

In Rutger Leukfeldt and Thomas J. Holt (Eds.), *The Human Factor of Cybercrime* (pp. 286-309). New York: Routledge (2020). Publisher's open access version [HERE](#).

---

## The Roles of 'Old' and 'New' Media Tools and Technologies in the Facilitation of Violent Extremism and Terrorism

*Ryan Scrivens, Michigan State University*

*Maura Conway, Dublin City University*

**Abstract:** This chapter describes and discusses the roles of media tools and technologies in the facilitation of violent extremism and terrorism. Rather than focusing on how media report on terrorism, we investigate how extremist and terrorist groups and movements themselves have exploited various “traditional” and “new” media tools, from print to digital, outlining the significance that they have had on extremists’ ability to mark territory, intimidate some audiences, connect with other (sympathetic) audiences, radicalize, and even recruit. Underlined is that violent extremists and terrorists of all stripes have, over time, used every means at their disposal to forward their communicative goals. Also worth noting is that ‘old’ media tools are not extinct and while ‘new’ media play a prominent role in contemporary violent extremism and terrorism, ‘old’ tools—everything from murals to magazines—continue to be utilized in tandem with the former.

**Keywords:** violent extremism; terrorism; media tools; Internet

### Introduction

Alfred Nobel’s invention of dynamite in 1867 was the technological breakthrough that ushered in the era of modern terrorism; the economy of means it afforded ensured that terrorist bombings proliferated. High levels of illiteracy in nineteenth century Europe imposed serious limitations on conventional text-based propaganda. Conversely, ‘propaganda by deed’ could show, said the French anarchist Paul Brousse at the time, “the weary and inert masses...that which they were unable to read, teach them socialism in practice, make it visible, tangible, concrete” (as quoted in Townshend, 2002, p. 55). When the anarchist Albert Parsons was arraigned for his alleged involvement in Chicago’s 1886 Haymarket bombing, he proclaimed in court that dynamite “made all men equal and therefore free” (as quoted in Townshend, 2002, p.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

5). However, while terrorist attacks may themselves draw attention and by their target choices and other aspects send some kind of message, successful terrorist campaigns must generally also employ speech, text, and visuals in order to seek to legitimize, rationalize and, ultimately, advertise terrorists' actions. In other words, as Rapoport (1984) reminded us over 30 years ago: "To be noticed is one thing, to be understood is another" (p. 665). 'The media' *qua* the traditional mass media has certainly been employed as a tool by terrorists for these purposes (e.g., 1972 Munich Olympics attack; 1975 Vienna OPEC siege). That is not what is at issue in this chapter however; instead this chapter spotlights the use of media tools directly by terrorists and not 'the media,' in the guise of journalists, as intermediaries. The focus is therefore on the establishment of newspapers, and radio and television stations by violent extremist and terrorist organizations rather than press, radio, and television coverage of terrorist attacks. The definition of 'media tools' utilized in the chapter is wider than these however, encompassing not just 'old' but also 'new' media tools, particularly the Internet, but also incorporating less obvious media tools, such as wall murals and photocopying machines. Underlined in the chapter is that in order to understand new media trends, we must first examine violent extremist and terrorists' 'old' or traditional media forbearers that supply crucial context for contemporary violent extremists and terrorists' online activity including, particularly, the latter's take-up of any and all ready means of communication in whatever era.

In terms of what constitutes 'violent extremism,' we are guided by Berger's (2018) characterization of it as "the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for violent action against an out-group," which violence may be characterized by the aggressors as "defensive, offensive, or preemptive" (p. 46). Terrorism, on the other hand, may be conceived as "violence—or, equally important, the threat of violence—used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim" (Hoffmann, 2006, pp. 2-3). Together, violent extremism and terrorism account for a range of political violence activity by a diversity of actors subscribing to an array of radical beliefs. The media and communication strategies of two particular ideologies are focused on herein: right-wing extremists and violent jihadis—albeit an array of others is referred to also (e.g., nationalist-separatists such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and violent Islamists such as Hizbollah). Violent jihadists are inspired by Sunni Islamist-Salafism and seek to establish an Islamist society governed by their version of Islamic or Sharia law imposed by violence (Moghadam, 2008). Right-wing extremists may also subscribe to some

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

radical interpretation of religion, but unlike those inspired by radical Islam, many extreme right adherents are not inspired by religious beliefs *per se*. Instead, what binds these actors is a racially, ethnically, and sexually defined nationalism, which is typically framed in terms of white power and grounded in xenophobic and exclusionary understandings of the perceived threats posed by such groups as non-whites, Jews, Muslims, immigrants, homosexuals, and feminists. Here the state is perceived as an illegitimate power serving the interests of all but the white man and, as such, right-wing extremists are willing to assume both an offensive and defensive stance in the interests of “preserving” their heritage and their “homeland” (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). As regards the chapter’s structuring, the sections below are ordered chronologically, treating, in turn, early low-tech communication methods or what we term ‘pre-media,’ followed by other relatively low-tech tools, such as print and photocopying. The high-tech tools reviewed are film, radio, and television, followed by the Internet, especially social media.

### **Low-Tech Media Tools: Pre-Media**

Over 30 years ago, Rapoport (1984) argued “there can be no politics without publicity” (p. 663). Yet prior to the establishment of ‘the media’ and easy access to information technology tools, terrorists were restricted in their ability to reach the masses. This did not stop some of the world’s earliest terrorists—such as the Shi’a Muslim group that became known as the Assassins (1090–1275)—getting their message across: “They did not need mass media to reach interested audiences, because their prominent victims were murdered in venerated sites and royal courts, usually on holy days when many witnesses would be present” (Rapoport, 1984, p. 665). These witnesses would then travel back to their towns and villages, orally spreading news of the murderous events to which they had borne witness. Complete non-access to means of communication beyond the directly spoken word was and is rare however. Apart from the latter, wall paintings—graffiti, murals, or other works of art executed directly on walls—are probably the most low-tech communication tools with the capacity to reach a wide audience.

Although primitive in some respects, historically murals have been a powerful communication tool for violent extremist and terrorist groups (Matusitz, 2014), including extreme-right (Heschel, 2008), nationalist-separatist (Rolston, 1991), and Islamist movements (Marzolph, 2003). Plastered on walls, other large permanent structures, and even on the roofs of public buildings, violent extremist and terrorist groups have widely used pieces of artwork or

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

artistic renderings of text for communicative purposes, oftentimes in geographic spaces that are home to clashing ethnic or religious groups (Matusitz, 2014). Murals tend to serve at least two functions: (1) they act as territorial markers: a terrorist group—or those who support the group or cause—will etch out a perimeter, oftentimes in a public space, which they claim control over thereby also segregating themselves from “enemy” communities; (2) they act as a form of political communication: instrumental communication devices or a “landscape of identity” to inform or remind multiple audiences—from the local to the global—about *why* they should take notice of a particular violent extremist or terrorist group or movement (our italics; Matusitz, 2014, p. 167).

Murals in support of right-wing terrorist (RWT) groups or ideologies are not only used to mark or claim territory, they are used to send a message to a particular group of people that they are not welcome. Notable examples include the Nazi terror campaigns in Germany prior to and during World War II and the ‘Ku Klux Klan’ (KKK) in the southern regions of the United States (U.S.) following the Civil War. To illustrate, in the mid-1930s, the Nazis in Germany used wall murals to mark their “turf” on the one hand, and systematically unite and mobilize the Nazi movement on the other, oftentimes by painting murals that romanticized their Aryan Jesus as a strong, handsome, muscular, blonde, and pure-hearted figure, while simultaneously depicting Jews and Jewishness as the root of all evil (Heschel, 2008). One of the most active RWT groups in the 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. was the KKK, which also communicated messages of intimidation and hate through murals. As but one example, in the 1950s, two identical KKK murals, featuring an image of a Klansman riding a black horse and holding a burning cross high in the air as the horse stood on its hind legs, were painted on the north and south walls of a bank in a city in Tennessee (Wilson, 2004).

