Khan's digital discourse, the distinction between radicalization and political mobilization became increasingly hazy. The use of encrypted applications like Telegram and social media hashtags like #CivilWarPakistan to call for mass defiance showed how PTI propaganda occasionally promoted aggressive, anti-institutional conduct that went beyond the bounds of regular protest (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024). He navigated the delicate balance between superpowers such as the US and China.

However, he should have been politically savvy and opted for dialogue rather than a long, ranting blame game. The results are what we see today: Imran Khans is in jail, his party is in tatters, people in power have stolen mandates and questionable legitimacy, and there is no visible improvement in the standard of the commoner, and there are no strong institutions. That he long promised.

His antithesis reacted, and society is more divided than before, pushing state sovereignty so far. A clash of civilizations was observed in the events of 9th May. It is often termed black day by military elites, a group of influential military leaders who have a significant impact on the country's political decisions, but Khan's adoption of social media at a mass scale does hammer the people's minds (Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, 2024).

Given the long-standing grievances, people opted for violence, more like violent extremism. Online videos showed PTI supporters destroying national symbols, yelling inflammatory chants, and assaulting military sites. These acts were unavoidably linked to the internet echo chambers that normalized and magnified this anger. Where Quaid Azam once resided, the house of a core commander caught

fire. People burned down the memorabilia. Volatility shared in Waziristan is now seen in Punjab and the federal peripheries.

Two political extremes adopted a new yet derogatory perspective on the genesis of language. Terms like "patwari" (for PML-N supporters) and "Youthiya" (for PTI supporters) were coined. These terms are pejorative and mild ways of abusing the opposing voices. The stubbornness of being unwilling to talk to the opposition led to political radicalization, bringing the state to the brink of irreparable division.

Political leaders must realize their responsibility to accommodate all the disparate interests in a politically constituted system, where compromise is indispensable. Bhutto must have invited Sheikh Mujeeb-ur-Rehman to form the 1971 government. He should not have relied on his stubborn acumen to let go of power; the results were two states within one. A wise man must know when to stop, but maybe Khan was not wise politically. Democracy encompasses both an attitude and an understanding, but his experience defined his personality, and his rigidity in political views contributed to further fragmentation (Shmargad & Klar, 2020).

Case Study of Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC)

Social media has transformed the landscape of information dissemination, providing a platform for diverse narratives. However, in societies like Pakistan, characterized by low literacy rates and partial access to critical media education, the population is particularly vulnerable to anti-state and anti-government narratives. This weakness has been exploited by various groups, most notably the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), which has emerged as a significant player in promoting extremist ideologies among the youth. Led by Dr. Mahrang Baloch, the BYC operates under the auspices of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and utilizes social media to disseminate narratives that provoke discontent, incite radicalization, and ultimately harm the socio-political fabric of the nation.

For example, BYC often shares remarks like "The silence of the world on Baloch genocide is criminal" on its official social media website on X (previously Twitter) (Baloch Yakjehti Committee, 2025a). The following is another frequently circulated tweet: "We have the right to resist; state kidnapping of Baloch students will not stifle our identity" (Baloch Yakjehti Committee, 2025b).

These intensely personal postings are not unique; hundreds of online supporters adopt a recurring narrative that portrays the state as an oppressive foe. Such rhetoric immediately encourages followers, especially young people, to adopt a combative attitude.

The Baloch Yakjehti Committee was formed amid the socio-political unrest in Baluchistan, a region plagued by issues of governance, economic deprivation, and human rights violations. Dr. Mahrang Baloch, a prominent figure in Baloch activism, established the BYC as a platform to advocate for the rights of the Baloch people (Baloch, 2023). Her father Abdul Ghaffar Langove was a part of Baloch Awami Party (BAP). The BAP aims to address the issues facing the Baluchistan province through political means and is seen as a moderate political entity (Baloch, 2023). Therefore, BYC underlying agenda aligns closely with that of the BLA, a group recognized for its insurgent activities against the Pakistani state. The BYC serves as a channel for BLA's ideologies, using the guise of advocacy to further its objectives while maintaining a façade of legitimacy.

