



## The Effects of Social Media on National Security: An Overview

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### Abstract

*Social media is a new concept that has originated rapidly and has captured the attention of billions. Social Media's quick access to information, and easy links it forms between people, and the easy promotion of business far and wide has allowed it to gain many supporters. Since the internet has emerged as a dominant figure in our society, social media and smart gadgets have given everyone the liberty to make comments and share their point of view and opinions on news stories any time they want. Viewers can record and upload original and selected content that has been most probably captured by them on mainstream media. But many malicious individuals like terrorists and criminals have abused the advantage that social media represents. This piece of writing is to analyze the effects of social media on the country's national security and a better understanding of the usage of social media.*

**Key Words:** Social Media, National Security, Internet, Propaganda, Terrorist Groups

### Introduction

Social media is a collection of virtual communities and platforms. It is a way of sharing, creating, and exchanging information, pictures, videos, and ideas virtually. In this new and advanced generation, social media has emerged to become a very useful and dominant source to connect people all around the world. It doesn't matter where you live; you can use social media to connect with anyone you want (Duggan and Smith, 2014). The development of Social Networking Sites (SNS) have progressively become the most desired and up-to-date platform for linking up people all around the world (Aghazamani, 2010:730-735). These platforms are international and transnational spaces for people to meet online and create social ties. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Skype, MySpace, Twitter,

Viber and Whatsapp are some very popular social platforms nowadays and are widely used all across the globe. These sites have made connecting and linking with others easier and have attracted millions of international users. Many of whom have blended the usage of these applications in their daily routines. These sites have completely altered the way people connect across the world (Haythornthwaite, 2005:125-147). Social media is dependent on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly used platforms that will enable people to share, create, discuss and modify good content. Social media is a hive of advantages. Entertainment, sharing different content and information, and the quick links to information that it provides are only a few examples of this statement.

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## **Understanding the Role of Social Media in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, social media is mounting amongst the people and is becoming a very big factor in the life of many. It has been reported that thirty million people use social media regularly, and the number is escalating rapidly ([Wilson et al. 2014:203:210](#)). There are currently 85 million 3G/4G users in Pakistan, according to Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), and 87 million broadband subscribers. Around 40 million people nationwide use social media. More than a significant 7% increase was observed in social media in the past year. The amount of Pakistani internet users also augmented by 11 million, which meant that it increased almost 17 percent between 2019 and 2020 (Rizvi, 2021). The comfort of the internet is available at a very cheap and reasonable price, thus, it is used by anyone. Currently, Facebook is the most highly used social media site in Pakistan and has nine million users and clients all across the nation. It has been reported that Facebook has one million Pakistani supporters in a month and 44 thousand join consistently. As of reports made in April 2013, it has been showing that Facebook's audience in Pakistan is 70% male and 30% female ([Haque and Polpalzai, 2013](#)). Facebook has turned out to be one of the lines of communication and correspondence between Pakistani Migrants living in European countries and the USA and their families back home ([Ansari et al., 2013:79-84](#)). Nearly 90% of internet users use the Youtube application. It was the most popular online application for streaming music and watching videos/TV. Around 38% of Pakistan's internet users went to YouTube when doing research on their shopping. Research called the 'Journey to Digital' focuses on how the Pakistani population spends and apply their time on the internet. Inclusively, the study said that 47% of internet users belonged to rural areas, and the other 66% were from urban areas. And about 46% of all Pakistanis used the internet on a daily basis. Pakistan's internet usage is at 54% ([The Express Tribune, 2021](#)). But it cannot be denied that social media is also the reason that all this cybercrime is being spread. Pakistan is now constantly under pressure and threats. The usage of social media should be prohibited until a safe and well-organized national

strategy is introduced. Native social media applications can also be devised to minimize cybercrime for the protection of national security. This will keep information inside our boundaries and also raise our economy. It should also be ensured that the information that is displayed on social media is reliable and can be used to the benefit of the country. It is the responsibility of every Pakistani civilian to use social media platforms responsibly and make sure that the information that they post online is not negative. Meanwhile, the government should guarantee that the personal information of the people will not be used in any way, ensuring individual freedom ([Rauf and Zareen 2021](#)). As in the developed countries, citizens are provided with their daily news reports through modern news media. It is the job of the media to aid the people with reliable and unbiased information they need to know to understand international and national situations and updates. But even so, media has always been accused of showing and representing only the point of view of the elite and powerful groups and overlooking the views of the minorities. People that live in suppressive countries and haven't been granted freedom of speech have now been enabled to express their views openly on social media. Media now allows fast and easy global access to information from anyone anywhere ([Sauderson, 2019](#)).