Such murals did not become extinct with the shift to mass media. Murals, for example, played a role in the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ from the late 1960s. They are still found all over Northern Ireland, but are most prevalent in working class areas of Belfast and Derry cities. In terms of marking territory, probably the most well-known Northern Ireland mural is located in Derry, where the text “You Are Now Entering Free Derry” was first painted on the side of a house in the Republican Bogside area of the city in 1969. Both the sentiment and technique was emulated by Loyalists who later painted the “You Are Now Entering Loyalist Sandy Row” mural in Belfast. In terms of political communication, it is estimated that throughout the period of the

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

‘Troubles’ (1969–1998), some 2,000 murals of varying quality appeared and disappeared. Many of these explicitly supported either Irish Republican or Ulster Loyalist terrorist groups, including the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF); others commemorated the perpetrators or victims of terrorist attacks. Not all Northern Irish murals are explicitly political and it is increasingly common, following 1998’s Good Friday peace agreement, for wall paintings undertaken by school and community groups to be non-political or have messages of peace. At the same time, many of the most explicitly hateful and explicit murals have been decommissioned.

Murals are still utilized by some extremist and terrorist groups today. Rather than using the term ‘mural(s),’ Johnson (2017) refers to ‘graffiti’ when discussing the Taliban’s wall writing activity, which he says “primarily aims to mark territory friendly or sympathetic to the Taliban’s cause and objectives, while offensive graffiti (threatening messages) aims at intimidating or ‘marking’ undecided or pro-government communities” (pp. 102-104). The so-called ‘Islamic State’ (IS) has also made extensive use of murals in towns and cities controlled by them. Large renderings of their black and white ‘logo’ were painted on walls and rooftops in Mosul, Raqqa, Tal Afar, and numerous other locations in Iraq and Syria. In a Blog post discussing IS murals, Al-Tamimi (2015) supplies a photo of, for example, an IS mural on a double archway stretching over a road showing the IS logo and the text “The Islamic State [Ninawa Province; Locality of Tel Afar] Welcomes You”(p. 2). Similar to the Taliban, many IS murals were wholly text-based, often featuring quotes from prominent jihadi figures or IS slogans, such as the well-known “Remaining and expanding” (Al-Tamimi, 2015, p. 5). The prominence of text-only murals in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria can be explained by the prohibition in Islam on depictions of people and animals. Finally, worth mentioning here is that after IS’s loss of their Iraqi ‘capital,’ Mosul, in summer 2017, observed was IS murals “being painted over with Iraqi flags, white doves bearing olive branches and the hashtag ‘Make it more beautiful’” (Solomon, 2017, p. 1). Having said this, the commissioning and de-commissioning of wall paintings—a form of ‘pre-media’—continues to resonate even in the Internet age.

## **Low-Tech Media Tools: Print and Photocopying**

### *Newspapers, Magazines, and Billboards*

In their seminal contribution to the study of terrorism and media, *Violence as Communication* (1982), Alex Schmid and Janny De Graaf point out that:

Before technology made possible the amplification and multiplication of speech, the maximum number of people that could be reached simultaneously was determined by the range of the human voice and was around 20,000 people. In the nineteenth century, within one lifetime, the size of an audience was expanded twenty-five to fifty times. In 1839 the New York Sun published a record 39,000 copies; in 1896, on the occasion of President McKinley's election, two US papers, belonging to Pulitzer and Hearst, for the first time printed a million copies. William McKinley paid dearly for this publicity. In 1901 he was killed by an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, who explained his deed with the words: 'For a man should not claim so much attention, while others receive none' (p. 10).

Violent extremists and terrorists of all stripes have exploited the power of the printing press to systematically expand their "fan" bases, garner new recruits, and gain support amongst broader publics.

The printing press was certainly an enabler in the Nazi Party's transformation of Germany in the inter-war years into a totalitarian state built on racism, hatred, and fear of the 'other' (Herf, 2006; Koonz, 2003; Welsh, 1993). Newspapers were but one of many print-propaganda tools, not only to systematically suppress, instill fear in, and terrorize those who were perceived as less than the Germanic peoples, but to unite and mobilize the Nazi movement, as well as recruit new members. In the 1920s, for example, Hitler and his Nazi Party re-established a daily propagandistic newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* ('People's Observer') (c. 1920–1945), which disseminated Nazi ideology targeting, amongst other things, the weaknesses of parliamentary government, the national humiliation wrought by the Versailles Treaty, and the evils associated with Jews and Bolshevism. At its height in 1929, the newspaper reached over 26,000 readers daily (Welsh, 1993).

Print magazines were also a staple Nazi media tool. German Nazis used magazines for an array of propaganda purposes during the Third Reich (1933–1945) including, for example, providing magazine editors with guidelines about which topics were appropriate for publication and alerting a wide audience to guidelines about types of race relations that were and were not acceptable (Koonz, 2003). Audience segmentation occurred through the distribution of women's magazines (e.g., *NS-Frauen-Warte*), which supplied a "better" understanding about what the Nazis were doing for women, as well as guidelines about women's roles in the Nazi state (Rupp,

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

1978). Also worth mentioning here is the bi-weekly magazine *Signal* (1940–1945), published by the unified armed forces of Nazi Germany as a “slick” and “glossy” propaganda tool designed for readers in neutral, allied, and occupied countries (Meyer, 1976). Appearing in 30 languages, *Signal* published as many as 25 issues and reached as many as 2.5 million readers in 1943. Its contents included an array of relatively high-quality images, alongside detailed information about Nazi Germany and its ‘New Order’ as the great benefactor of European people, omitting anti-Semitic propaganda (Meyer, 1976).

In addition, front and center in the Nazi propaganda efforts was an “artistic” yet hateful poster campaign, which—similar to wall murals—marked German-occupied territories in the 1930s and 1940s. Unlike newspapers and magazines, which one generally had to seek out, posters were difficult to avoid (Rhodes, 1976). To illustrate, from 1936 to 1943, an estimated 125,000 posters were placed in public spaces with a high traffic flow of pedestrians (e.g., train carriages, buses, station platforms, ticket windows) for the purposes of educating and unifying the German people (Herf, 2006). Poster campaigns, which were a blend of political posters, leaflets, newspaper editorials, and tabloid journalism, primarily targeted Jews and the allied countries of Great Britain, the U.S., and Russia, all while simultaneously depicting the Aryan race as superior. The visual effect of these posters was striking, as they contained bold lettering and Nazi influenced colors as a means of capturing the attention of those passing by (Herf, 2006).

Across the Atlantic in the 1920s, RWT groups in the U.S. were developing their own propaganda machine. In 1921, the second wave of the Klan developed their own press after facing growing criticism from the public about their “hate-propagating tactics and deeds” (Cutlip, 1994, p. 396). The emergence of the U.S. tabloid press at around the same time was viewed by the KKK as a key opportunity for them to showcase their Klan identity and, by extension, present their radical messages to the public by reframing themselves as more “consumable.” As Harcourt (2017) explains:

[T]he Klan publications that were created are revealing. Klan newspapers were shaped by, and reflected, an accommodation to modern press trends – particularly in the tabloidization of news. Perhaps the clearest example of the commingling of these cultural strands was the collision of the Klan’s anti-modern rhetoric with the puzzle craze that gripped the emerging consumerist society. The porous boundaries of cultural division in the 1920s were on full display in the popularity of the “Fiery Cross-Word Puzzle” (p. 31).

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

What constituted ‘news’ was changing from traditional broadsheets to tabloid newspapers, and RWT groups in the U.S., particularly their public relations teams, took advantage of this development by introducing such newspapers as the *Searchlight* (1921–1924), an Atlanta-based publication that promoted “Free Speech: Free Press: White Supremacy” and was the rival of the official Klan tabloid *The Imperial Night-Hawk* (see Cutlip, 1994).

Magazines were also an important component of the Klan’s media and information strategy during this time. Perhaps the most notable output of the Klan’s printing presses was the *Fellowship Forum* (1923–1937). This 12-page weekly, unlike its predecessors, was circulated to a national audience, and by 1925 had reached five million regular readers—some of whom were international (Harcourt, 2017). Not only did the *Forum* maintain its readership during a period in which the KKK’s official press network began to collapse (i.e., c.1925 onward), but it did so in large part because it was developed as a “respectable mainstream weekly” that also tailored itself to Klansmen (Harcourt, 2017, p. 49). Throughout the 1950s, newspapers continued to be the medium of choice for the U.S. radical right movement more broadly. In 1958, for example, prominent U.S. white supremacist Edward Field launched *The Thunderbolt* (1958), which became a leading white power newspaper, succeeded in the late 1980s by *The Truth At Last*, which only ceased publication in 2008 (Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2008). Today, the KKK’s official newspaper is *The Crusader*.