The BYC employs several tactics to engage and attract youth across various demographics in Pakistan. Notable tactics employed are as follow:

❖ **Narrative Construction**

One of the primary tactics utilized by the BYC is the construction of compelling narratives that resonate with the grievances of the Baloch populace. By framing the struggles of the Baloch people in terms of oppression, victimhood, and the quest for autonomy, the BYC effectively positions itself as a legitimate voice for the marginalized. These narratives often highlight issues such as economic neglect, social injustice, and human rights abuses, thereby fostering a sense of collective identity and solidarity among young people (Iftikhar & Malik, 2023).

❖ **Emotional Appeal**

The BYC's use of emotional storytelling is a powerful tool in attracting youth. By presenting their cause through personal stories of loss, injustice, and resilience, they create an emotional connection that can be difficult to resist. This emotional appeal often romanticizes the idea of resistance and paints the BLA as freedom fighters, encouraging young individuals to see involvement in this struggle as a noble pursuit.

❖ **Social Media Engagement**

BYC leverages social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and Instagram, to disseminate its messages widely. The accessibility and popularity of these platforms allow the BYC to reach a broad audience, particularly the youth, who are prolific users of social media. The committee regularly shares content that includes videos, infographics, and posts that depict the Baloch struggle, often designed to be visually appealing and easily shareable (Ahmed, 2022). This strategy enhances the likelihood of their narratives going viral, thereby amplifying their reach.

❖ **Influencer Collaborations**

Collaborating with social media influencers and human right activists, who align with their ideology has become a key tactic for the BYC. During recent protest in Islamabad, several human rights activists including advocates, civil workers and persons from Amnesty International participated in their protest which further supports their narrative across the country. Influencers possess significant sway over their followers and can effectively legitimize the BYC's narratives (Ahmed, 2022). By engaging these figures to promote their ideas, the BYC expands its reach and influences young minds, making their extremist messages appear more credible and appealing.

❖ **Misinformation and Propaganda**

The group has been accused of disseminating false information to manipulate public perception to incite unrest. This misinformation often targets state institutions and security forces, portraying them as oppressors while simultaneously highlighting the BLA's activities as justified responses to oppression. By creating a narrative of systemic injustice, the BYC effectively galvanizes youth support for the BLA's insurgency. The group actively mobilizes youth through protests, social media campaigns, and calls for international support. These activities not only promote their cause but also create a sense of community among participants. The notion of being part of a larger struggle can lead to increased radicalization, as young individuals may become more willing to adopt extremist views and engage in militant activities.

Impact of BYC in Promoted Radicalization on Pakistani Society

The combination of these tactics has a profound impact on radicalization within society. As the BYC propagates its narratives, it nurtures an environment of distrust

towards the state and its institutions, further polarizing the populace. The emotional connections fostered through storytelling and community mobilization can lead to an "us versus them" mentality, making it easier for individuals to justify radical actions against perceived oppressors.

Additionally, the BYC's ability to frame its struggle as a legitimate fight for rights allows for the normalization of extremist rhetoric. Young individuals, seeking purpose and identity, may find themselves increasingly aligned with the BYC's ideology, leading to greater participation in extremist activities. This dynamic poses a significant threat to societal cohesion and stability, as radicalized youth may resort to violence as a means of achieving their goal (Rahman, 2023).

The rise of extremist narratives and the mobilization of youth by the BYC can contribute to an increase in violence and militancy in the region. As more individuals are drawn into the radicalization process, the likelihood of clashes with security forces increases, leading to a cycle of violence that affects not only the Baluchistan region but also the broader security landscape of Pakistan (Shah, 2024). The activities of the BYC and its connections to militant groups like the BLA is negatively impacting Pakistan's international reputation (Shah, 2024). BYC's online activity and the actual upheaval occurring in places like Turbat and Quetta are increasingly overlapping, according to analysts (Conway, 2017). Although it is challenging to prove direct causality, security authorities are concerned about the group's online propaganda, which regularly echoes themes of resistance and state persecution, and its potential to affect offline mobilization. The portrayal of the Baloch struggle in the context of human rights and self-determination is attracting international attention and criticism, complicating Pakistan's diplomatic relations and affecting foreign aid and support (Conway, 2017).