## **Social Media and National Security**

Social media plays a very mixed role in today's society. It is deeply frowned upon by many, but it has become vital for daily social communication and access to the latest news and information. It is a very useful communication tool for local and international people both to share and spread information. It is considered as the fourth pillar of the state. Its part in policy formation to policy implementation is very big. Its role is very influential. Media itself is like an ocean. You either enjoy the advantages of drowning in the waves of its disadvantages. To help ensure national security, social media needs to be a trustworthy, positive, and friendly platform. Hence, it needs a few changes to be made to it. Its approaches need to be mature and should support the government's stances on

policymaking. Media freedom is a positive thing in democratic societies, but regarding national security, media should keep reporting national security decision-making instead of defining it. National security is a very important matter, and Pakistan has great concern for it, so for this, social media needs to have a good role in society ([Ali, 2018](#)). Not only developed countries but newly developing countries also play a big role in the popularity of SNS ([Arif and Moritz, 2014:1-17](#)). According to research conducted recently by the University of Oxford, about 70 states, including India from South Asia, and several Arab and Western countries, have been using and manipulating social media to achieve their foreign and national policy goals. This information has been attained through the latest study conducted by the University of Oxford. The study has also shown that 90% of NSA's have also been manipulating media for recruitment, fundraising, networking, training, and influencing ([Maheem, 2021](#)). It is said that the 2010 Arab spring was also uplifted by social media. Many people call it a Facebook Revolution. Many say that it was triggered by social media. Social media is considered a threat to democracy for a lot of Arabs. It has become a powerful and political medium in the Arab world. In the days of the Arab uprisings, many activists were using social media to make their demands heard. Many people consider this a myth, but it has been confirmed in many places. Maybe Facebook wasn't entirely responsible for the Arab Spring, but it definitely played a big role in the uprising. When the social media platforms realized the true situation and chaos that had been created, everyone believed that it was too little, too late. The destruction had already been done ([Guesmi, 2021](#)).

Countries like China have detected their threats and prescribed western social media giants. They have now created social media platforms of their own for their country. The number of social media users in Pakistan media is large. About 18% of the population of Pakistan is active members of social media. Most of them vary between the ages of 18-24. Fighting cybercrime is getting harder day by day as Pakistan's law enforcement agencies have inadequate resources to fight it off and monitor social media platforms. Anything that

is displayed on social media almost always leaves an influence on its viewers. Modern technology is enabling antagonistic groups to misuse it and pose serious threats to national security. These hostile groups use it to gain favors in subjects like opinion building, propaganda, awareness, and cybercrimes. It is now vital for the government of Pakistan to reach out to its people and spread awareness amongst them to take caution from these groups. As these terrorist and criminal groups continue to scatter propaganda against the state, it is now upon the government to develop native social media platforms to keep the cyber world under its eye ([Rauf and Zareen 2021](#)).

Media can be used as a way to accelerate security awareness. It can change the public's views on the context of security awareness and expand it. Media can also be used to portray a countries image in a positive light at the international level. Media now has the need to adapt a more professional approach in Pakistan, and its freedom shouldn't be prohibited or oppressed. The news coverage should be outside the boundaries of politics and needs to present the public with an independent view. It is on the shoulders of the media to deliver information to the public and educate them, and for that they need to implement a more constructive approach. Media and politics have a strong relation in the modern-day strategic atmosphere. The role of media has now been changed and extended. Political actors now work in environments that have been molded by the media. If the media says something, political leaders work with it. Perceptions are formed by the media. Policies are made through these perceptions, especially during emergencies and times of political change in a country. But media can never be an independent platform. It will either work under pressuring governments, or a financier, as media is now a money-making industry. There are three important theories on the role of the media, as it is determined by its relationship with the state: 1) In the Authoritarian system, the media is under government control. In this system the media will show full-on support towards the government and its policies. Saying anything against the government is forbidden. 2) In the Libertarian system, the media is under anyone who is financially backed up to control it. The purpose of media

in this scenario is to inform discover the truth, and responsibility of the government. 3) In the Social Responsibility system, anyone who wants to say something is allowed to speak out in this system of media ([Fred et al. 1956](#)).