The Klan also has a long history of billboard advertising. As far back as Christmas 1923, the corner of a busy street in Des Moines, Iowa, featured a Klan billboard that read “STOP! When you speed you violate the law. Good citizens uphold the law. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.” Comparably, Sims (1996) describes how in the mid-1960s:

...billboards encouraging motorists to JOIN AND SUPPORT UNITED KLANS OF AMERICA INC. became as commonplace as Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club Greetings. Each year the Klan paid five dollars per sign for a state permit to advertise like Coca Cola and Philip Morris” (p. 29).

Similar billboards are still observable today in, especially, southern U.S. states. Thomas Robb, the ‘National Director’ of the KKK, has, for example, erected billboards throughout the area around Harrison, Arkansas, that display messages such as “Diversity is a code for #whitegenocide.” Other extreme right groups have followed suit, with the secessionist League of the South erecting billboards in Arkansas and Tennessee urging motorists to “#Secede” (Schulte, 2017).



## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Historically, Islamist movements, too, have utilized ‘old’ forms of mass media to disseminate their message widely, recruit new members, and legitimize their cause. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood provides a prime example of this propaganda tactic, as they were avid users of the printing press from the 1930s. In 1933, the Brotherhood purchased a printing press and established a publishing company, thus starting a tireless effort to produce various newspapers over the course of the next decade, including launching their own weekly newspaper that was available from 1933 to 1938 and again from 1942 to 1946, and that became a daily from 1946 to 1948 (Ghanim, 1992; Lia, 1998). This print media featured articles that warned its readers about Zionism in general and Jews in particular, drawing distinctions between both groups, but boycotting Egyptian Jews on the basis that they were allegedly financing Zionist groups in Palestine (Lia, 1998; Mitchell, 1993). Funding to support such initiatives was raised by creating a joint-stock company, in which only Brotherhood members were allowed to buy shares (Lia, 1998). The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood also printed an array of magazines from the late 1930s to the late 1950s, including the weekly magazines *Al-Nazir* (1938–1939) and *Al-Manar* (1939–1940) and the monthly magazines *Al-Shahab* (1947–1948) and *Al-Da’wa* (1951–1957) (Ghanim, 1992). In addition to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hizbollah, Hamas, and a range of other Islamist groups too have long histories of printing and circulating a variety of daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and magazines. Hizbollah’s weekly newspaper, *Al-Ahed* (‘The Pledge’), was launched on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1984, for example, and was followed by the weeklies *Al-Bilad*, *Al-Wahda*, *El-Ismailya*, and the monthly *Al-Sabil* (Conway, 2007a).

In terms of IS’s media strategy, the vast bulk of attention has been paid to their online activity. IS also established and circulated a weekly Arabic language newspaper called *Al-Naba* in territory controlled by them from approximately July 2015 however. *Al-Naba* was also available online from December 2015, but as Mahlouly and Winter (2018) recently noted, “its primary audience, at least between 2015 and 2018, appears to have been civilians and combatants living inside the group’s territories in Syria and Iraq” (p. 14). There are more than 100 official IS photographs available showing hardcopies of the newspaper being distributed, oftentimes prior to its appearance online (see Mahlouly & Winter, 2018, pp. 15-16, for a selection of these). As Mahlouly and Winter (2018) further explained: “Al-Naba’s structure and form are meticulously consistent: for the most part written in standardized media Arabic, it always features a combination of short and long articles with two full-page infographics” (p. 16).

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Containing photographs, announcements, military updates, and essays, its 139<sup>th</sup> issue had appeared at time of writing (mid-July 2018). Originally 16 pages in length, it was shortened to 12 pages from the 105<sup>th</sup> edition.

Al-Tamimi (2013) describes IS billboarding as a form of *da'wah* or Islamic religious outreach or proselytization and says that those in Raqqa routinely included the text “From your brothers in the *da'wah* office: Raqqa” (p. 5). Unlike its murals, IS billboards often combined text and sophisticated imagery. Al-Tamimi (2015) supplies examples of some of these, including one showing a fighter jet, a missile, IS fighters, and an IS flag, with accompanying text reading “The Messenger of God said: ‘Whoever dies and has not launched a raid/operation or resolved to launch an operation, he has died among the division of hypocrisy’” (pp. 2-3). Another very common subject of IS billboards was instruction on correct womanly behavior and attire. These billboards often showed black woman-type shapes and admonishments to wear full *niqab*. Many also featured flowers and other feminine design elements, including utilizing a pastel color palette (see Al-Tamimi 2013 and 2015 for examples). On the other hand, in a twist on this theme, in 2016 American Muslims in Chicago, Phoenix, St. Louis, and elsewhere funded a series of billboards stating, in large black and white lettering, “HEY ISIS. YOU SUCK!!! Life is Sacred (Quran 5:32). From: #ActualMuslims” (Norton, 2016).

### *Photocopying*

Brazilian Leftist Carlos Marighela’s *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerilla* (1969) contains a section on ‘Armed Propaganda,’ which states:

...the urban guerrilla must never fail to install a clandestine press, and must be able to turn out mimeographed copies using alcohol or electric plates and other duplicating apparatus, expropriating what he cannot buy in order to produce small clandestine newspapers, pamphlets, flyers and stamps for propaganda and agitation against the dictatorship.

The urban guerrilla engaged in clandestine printing facilitates enormously the incorporation of large numbers of people into the struggle, by opening a permanent work front for those willing to carry on propaganda, even when to do so means to act alone and risk their lives (p. 30).

Mimeographs were superseded by photocopiers, so essentially Marighela was advocating for the widespread use of photocopying. And, indeed, the latter’s widespread availability from the 1970s, marked the beginnings of ‘small’ or personal media use for campaigning purposes.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Through the simple use of a photocopier, violent extremists and terrorists could mass produce posters, stickers, or flyers cheaply and at their convenience. Daniels (2009) points to how the extreme-right, amongst other movements, have exploited personal media and information tools both prior to and during the Internet era: “social-movement organizations can and do effectively engage in activism by relying solely on non-Internet-based forms of communication, such as landline telephones and printed materials sent via fax or postal mail” (p. 113). For example, David Lane, an American white supremacist leader and member of the terrorist group The Order, used an office photocopier in the early 1980s to produce thousands of copies of his first pamphlet, ‘The Death of the White Race,’ which was later distributed around Denver neighborhoods (Michael, 2009). Similar to ‘pre-media’ therefore, the employment of low-tech media tools, such as printing and photo-copying technology, have been in use by violent extremist and terrorist outfits from when such technologies first became relatively widely available, right up to the present time.

### **High-Tech Media Tools: Sound and Vision**

#### *Radio*

Radio broadcasting gained remarkable popularity amongst the general public in the Western world post-World War I, with the communication strategies of extreme right groups, including the Nazis in Germany (Welsh, 1993) and the Klan in the U.S. (Harcourt, 2017) in turn shaped by these—in this context—‘new’ technologies.

When Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, he saw the radio as an opportunity to disseminate his Nazi message to the masses; soon after his speeches and Nazi propaganda were being broadcast not only across Germany, but in German-occupied countries and enemy states. In fact, Hitler’s speeches were so significant to the Nazi brand that they were widely advertised in weekly poster campaigns, and re-printed in book and pamphlet formats. In fear that their audience would not tune in, or worse, Germans would tune in to enemy propaganda broadcasts, the Nazis took active steps to make radio sets cheap to its citizens, as well as broadcast an array of Nazi-leaning programs with non-propaganda elements, including music, advice, and tips (Koonz, 2003). Nazi propaganda was expected to be aired on restaurant and pub radios across Germany, as well as in the homes of German residents (Bywerk, 2008).