As a result, the BYC fosters an environment of distrust towards state institutions, normalizes extremist rhetoric, and mobilizes youth participation in protests and activism, thereby promoting radicalization and extremist sentiments across Pakistan.

Sentiment Analysis of BYC Activities

To gauge the impact of BYC's narratives, a sentiment analysis was conducted on their social media activities. Utilizing natural language processing (NLP) tools, following results have been drawn;

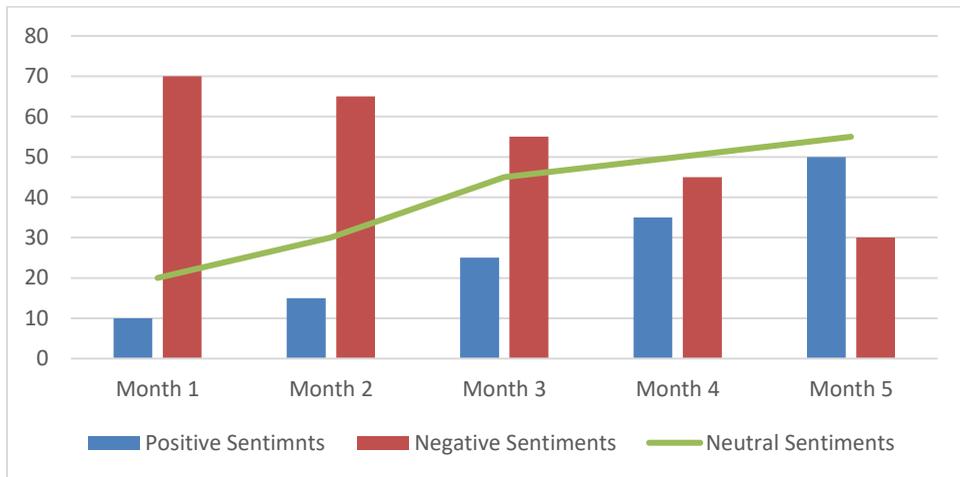


Figure 1. Sentiment Analysis of Posts Shared by BYC Across the Social Media Platforms

Explanation of Figure 1

- Initial Resistance:** In the early months, the overwhelming negative sentiment reflects the initial resistance to BYC's narratives, indicating a lack of acceptance within the broader public.
- Gradual Shift:** As time progresses, positive sentiment increases, suggesting that the BYC's tactics may be gaining traction and that more individuals are resonating with their narratives.
- Normalization of Support:** By Month 5, the increase in positive sentiment indicates a significant shift in public perception, highlighting the effectiveness of the BYC's campaigns in fostering support and legitimizing their cause.

Way forward

A hardcore approach is needed to regulate social media platforms for shared prosperity and a stable society. For that to be addressed and implemented, the will

and wisdom of ruling elites are crucial. Social media's ungoverned and loosely regulated nature is deemed a significant change. The following methods are analyzed to address such issues: -

❖ Regulation of SM

Social media, a platform that holds the key to the digital front's nuclear threshold, is in urgent need of regulation in Pakistan. It is a platform for promotion of digital terrorism (Weimann, 2016). The youth are increasingly radicalized, hate speeches have become commonplace, and extremist and divisive narratives are often amplified. A proactive and collaborative approach involving the ruling parties is crucial to address this evolving nature of radicalization, particularly on social media platforms. The time to act is now.