When media and the military meet during a conflict, clashes are unavoidable. The media wants freedom of speech, whereas the military forces wants to win the war and avoid any type of mishaps. The media wants complete access and capability to spread information to the public and audience fast. The military wants to control. Not a good mix. The worst nightmare of military personnel is that something might leak out of the premises and tip off the enemy pre-invasion. But the fear of the media is that the military might repress news coverage to enhance their public image or to stifle their mistakes. These are clashes that are bound to happen and cannot be avoided. But presently, media and the military are working together for national interests, security and public harmony. To fight off the war and counter the aggressive propaganda from across the border, media has played a big part ([Sultan. 2003](#)).

Propaganda is one of the most effective means of warfare. Propaganda is the process of changing the will and opinion of people. Media is sometimes used as a tool for propaganda. Adolf Hitler, including Machiavelli, Chanakya, and many leaders of countries, used propaganda to shape the mind of the public in order to make them like or dislike something. Even this tactic is used by the current leaders of the world ([Michael et al. 1989](#)). History shows that media started to display a very influential role in society during the time of WWII. But the forms of propaganda happening during those times are very different from propaganda nowadays. Propaganda in the USA was in the form of radio, posters, wall graffiti, television, leaflets, and comic art, which all had a powerful effect on its people. Propaganda in Germany was circling around military influence and the perfected image of Hitler. Britain was also using this as a means to flow things in its desired direction. The media portraits during the war were to unite the public ([Ali, 2018](#)). Propaganda against a country outside of its borders is now very common. The personal opinion of someone is masked up as fact and displayed all over the country. The

repeated lies that are being fed into everyone's minds end up putting the desired effect on them. If you are told lies and nothing else, you will, of course, believe those lies ([Michael et al. 1989](#)).

Many people believe that the US marines received much more credit than they deserved in the Gulf War. Military leaders now have started to believe that media coverage not only makes the public aware but it also extends their morale by informing their families, friends, and relatives about their current situation and their achievements. Many Americans were led to believe that they lost the war due to the absolute freedom given to the media in the coverage of the war. Their negative and cynical news angered the public opinion against the conflict. The Pentagon used information security to avoid a situation like Vietnam. They showed the means to blackout the field anytime they wanted to, even with thousands of world media representatives watching. Studies have now proved that in matters of national security, the government has a lot of influence on the media. It's up to the government what is displayed in the media. It decides what information should be let out into the open, how much of it should be shared, and the way that it should be relayed to the public ([Miller. 2003](#)).

Regarding South Asia, the region can be described as a place full of color, culture, and conflict. Poverty is widespread, and battles are common. It is victim to the spiteful relationship of Pakistan and India. Since the partition, both countries have been cold and bitter towards each other. Four wars have been fought while continuing a low-intensity war in Kashmir. South Asia is one of the most militarized zones in the world because of this decade's long hostility. Suspicion has flooded both nations from the very start of independence. The cause of this is due to the security threats in both countries. The security of both countries has remained tense as they have used Kashmir as one of the many factors to sustain the anti-enemy bombast. The security policies of both these nations have always been enemy revolving. India and Pakistan have always believed and assumed that security threats are always external. They don't put the possibility into mind that the threats can be internal and

not always from the enemy. Everyone's mind is carved to be against the enemy. The security policies have been made revolving around each other. The already stressed relations of both countries are being further strained due to misperception and over-analysis of the threat being received. The topics of national security are never challenged or questioned by the media. Media reportage is usually supporting national interest. "The media is expected to follow government views on who is the hero and who is the villain. But in matters of national security, the media is supportive of the policies of both nations" ([Hussain, 2008](#)).