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

The Klan also exploited the communicative power of radio broadcasting in the post-World War I period. In 1923, for example, the first reported Klansman to contribute to a radio broadcast, Imperial Wizard Hiram Evan, addressed “the Klansmen of the Nation” from station WOQ in Kansas City, Missouri (Harcourt, 2017). In 1924, ‘Hamilton County Klan’ was reported as one of the first Klan programs broadcast from a government licensed radio station. It featured lectures by KKK members and “light” entertainment delivered by Klan musicians (Harcourt, 2017). Klan radio programming became increasingly popular in the U.S. in the 1920s: “a smashing hit,” according to one Klan newspaper. The Klan’s *Searchlight* newspaper also regularly published a column aimed at amateur radio enthusiasts (Harcourt, 2017). Klan members even managed to form alliances with one of the most powerful broadcasters in the Midwest, KFKB of Milford, Kansas. In 1925, the station featured Klan members on a fairly regular basis, including KKK lectures and music selections (Harcourt, 2017). But the Klan’s most favored broadcasting station was New York City’s WHAP, which three times a week in 1926 broadcasted anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic sentiment. Klan newspapers and magazines, including the *Fellowship Forum* and *Kourier Magazine* praised WHAP for being one of the few stations to spread their message (Harcourt, 2017). From its establishment in 1926, however, the U.S. Federal Radio Commission (FRC) made it increasingly difficult for groups such as the Klan to acquire a broadcast licence and transmit material that was both “undesirable and obnoxious to [...] religious organizations” and deemed not in the “public interest, convenience or necessity” (Harcourt, 2017, p. 151).

U.S. talk radio’s growth followed decades of deregulation, including the 1987 revocation of the Fairness Doctrine, a way by which the Federal Communications Commission attempted to regulate content produced by licensed broadcasters. The subsequent rise of conservative talk radio had enormous influence and continues to attract millions of listeners daily, well into the Internet age. Some stations and programs are no longer simply conservative in their orientation however, but fall squarely into the extreme right category. Contemporary extreme right radio’s most conspicuous exponent is InfoWar’s Alex Jones. He hosts *The Alex Jones Show* on the Genesis Communications Network, which airs on more than 90 AM and FM stations, and at least one shortwave station, across the U.S., and also online. Jones is an infamous conspiracy theorist. The aggressively pro-gun Jones is, for example, a Sandy Hook ‘truther.’ He believes, in other words, that the slaying of 20 six and seven-year-old children in their elementary school in

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Connecticut in December 2012 never took place and is an elaborate fake. He has also accused the U.S. government of involvement in 1995's Oklahoma City bombing and the 9/11 attacks. Jones started his career in his home town of Austin, Texas with a live, call-in format public-access cable television show. In 1996, he switched from television to radio, hosting a show called *The Final Edition* on the former KJFK 98.9 FM, also in Austin. In 1999, KJFK-FM fired him for refusing to broaden his topics beyond conspiracies and similar. He thus began airing his program online from his home. As far back as 2010, the program was reported as attracting some two million listeners weekly. While Jones has emerged as the most famous U.S. far right radio 'shock jock,' he is certainly not alone. For example, one of the Knights Club of the KKK-sponsored billboards in Harrison, Arkansas mentioned earlier, features an image of a young girl, the text "It's not racist to [heart] your people," and the URL of White Pride Radio. While the latter URL currently resolves to altrightv.com, which is no longer reachable, a host of other white supremacist radio stations and programs continue to attract listeners. These include Don Black's long-running Stormfront program, which streams online for an hour every weekday, and National Vanguard Radio, which focuses on "the anti-White agenda," "White survival," and similar topics.

IS's radio station *Al-Bayan* or 'The Dispatch' was first heard in early 2015. Originally airing on an FM frequency in Mosul, Iraq, it was shortly also airing in Raqqa, Syria and, for a short time, also in Libya. Described by an Iraqi Joint Operation Command spokesman as "one of the strongest" propaganda tools for the militants in Mosul, the Mosul station reportedly went off air in early October 2016 after it was bombed by Iraqi government jets (NBC News, 2016). *Al-Bayan* had a dedicated website, but which was also subject to frequent disruption. IS sought to evade domain takedowns by slightly changing the station's URL each time it reappeared; once a domain such as, for example, al bayan.com was deleted by authorities, IS would utilize a different but very similar URL, such as by adding an extra character (i.e., albayaan.com), or choose a new domain suffix for the site (e.g., '.org'). News bulletins were also, at different points in time, delivered through Twitter and other social media sites. In addition to Arabic language broadcasts, *Al-Bayan* was known to broadcast in English, French, Russian, with one English language news reader described as having "a smooth, male voice with an American accent"

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

(Sharma, 2015, p. 1).<sup>1</sup> Following a February 2017 takedown of the station’s website, an updated version was reported as appearing online that included “options for high and low bandwidth playback and a link to a Firefox browser plugin to enable streamlined playback with the click of a button” (Daftari, 2017, p. 1). Earlier, in February 2016, it was reported that AKP files—used to install software on Android systems—for an *Al-Bayan* radio app were circulating on IS-linked social media accounts (Tasch, 2016). The station was widely reported as being played loudly over speakers in public places, such as markets and the like, in areas controlled by IS (NBC News, 2016).

### *Film and Television*

The year that witnessed the birth of modern international terrorism, 1968, was the same year in which the U.S. launched the first television satellite, heralding the second great revolution in mass communications that directly impacted extremism and terrorism (Carruthers, 2000; Chaliand, 1985; Hoffman, 2006; Schmid & De Graaf, 1982). In light of these developments, worth noting is that while television marked the birth of modern international terrorism in the late 1960s, roughly 30 years prior, German Nazis took active steps to make their extremist campaign international without the use of television. As early as the 1930s, the Nazi Party exploited film to expand their propaganda efforts and reach an international audience. The KKK also made efforts in this respect at around the same time, but the Nazis were much more successful than the Klan at using film to reach an international audience. Interestingly, no extreme right organization has had the wherewithal to establish its own television station. Prior to IS, the group with the best-known televisual output was Lebanon’s Hizbollah and their *Al-Manar* television station.

In addition to radio, in the 1930s, film also assisted Hitler’s propaganda to reach an international audience (Welsh, 1993). Nazis came to dominate the nascent German film industry, which they viewed as a means of influencing German culture, education, and entertainment. Their nationalistic films, including ‘Triumph of Will’ (1935), featured footage of German soldiers marching to militaristic tunes and speeches from Nazi leaders. They also produced “documentaries,” such as ‘The Eternal Jew’ (1940), which portrayed Jewish people as cultural hedonists and parasites. German schools were provided motion picture projectors as a means of

---

<sup>1</sup> The voice can be heard on a Quilliam Foundation-produced clip about the station entitled ‘Islamic State’s Al-Bayan radio station’ and posted to YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUBbwa0FvPs>.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

providing students with “military education” (Rhodes, 1976). In the U.S., the Klan also saw the development of cinematography as an opportunity to inject messages of hate into mainstream culture. The movie industry was fast-growing in America in 1915 when the KKK released the film ‘The Birth of a Nation,’ which celebrated the original late 19<sup>th</sup> century Klan (Cutlip, 1994). During its height in the 1920s, Klan members developed their own film enterprise, producing feature films such as ‘The Toll of Justice’ (1923) and ‘The Traitor Within’ (1924), both of which were advertised with poster campaigns as well as screened in churches and schools, and at outdoor events (Rice, 2015).

Following ‘the sanitary decades’ (1940s–1950s) (i.e., a period after World War II in which ‘fascism’ was a dirty word), television played a role in propelling the extreme right message anew (Hoffman, 2006; Schmid & De Graaf, 1982). During the 1980s, for example, television repairman and founder of White Aryan Resistance (WAR), Tom Metzger, developed a cable-access television show called ‘Race and Reason,’ which during its height aired in 62 cities in 21 U.S. states (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). Formatted as a “talk show,” the program featured interviews with ‘Aryan’ activists about “white rights” and other race-related issues (Simi & Futrell, 2015).<sup>2</sup> No group succeeded in actually establishing their own television station however. Islamist groups like Hizbollah, on the other hand, were pioneers in developing their own stations (Hoffman, 2006).