❖ SM Situational Awareness Tool

A social media tools mainly focused on "grey space," an area where state and non-state actors operate in an information environment- a habitat of social media platforms. Any non-kinetic form of influence, disinformation campaigns, and propaganda that carry radical and extremist cofactors lies in such areas. A tool designed on such a footprint can assess data sources from news outlets, social media platforms, and narrative trends. It could quickly identify the emerging and coordinated social media trends in attack and give the ruling or governing party of social media an upper hand. through which they can quickly devise a response plan while identifying the potential impact of operations carried out in grey space and false flag activities can then easily be identified and tracked down.

❖ Algorithmic Intervention

Revising algorithmic patterns to exclude extremist and radicalized content is crucial in ensuring a fair and balanced online discourse. The employment of attuned moderators to promote such discourse on social media platforms is equally important. This emphasis on fairness and balance is not just a goal but a necessity for maintaining a healthy and democratic online environment (Guess et al., 2023).

❖ Legislative regulation

The ruling parties must develop a legislative body for social media regulation that effectively addresses political bullying on social media and curbs content that burgeons the minds of youth into radical ones. It is more like a social media watchdog that relies only on the causative agents, thereby not limiting social media's diverse narrative or political viewpoints. That method can create a transparent rule sheet for social media users on what is acceptable and what is not.

Conclusion

Pakistan is facing multi-faceted threats both on internal and external fronts—the concept of Capt. Liddell Harts's indirect strategy and 'war of thousand cuts' significantly impacted the character of warfare in the current era. Reliance on social media platforms is on the surge, especially for narrative dissemination. At the same time, the spread of fake news spread, hate speech, and their lethal impact on the destabilizing public sector are all documented. Hence, one can easily decipher how several incidents and campaigns, often disguised as misinformation, contribute to social unrest. This thereby validates the vital role of non-kinetic warfare in Pakistan's security landscape. Being a rational actor, a state is very much susceptible to opposing voices, especially those that come from within. In the era of non-kinetic warfare, propaganda and misinformation create distress among the government and citizens.

Social media, being an open and free platform for freedom of speech, is playing the role of catalyst in promoting radicalization, extremism, and polarization. Societies like Pakistan, where the literacy rate is marginal and people have very little access to real-time evidence, become very prone to misinformation and propaganda campaigns.

In lieu of public sphere theory, the government shall take appropriate measures to mitigate the existence of such threats. If the government guaranteed the creation of a welfare state while providing all necessary rights, such groups that promote anti-state rhetoric would have very little material for formulating such narratives. From a theoretical standpoint, this emphasizes the continued relevance of hybrid warfare concepts and the need to expand Public Sphere Theory to encompass digital information spaces. In practice, it calls on governments to implement multi-

pronged strategies that integrate social programs, strict digital platform control, media literacy training, and civil society participation to strengthen resistance to radicalization. Only by implementing such integrative measures can the state hope to promote social cohesiveness and limit the spread of disruptive propaganda. In parallel, there is a need to encourage counter-narratives that destabilize radical thoughts.

Moreover, groups like PTI and BYC are continuously violating the loopholes of the state, using public sentiments in their favor and creating a 'Us vs Them' mentality across the population. Such notions provoke extremely radical and polarized thoughts in the hearts and minds of fellow citizens. There is a need to apply an algorithmic check and balance procedure across social media platforms and counter-propaganda campaigns to alleviate such radicalization. Formulation of special authority for countering such threats is the need of the hour. Additionally, academia needs to pave the way for ideological clarification of citizens so that they may not be caught off guard in such rare occurrences. The intricate role that algorithms play in influencing public opinion should be the primary focus of future studies, which should also examine how AI-driven content recommendation systems may unintentionally disseminate extreme viewpoints. Empirical research is also required to determine how susceptible various demographic groups—particularly young people and underrepresented communities—are psychologically to online radicalization. Furthermore, Effective counter-narrative tactics and their application in low-literacy situations must also be thoroughly studied, with a focus on multidisciplinary approaches that integrate social policy, psychology, and technology.

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