Social media has always been the wingman of riots, terrorist group recruitment, terrorism, gang glorification, attack encouragement and the spread of violence in the world. Negativity is in every nook and cranny of the internet. People show off their talents on platforms like YouTube and Instagram in hopes of finding a tad of fame. Relationships are formed on the ground of the internet. These are some of the many representations of social media in our minds. But many people are using it for malicious and dangerous acts. Activists make connections with each other, slowly binding the amplification of their voices to coordinate actions against the government and law enforcement. Many people make their side of the story heard and change the world in the process. The 2011 Arab spring and the 2011 London riots are two of these controversial yet powerful examples of how national security is being greatly impacted by social media. ([Salik and Iqbal, 2019](#)). "Many terrorist groups nowadays have taken advantage of social media. They are misusing it in all means possible. They use social media to communicate with other cyber-crime groups and manage with them illegal fundraising activities like illegal drug trafficking and smuggling" ([Theohary and Rollins, 2011](#)).

History is proof of how terrorist groups use social media to spread violence and negativity in the world. The terrorists associated with al-Qaeda have always used the internet to spread propaganda about various things about themselves. Their ideology, training guides, recruitment, and attacks have been displayed on the internet. They hold online meetings

where they discuss the procedure of bomb-making, the degrading of their enemies, and most importantly, the recruitment of others in their terrorist group over Twitter, Facebook, and even video games. "Many groups (known as terrorist groups in the west) use disguised names on twitter such as @HSMPress-al-Shabaab, @almanarnews-Hezbollah, @Alqassambirgade-Hamas, @aBalkhi-Taliban, @alsomood-Taliban, @MYC\_Press-AlShabaab" ([Salik and Iqbal, 2019](#)). Nowadays, the terrorist groups that use the cyber world for their own purposes are the Islamic-jihadist ones. Organizations like al-Qaeda use platforms such as YouTube and Facebook to gain jihad supporters and sympathizers. Many of these groups use various tactics to bring people on their side. They sometimes display themselves as heroes to gain even more support from the public. They post videos of successful attacks, publish biographies of martyrs. Aside from proselytism reasons, it is used by Islamist groups for propaganda activities that cause widespread panic in a country. Content that is posted on the internet usually spreads like a wildfire. Due to this reason, false news that is shared by terrorist groups can have a large impact on societies and even entire nations. The information gained through the internet usually surpasses the information gained through newspapers and radios, which are traditional ways of reaching information. During a disastrous event (tsunami, earthquake, pandemic, blast of a nuclear reactor, etc.) if false news is shared, the outcome can be even more disastrous ([Lindsay, 2011](#)). Terrorists or criminal groups can also use the media to spread viruses and destructive malware into people's electronic devices. Twitter and Facebook are used not only to spread propaganda in a country but to hack the electronic devices of its people and insert malicious viruses. Virtual crime and criminals are increasing day by day. People who come from the same regions and know each other personally usually join together on social media to produce negativity and threat. But people who are not personally associated with each other and have never met in person also team up on the internet and form virtual ties. These groups then perform all types of malicious acts on the internet. Human trafficking, drug smuggling, money laundering,

transfer of confidential industrial documents, virtual identity theft and phishing are only a few examples. The use of social media to commit crimes now becomes very common ([Montagnese, 2012](#))

### **Conclusion**

Social media plays an important role in the life of every individual and can influence day to day life of everyone. Social Media can constitute either a threat to national security or can be a useful tool or asset for the protection of the state's national interest. The study focused on the effects of social media on national security. This research established that

social media platforms have far-reaching social and security implications. The study concludes that terrorist organizations used social media as a tool for ideological radicalization, communication and training of its member and thus threatened the security of any state. Future uprisings and conflicts will occur more and more in societies that are connected through the media and other information technologies. Social media has been employed by the military and army in a lot of countries and is going to be employed even more. During a conflict, the use of social media leads to the employment of other mass media for deception activities, propaganda, and influence.

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