*Al-Manar*, the ‘Beacon’ or ‘Lighthouse,’ in Arabic, has been described as the “jewel in Hizbollah’s media crown” (as quoted in Conway, 2007a, p. 402), but labelled a ‘Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity’ by the U.S. government, it was banned by them in December 2004. Live footage of Hizbollah operations appeared for the first time in 1986, with coverage of the invasion of the Israeli-occupied Sujud fort in south Lebanon, and was distributed to those Lebanese television stations in operation at that time. According to Hizbollah’s second-in-command, Naim Qassem, “[f]ollowing the first television broadcast of this operation, the camera became an essential element in all resistance operations” (as quoted in Conway 2007, p. 402). The establishment of *Al-Manar* followed shortly thereafter; its first broadcast was Iranian revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini’s June 1989 funeral. The *Al-Manar* satellite station was launched in 2000 and is now one of the top-ranked television stations in the Arab world. *Al-*

---

<sup>2</sup> Metzger also made frequent appearances on national talk shows; his son also appeared on the ‘Geraldo’ television programme, which left Geraldo Rivera, the show’s host, with a broken nose after an infamous brawl.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

*Manar*, however, has been criticized for, among other things, its anti-Semitic content, circulating the conspiracy theory that Israel was behind the 9/11 attacks and broadcasting a drama series entitled *Al-Shattat* ('The Diaspora'), based on the controversial 19th-century *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which depicts a Zionist conspiracy to take over the world (Conway, 2007a). These and other reasons caused it to be banned from broadcasting in, amongst other jurisdictions, France (2005) and the U.S. (2006), but with this being entirely circumventable via *Al-Manar*'s continuous free live online streaming (Conway, 2007a). The latter was, however, just one of the innovations ushered in by increased access to the Internet by a wide variety of violent extremist and terrorist groups and their supporters from the mid-1990s.

### **High-Tech Communication Tools: Online Multimedia**

As Ranstorp (2007) put it, "[t]he role of the media as the oxygen of publicity would take on a new added meaning, urgency and complexity with globalization and the instruments of cyberspace" (pp. 1-2). Illustrated in this section is that while the Internet and the ways in which it operates is in some ways quite distinct from 'older' media forms, significant overlaps also exist. Having said this, the Internet's increasing ubiquity is causing us to communicate, think and ultimately live differently. Indeed, today's world is interactive in ways that are strikingly new in their orders and intensity at all levels (Appadurai, 1996). This has caused some media theorists to describe ours as a 'convergence culture': "convergence represents a cultural shift, as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). Convergence is occurring at the levels of both production and distribution; newspapers, television and music once had very different physical productions, but can now be produced via a single high-end mobile phone or other handheld devices, such as tablets. At the distribution level, previously discrete channels are absorbed into a single-networked online process, with news, music, and so on, all accessed through the Internet. Convergence is also occurring at the level of content with, for example, news and entertainment being combined and recombined in new ways.

Violent extremists and terrorists have been undeniably quick to adopt and use every emerging online platform at their disposal, exploiting convergence culture through the use of Internet-based media tools. Many journalists and policymakers, however, have only in recent years come to an awareness of the use of the Internet by such actors. This "discovery" is, by and



## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

large, a result of IS's announcement of their so-called 'caliphate' and their release via the Internet of a steady stream of video-taped beheadings of Western hostages and other atrocity footage, including mass shootings, stonings, and crucifixions, beginning in summer 2014. IS's violence, including the Internet's role as its means of dissemination, has attracted significant news media attention globally. Journalists, policymakers, and others have come to view IS's Internet activity as a core mechanism of their 'success' and that activity has thus taken on something of a mythic status. The terrorism-Internet nexus has a much lengthier history than this however.

### *Web 1.0: Bulletin Board Systems, Websites, and Online Forums*

Along with a history of violence, the extreme right has a very long online history, dating to the earliest days of the public Internet in the mid-1980s. American white nationalist Louis Beam, an early advocate of 'leaderless resistance,' established and ran a bulletin board system (BBS) known as *Aryan Nation Liberty Net* accessible from at least 1984 via telephone numbers in the U.S. states of Idaho, Texas, and North Carolina. It allowed anybody with a computer and a modem to gain 'dial-up' access to a variety of hate propaganda and to leave their own hate messages. Similarly, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) described in a 1985 report how:

[T]he Aryan Nations' network supplies under the heading of "enemies" a listing of the addresses and phone numbers of the Anti-Defamation League's national and regional offices. In the same category are listed what the Aryan Nations refers to as "informers" for the "Zionist Occupational Government," its name for the United States government. Another group of "enemies" is labeled "race traitors" and is accessible, the network claims, only to callers with special clearance.

Also provided are the names and addresses of so-called patriotic organizations, including a variety of neo-Nazi, Klan and armed racist groups such as the Christian Patriots Defense League and the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord. The computer supplies dates and locations of their meetings (pp. 2-3).

Nor was Beam's service the only such BBS operating at this time, another U.S.-based service known as *Info International* was established and run by George Dietz, the owner of a notorious extreme right publishing company, *Liberty Bell Publications* (Anti-Defamation League, 1985).

The Internet first became publicly accessible in 1991, and during this time, Florida-based *Stormfront* proudly described itself as "the first White Nationalist site on the Web" (Oldham, 1998, p. 1). As early as 1996, *Stormfront's* Don Black asserted that "Organizations have

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

recruited through Stormfront, and through their Web pages that we've linked to" (Kanaley, 1996, p. 1). The original *Stormfront* was more website than forum, containing a 'Quote of the Week,' 'Texts Library' of 'White Nationalist' documents, a letters page, an assortment of cartoons, and a downloadable graphics section. The 'Hot Links' page featured connections to like-minded sites such as those maintained by Aryan Nations, William Pierce's National Alliance, and Posse Comitatus. Some of these websites framed themselves as "news" (such as 'National Vanguard News' and 'Life Site News') or "educational" sites (such as 'DavidDuke.com' and 'American Renaissance') (Daniels, 2009), and included links to an array of content and services, from "Whites only" dating services to white power music and racist video games (Back, 2002).

The earliest research into the intersection of explicitly terrorism and the Internet focused on the possibility of the emergence of cyberterrorism (i.e., a terrorist attack using or targeting the Internet) (e.g., Collin, 1997; Devost et al., 1997; National Research Council, 1991). By the mid-1990s, however, actually-occurring instances of terrorists' Internet use began drawing the attention of researchers, eventually coalescing around five broad types or categories of such use: information provision, financing, networking, recruitment, and information gathering (see Conway, 2006). Influence was identified as an important function, but not singled out at this stage; radicalization was a concept not yet in wide circulation in terrorism analysis (Awan, Hoskins, & O'Loughlin, 2012). In 1998, approximately half of the (then) 30 groups designated as 'Foreign Terrorist Organisations' under the U.S. Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 operated websites, including Hamas, Hizbollah, the Tamil Tigers, and others. These groups oftentimes portrayed their radical content as "news," but with the vast majority of the content featuring fierce criticism of Western foreign policy and a focus on violence perpetrated by the groups' adversaries as a means to justify their own use of violence (Seib & Janbek, 2011). Other sites run by supporters of terrorist groups (e.g., 'Kalamullah' and 'Islam Web') were disguised as "educational" and included provocative speeches from, for example, Anwar al-Awlaki, an American Imam who was involved in planning terrorist operations for Al-Qaeda. These early websites fulfilled a largely 'broadcast' function, with website content tightly controlled by the terrorist organizations, and opportunities for interaction negligible. The sites nonetheless served as one-stop shops for information on the groups (Conway, 2005).

By the next decade, online forums had become a popular media and information format, especially amongst right-wing extremists and violent jihadis, as forums allowed for much greater

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

levels of interactivity amongst their users (Conway, 2006). The online practices of violent jihadis and their supporters, for example, were subject to increased scrutiny by news media, policymakers, and researchers following the 9/11 attacks (see, for example, Conway, 2007b; Ducol, 2012; Kimmage, 2008; Kimmage & Ridolfo, 2007; Seib & Janbek, 2011). This was unsurprising given both the events of 9/11 and that violent jihadis significantly grew their online presence post-9/11. Dedicated forums were where the global jihad was virtually headquartered throughout this period (Hegghammer, 2014; Zelin, 2013). Not only were the forums important online discussion spaces, but it was also via the forums that new jihadi online content was first advertised and then filtered through to the wider jihadi online community. As late as 2013, Zelin predicted “Twitter is unlikely to supplant the forum architecture because it cannot replace the sense of authenticity and exclusivity created by the forums” (p. 2). Despite increased interactivity, this sense of authenticity and exclusivity was maintained via a significant element of control still in evidence on the forums. An example was a conversation on the English-language *Islamic Awakening* forum in which a member complained of having been ejected from an Al-Qaeda-affiliated forum after commenting on Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)’s killing of Muslims; to this another poster responded that the expelled member deserved it, and that the persistence of such questions must be dismaying for the mujahidin (Ramsay, 2009). Such controls notwithstanding, there were five to eight popular and functioning jihadi online forums active in the period 2004 to 2009; by 2013, this had decreased to between three and five. This decrease was probably due to a combination of (1) cyberattacks against the forums from the mid-2000s degrading their functionality and deterring new members and forums and (2) younger adherents shifting to social media platforms (Zelin, 2013, p. 2).

While jihadi online forums have been eroded by a shift to social media, the extreme right are still committed to the use of both general and dedicated online forums. The extreme right became increasingly reliant from the mid-1990s on web forums to facilitate movement expansion by publicizing messages of hatred and connecting with like-minded individuals, both within and beyond domestic borders (Back, 2002; Bowman-Grieve, 2009). A report by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) alleges that in the period 2010–2014, almost 100 murders could be attributed to registered Stormfront users (Beirich, 2014, pp. 2-6). One infamous contributor, for example, was the Norwegian extreme right terrorist Anders Breivik. According to *Stormfront*’s own statistics, the forum had well over 12.5 million posts at time of writing (August 2018), the

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

“most users ever online” on their forum at any one time was 24,066 at 1.52pm on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and the “total guests” visiting the forum in a 24-hour period in August 2018 hovered around 25,000. In addition to dedicated extreme right forums, a diversity of more general online platforms or forum-like online spaces also host increasing amounts of extreme right content. These include the popular social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion site Reddit and image-based bulletin board and comment site 4chan.

### *Web 2.0: Digital Video and Social Media*

The shift by violent extremists and terrorists over the course of two decades from an overwhelming reliance on websites to a heavy reliance on forums to a wholesale commitment to social media has at least as much to do with transformations in the workings of the Internet as in the workings of violent extremism and terrorism over the period (Hegghammer, 2014). As we have seen, Al-Qaeda had used the Internet for communication and propaganda purposes prior to the 9/11 attacks, but their use of the Internet increased exponentially thereafter. This had two interrelated causes: (1) the loss of Al-Qaeda’s Afghan base and the consequent dispersal of its leaders and fighters; and (2) the rapid development of the Internet itself, the global spread of internet cafes, the proliferation of internet-capable computers and other devices, such as mobile telephones, and the emergence of so-called ‘Web 2.0’ (Conway, 2012). The latter is characterized by its emphasis on the integration of digital video, social networking, and user generated content.

In addition to adopting Web 1.0 and 2.0 technology for violent extremist purposes, the performative nature of terrorism meant that violent jihadis, much more so than RWT groups and supporters, were eager adopters of digital video (Kimmage, 2008; Kimmage & Ridolfo, 2007). AQI’s Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a noteworthy early innovator with respect to the use of digital video content. In May 2004, al-Zarqawi had himself filmed personally cutting off the head of American hostage Nicholas Berg, and posted the footage online. The purpose of this beheading was precisely to videotape it; the images gripped the imaginations of AQI’s allies and enemies alike. Al-Qaeda and a diverse range of other jihadis had, for some time, been circulating a range of content online, including particularly text-based (e.g., forum postings, magazines/journals, books, and written statements) and audio (e.g., statements by leaders, sermons by violent jihadi preachers, *nashid* (chants) products). With the advent of easy digital video composition and fast

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

download, large amounts of violent jihad-supporting video began to be produced, distributed, and consumed.

Early genres of jihadi video included political statements, by leaders and (Western) ‘spokesmen;’ attack footage; ‘pre-martyrdom’ videos, such as that made of 7/7 bomber Mohammed Siddique Khan; instructional videos, of both theological and military-operational sorts; memorial videos commemorating persons and/or events; ‘music’ videos; and beheadings. These were produced by a variety of official and semi-official media production houses, such as *Al-Fajr*, the *Global Islamic Media Front*, and *As-Sahab*. These products were “consistently and systematically branded” by the prominent display of graphic logos (Kimmage & Ridolfo, 2008, p. 1) and made available in a variety of formats, including those optimized for iPod and cell phone viewing. In terms of production volume, between 2002 and 2005 *As-Sahab* issued a total of 45 video products; there was an exponential increase in 2006, which saw the distribution of 58 productions (Rogan, 2007, p. 91); 2007 too was a banner year, with 97 original productions (Seib & Janbek, 2011, p. 32). Both the number of videos and the quality of the content produced by Al-Qaeda and associated groups came to be eclipsed by IS’s video output however.

It has been estimated that IS produced an average of c.46 videos per month in the period between January 2015 and July 2016, which amounted to some 140 hours of digital footage (Milton, 2016). IS’s digital video content is notable for its high production qualities with, for example, one video employing aerial drone camera footage in its opening sequence and the 22-minute long production showing the burning of Jordanian fighter pilot, Lt. Muath al-Kasasbeh, containing complicated animations and scene changes. Many videos contained largely Arabic language content, but were subtitled in English and other languages depending on their content and the audience(s) at which they were targeted. In terms of the nature of the video content, an interesting reversal has taken place over time, with over half of all visual content, including video, being non-military in nature in the first quarter of 2015, but only 15% having this non-martial character in the period January to March 2018 (Milton, 2018). While video content comprises only a small percentage of IS’s overall online output, it is worth underlining that video content probably also has a much greater viewership and thereby also influence than many other types of content (Milton, 2018).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Milton (2018) calculates that it never rose above 20% of even their *visual* output between 2015 and 2018.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

Jihadis and their online supporters had increasing recourse to mainstream social media platforms from 2011, but with a particularly strong swing in this direction from 2013 (Zelin, 2013). Like Al-Qaeda before them, IS does not have a single official website; instead their ‘official’ online content emanates from IS-affiliated content production entities or so-called ‘media departments.’ At the height of their ‘success’ in c.2015, official IS media departments included IS’s central media bureaus (i.e., *Al-Furqan*, *Al-Hayat*, etc.) and regional media production houses (i.e., *Wilayat Homs*, *Khurasan*, *Sinai*, etc.); semi-official production outlets included *Amaq News Agency* and *Furat Media Centre*; and a variety of unofficial and IS ‘fan’ online outlets.<sup>4</sup> These media production outlets produce and circulate not just videos, but a host of other types of content, including photo montages, audio, infographics, and magazines. In the period 2013 to 2016, this content was largely distributed via major and some minor social media and other online platforms. These included prominent IS presences on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, but also Ask.fm, JustPaste.it, and the Internet Archive.

Twitter was a platform particularly favored by IS and their supporters; it was estimated that there were between 46,000 and 90,000 pro-IS Twitter accounts active in the period September to December 2014 (Berger & Morgan, 2015). In IS’s Twitter ‘Golden Age’ in 2013 and 2014, a variety of official IS ‘fighter’ and an assortment of other IS ‘fan’ accounts could be accessed with relative ease. For the uninitiated user, once one IS-related account was located, the automated Twitter recommendations on ‘who to follow’ accurately supplied others. For those ‘in the know,’ pro-IS users were easily and quickly identifiable via their choice of carousel and avatar images, along with their user handles and screen names. Therefore, if one wished, it was quick and easy to become connected to a large number of like-minded Twitter users. If sufficient time and effort was invested, it was also relatively straightforward to become a trusted—even prominent—member of the IS ‘Twittersphere.’ Not only was there a vibrant overarching pro-IS Twitter community in existence at this time, but also a whole series of strong and supportive language (e.g., Arabic, English, French, Russian, Turkish) and/or ethnicity-based (e.g., Chechens or ‘al-Shishanis’) and other special interest (e.g., females or ‘sisters’) Twitter sub-communities. Most of these special interest groups were a mix of: (1) a small number of users actually on the ground in Syria; (2) a larger number of users seeking to travel (or with a stated preference to do so); and (3) an even larger number of so-called ‘jihobbyists’ with no formal affiliation to any

---

<sup>4</sup> For a graphic representation, see for example Figure 3 and Figure 4 in Milton (2016).

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

jihadist group, but who spent their time lauding fighters, celebrating suicide attackers and other ‘martyrs’ and networking around and disseminating IS content (Conway et al., 2017).

External effects, including increased pressure on IS’ territory and manpower and direct targeting by Western forces of IS’ social media ‘experts’ and strategists and their cyber apparatus, contributed to a decrease in production of IS online content from late 2015. Disruption by major social media companies of pro-IS accounts began to bite at about this time also. In a February 2016 blog post, titled ‘Combating Violent Extremism,’ Twitter stated that they had suspended over 125,000 accounts for threatening or promoting terrorist acts, primarily related to IS, since mid-2015. In a follow-up blog post in August, Twitter described suspending an average of c.40,000 IS-related accounts per month in the period between mid-February and mid-July 2016. This ramped up further in 2017, with many pro-IS accounts being suspended within minutes of their appearance, such that in 2018, IS’s presence on most major social media platforms is a tiny fraction of what it once was.

While Twitter was once IS’s preferred platform, the Telegram messaging application is now its platform of choice. Telegram is as yet a lower profile platform than Twitter—and obviously also Facebook—with a smaller user base and higher barriers to entry (e.g., provision of a mobile phone number to create an account, time-limited invitations to join channels). These are probably positive attributes from the perspective of cutting down on the numbers of users exposed to IS’s online content and thereby in a position to be violently radicalized by it. On the negative side, this may mean that Telegram’s pro-IS community is more committed than its Twitter variant. Also while IS’s reach via Telegram is less than it was via Twitter, the echo chamber effect may be greater as the ‘owners’ of Telegram channels and groups have much greater control over who joins and contributes to these than on Twitter. Another aspect of Telegram that is attractive to extremists is its in-platform content upload and cloud storage function(s), which reduces the need for outlinking to other platforms. While Telegram restricts users from uploading files larger than 1.5GB—roughly a two-hour movie—it provides seemingly unlimited amounts of storage.

As already mentioned, right-wing extremists have not exploited digital video to the same extent as, for example, IS, but they have nonetheless considerably grown their online presence in recent years. Right-wing extremist groups and sympathizers have a noticeable presence on all major social media platforms, while a new generation of right-wing extremists are also moving

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

to more overtly hateful, yet to some extent more hidden platforms, including 8chan, Voat, Gab, and Discord (see Davey & Ebner, 2017). A cursory Google search also reveals that right-wing extremist groups, unlike the vast majority of jihadi groups, are able to maintain official websites. Davey (2018) chalks up these differences to how social media and technology companies police their platforms, in that a much more concerted effort has been placed on removing Islamist content than content from the extreme right. Less, however, is known about how right-wing extremist groups and supporters are using encrypted communication apps. Some recent reports, however, suggest that *The Daily Stormer*'s Andrew Anglin has taken a page out of IS's playbook by urging his fellow activists to ditch standard online platforms and revert to encryption chat services such as Telegram (Holt, 2018). In 2016, National Action also used Telegram to communicate with other members of the group about a neo-Nazi stickering campaign they were involved in on a university campus (Dearden, 2018), and right-wing extremists in Germany reportedly used encrypted apps to mobilize the movement during the 2017 election (Davey & Ebner, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

Terrorism has always been about communication because, as Schmid and De Graaf (1982) remind us, "Without communication there can be no terrorism" (p. 9). The late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously described publicity as the oxygen of terrorism. This pronouncement continues to resonate because while it is never their ultimate objective, publicity is what sustains effective terrorist campaigns. It follows from this that violent extremists and terrorists should take every opportunity to get their message out to as large an audience as possible by amplifying their violence via media. What this chapter has shown is that a diversity of groups and movements have been quick to adopt and use every emerging media and information tool at their disposal, seizing on every opportunity to produce and disseminate material and ideas that they desire to resonate with adherents and attract new members.

Two additional points are worth noting as we conclude this chapter. First, while it is clear that the Internet and encrypted platforms have provided violent extremists and terrorists with a centralized space to facilitate interactive communications with like-minded individuals on a global scale, perhaps less obvious to some is that such actors are still drawing upon a wide range of 'old' media tools to further their goals, oftentimes combining them with high-tech



## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

communication methods—‘good’ examples of this are jihadi online magazines. Second, our mapping of media and information tools exploited by a diversity of violent extremist and terrorist groups and movements, particularly the extreme right and violent jihadis, shows that they have all adopted similar media tactics. What varies between the two movements’ use of media tools for violent extremist purposes largely depends on their objectives and the technological, social, cultural, and political context in which they reside. With regard to low-tech communication methods, one terrorist group, such as the Nazis in Germany, for example, who occupy a territory may paint a wall mural on the side of a building in a busy part of town to remind Germans that the Nazi Party is in charge and that residents must adhere to their laws. Another terrorist group, such as Al-Qaeda in Syria, may display wall murals in a public space immediately following a U.S. drone strike, in an effort to drum up local support by reminding residents that the U.S. are invading “their” country. Turning to high-tech communication methods, a terrorist group such as IS may have no choice but to turn to encrypted platforms to disseminate their content, in fear that the material will be removed if it is on the open Web. On the other hand, National Action, a RWT group in the U.K., may not have to turn to the Dark Web to spread hatred, but perhaps forced to tone down their rhetoric on their Facebook page, for example, in fear that the social media company will ban them from the site. In short, both movements have used similar communication strategies but at different time periods.

### References

- Anti-Defamation League (ADL). (1985). *Computerized networks of hate: an ADL fact finding report*. New York: ADL.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions in globalization*. London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Al-Tamimi, A. (2013). The Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham billboards in Raqqa [Personal Blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.aymennjawad.org/13960/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham-billboards>.
- Al-Tamimi, A. (2015). The Islamic State billboards and murals of Tel Afar and Mosul [Personal Blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/the-islamic-state-billboards-and-murals-of-tel>.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

- Awan, A., Hoskins, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2012). *Radicalisation and media: connectivity and terrorism in the new media ecology*. London: Routledge.
- Back, L. (2002). Aryans reading Adorno: cyber-culture and twenty-first century racism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25(4), 628-651.
- Beirich, H. (2014). White homicide worldwide. *Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report*, Summer. Retrieved from <http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/white-homicide-worldwide.pdf>.
- Berger, J. M. (2018). *Extremism*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Berger, J.M., & Morgan, J. (2015). *The ISIS Twitter census: defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter*. Washington DC: Brookings.
- Bowman-Grieve, L. (2009). Exploring “Stormfront:” a virtual community of the radical right. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 32(11), 989-1007.
- Bywerk, R. L. (2008). *Landmark speeches of national socialism*. Texas: Texas A&M University Press.
- Carruthers, S. L. (2000). *The media at war*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave.
- Chaliand, G. (1985). *Terrorism: from popular struggle to media spectacle*. New Jersey: Saqi Books.
- Collin, B. (1997). Future of cyberterrorism: physical and virtual worlds converge. *Crime and Justice International*, 13(2), 15-18.
- Conway, M. (2005). Terrorist web sites: their contents, functioning, and effectiveness. In P. Seib (Ed.), *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 185-215). New York: Palgrave.
- Conway, M. (2006). Terrorism and the internet: new media—new threat? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59(2), 283-298.
- Conway, M. (2007a). Terror TV? Hizbollah’s Al Manar Television. In J. Forest (Ed.), *Countering Terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Vol. 2) (pp. 401-419). Connecticut: Praeger Security International.
- Conway, M. (2007b). Terrorism and the making of the ‘New Middle East’: new media strategies of Hizbollah and al Qaeda. In P. Seib (Ed.), *New Media in the New Middle East* (pp. 235-258). London: Palgrave.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

- Conway, M. (2012). From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: the emergence and development of an online radical milieu. *CTX: Combating Terrorism Exchange* 2(4), 12-22.
- Conway, M., Khawaja, M., Lakhani, S., Reffin, J., Robertson, A., & Weir, D. (2017). *Disrupting Daesh: measuring takedown of online terrorist material and its impacts*. Dublin: VOX-Pol.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1994). *The unseen power: public relations. A history*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Daftari, L. (2017). Islamic State's Al Bayan radio station back online. *The Foreign Desk*, February 13. Retrieved from <http://www.foreigndesknews.com/world/middle-east/islamic-states-al-bayan-radio-station-back-online/#>.
- Daniels, J. (2009). *Cyber racism: white supremacy online and the new attack on civil rights*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Davey, J. (2018). I work for an anti-extremism organisation and this is the difference between neo-Nazi and Islamist propaganda online. *Independent*, January 13. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/anti-extremism-islamist-terrorism-far-right-twitter-national-action-scottish-dawn-online-a8157426.html>.
- Davey, J., & Ebner, J. (2017). *The fringe insurgency: connectivity, convergence and mainstreaming of the extreme right*. London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
- Dearden, L. (2018). Neo-Nazis convicted after spreading National Action stickers around Birmingham university and performing Hitler salute. *Independent*, May 9. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-neo-nazi-stickers-birmingham-aston-university-racist-convicted-a8343596.html>.
- Devost, M., Houghton, B., & Pollard, N. (1997). Information terrorism: political violence in the information age. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9(1), 72-83.
- Ducol, B. (2012). Uncovering the French-speaking jihadisphere: an exploratory analysis. *Media, War and Conflict*, 5(1), 51-70.
- Ghanim, I. B. (1992). *Al-Fikr al-siyasi lil-imam hasan al-banna*. (The Political Thinking of Imam Hassan al-Banna). Cairo: Dar al Tawzi' wa-al-Nashr.
- Harcourt, F. (2017). *Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

- Hegghammer, T. (2014). *Interpersonal trust on Jihadi internet forums*. Retrieved from [http://hegghammer.com/\\_files/Interpersonal\\_trust.pdf](http://hegghammer.com/_files/Interpersonal_trust.pdf).
- Herf, J. (2006). *The Jewish enemy: Nazi propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Heschel, S. (2008). *The Aryan Jesus: Christian theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism: revised and expanded edition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Holt, J. (2018). Neo-Nazis are fleeing discord, heading to messaging app popular with ISIS supporters. *Right Wing Watch*, April 18. Retrieved from <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/neo-nazis-are-fleeing-discord-heading-to-messaging-app-popular-with-isis-supporters/>.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Johnson, T. H. (2017). *Taliban narratives: the use and power of stories in the Afghanistan conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kanaley, R. (1996). Hate groups tap into the Internet. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4.
- Kimmage, D. (2008). *The Al-Qaeda media nexus: the virtual network behind the global message*. Washington, DC: Radio Free Europe.
- Kimmage, D., & Ridolfo, K. (2007). *Iraqi insurgent media: the war of images and ideas*. Washington, DC: Radio Free Europe.
- Koonz, C. (2003). *The Nazi conscience*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lia, B. (1998). *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: the rise of an Islamic mass movement 1928-1942*. Reading, UK: Garnet.
- Matusitz, J. (2014). *Symbolism in terrorism: motivation, communication, and behavior*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Marzolph, U. (2003). The martyr's way to paradise: Shiite mural art in the urban context. In R. Bendix & J. Bendix (Eds.), *Sleepers, Moles, and Martyrs: Secret Identifications, Societal Integration, and the Differing Meaning of Freedom* (pp. 87-97). Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Meyer, S. L. (1976). *Signal: Hitler's wartime picture magazine*. London: Bison Books.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

- Michael, G. (2009). David Lane and the fourteen words. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10(1), 43-61.
- Milton, D. (2016). *Communication breakdown: unraveling the Islamic State's media efforts*. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center.
- Milton, D. (2018). *Down, but not out: an updated examination of the Islamic State's visual propaganda*. West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center.
- Mitchell, R. (1993). *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*. London: Oxford University Press
- Moghadam, A. (2008). The Salafi-jihad as a religious ideology. *CTC Sentinel*, 1(3).
- National Research Council. (1991). *Computers at risk: safe computing in the information age*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- NBC News. (2016). ISIS' Al-Bayan radio station in Mosul is bombed into silence by Iraqi jets. *NBC News*, October 3. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-al-bayan-radio-station-mosul-bombed-silence-iraqi-jets-n658521>.
- Norton, B. (2016). Muslim Americans launch "ISIS sucks" billboard campaign: so-called Islamic State "does not represent Islam." *Salon*, August 5. Retrieved from <https://www.salon.com/2016/08/05/muslim-americans-launch-isis-sucks-billboard-campaign-so-called-islamic-state-does-not-represent-islam/>.
- Oldham, J. (1998). Web of hate is growing on the net. *The Jerusalem Post*, January 25.
- Perry, B., & Scrivens, R. (2016). Uneasy alliances: a look at the right-wing extremist movement in Canada. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 39(9), 819-841.
- Ramsay, G. (2009). Relocating the virtual war. *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, 2(1), 31-50.
- Ranstorp, M. (Ed.) (2007). *Mapping terrorism research: state of the art, gaps and future direction*. London: Routledge.
- Rapoport, D. C. (1984). Fear and trembling: terrorism in three religious traditions. *The American Political Science Review*, 78(3), 658-677.
- Rice, T. (2015). *White robes, silver screens: movies and the making of the Ku Klux Klan*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Rogan, H. (2007). Abu Reuter and the e-jihad: virtual battlefronts from Iraq to the Horn of Africa. *Culture & Society*, Summer/Fall.
- Rolston, B. (1991). *Politics and paintings: murals and conflict in Northern Ireland*. London: Associated Universities Press.

## THE ROLES OF MEDIA TOOLS IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

- Schmid, A. P., & De Graaf, J. (1982). *Violence as communication: insurgent terrorism and the western news media*. London: Sage.
- Schulte, B. (2017). The alt-right of the Ozarks. *Slate*, April 3. Retrieved from <http://www.slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/07/republicans-changed-the-rules-democrats-need-to-catch-up.html>.
- Seib, P., & Janbek, D. M. (2011). *Global terrorism and new media: the post-al Qaeda generation*. London: Routledge.
- Sharma, S. (2015). Islamic State has an English-language radio broadcast that sounds eerily like NPR. *The Washington Post*, June 4. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/04/islamic-state-has-a-daily-english-language-radio-broadcast-that-sounds-eerily-like-it-could-be-on-npr/?utm\\_term=.ca8b2841a7e6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/06/04/islamic-state-has-a-daily-english-language-radio-broadcast-that-sounds-eerily-like-it-could-be-on-npr/?utm_term=.ca8b2841a7e6).
- Simi, P., & Futrell, R. (2015). *American swastika: inside the white Power movement's hidden spaces of hate* (second edition). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Sims, P. (1996). *The Klan*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Solomon, E. (2017). Mosul medics work to purge legacy of Isis from hospital. *Irish Times*, March 5. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/mosul-medics-work-to-purge-legacy-of-isis-from-hospital-1.2998670>.
- Southern Poverty Law Centre. (2008). *Racist radio, newspaper close up shops*. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2008/racist-radio-newspaper-close-shops>.
- Southern Poverty Law Center. (2018). *Tom Metzger*. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/tom-metzger>
- Townshend, C. (2002). *Terrorism: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Welsh, D. (1993). *The Third Reich: politics and propaganda*. New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, J. (2004). KKK painting washed away. *The Chattanooga*, October 12. Retrieved from <http://www.chattanooga.com/2004/10/12/57049/KKK-Paintings-Washed-Away.aspx>.
- Zelin, A. (2013). *The state of global jihad online: a qualitative, quantitative, and cross-lingual analysis*. Washington, DC: New America Foundation.