Opposing Viewpoints on Youth Social Media Banning in the U.S. for the Combatance of Extremist Recruiting: Constitutionality and Societal Implications

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ABSTRACT

Today, terrorist groups are recruiting, inspiring, and guiding global strategies not just by Internet operations, but through an organized, steady infusion of propaganda videos and call-to-action messages. Most worrisome: increasing evidence that the youth population represents a particularly susceptible cohort, being drawn into the ranks of terrorist organizations operating worldwide. In response, this article will address the pros and cons of social media banning, its effects on constitutional rights, and its effectiveness towards decreasing radicalization and recruitment. The research presented here aims to further the field of Homeland Security and to encourage debates on how to decrease terrorism and youth recruitment and whether banning social media would assist the Department of Homeland Security’s mission. In conclusion, this article explores both sides of the spectrum while offering insight for scholars, organizations, and practitioners regarding the attainability of social media banning in the United States.

KEYWORDS

Banning, Constitutional Rights, Cyberterrorism, Radicalization, Recruitment, Social Media, Terrorism, Youth

INTRODUCTION

In 1931, General MacArthur—understanding that changes in methods and weapons held the potential to alter the nature of conflict—could not have even imagined the many forms of warfare that would be utilized a decade later in World War II. Just as machineguns, tanks, and aircraft have changed the nature of conflicts throughout history, so did the telegraph, radio, television, and eventually the Internet…creating advances in the information world, such as social and new media, which may prove as profound as any of these inventions (Mayfield III, 2008).

In spite of the transformative power social media strategies play in presenting new opportunities, historically spreading pro-democracy uprisings throughout the Middle East, and initiating several social media-led student protests in South America, Hong Kong, South Africa, and London, these technologies are simultaneously creating new concerns for security agencies dealing in the complex...
world of extremist ideology (Kunkle, 2012). Not only is the rapid spread of blogs, social networking sites, and media-sharing technology (such as YouTube), aided by the proliferation of mobile technology, changing the conditions in which the United States conducts military operations, but with the speed and transparency of information increasing dramatically, events which would previously have been kept secret are being spread around the world in minutes (Mayfield III, 2008).

Today, terrorist groups are recruiting, inspiring, and guiding global strategies through an organized, steady infusion of propaganda videos and call-to-action messages circulated via social media platforms: blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Kunkle, 2012). In doing so, foreign jihadists have expanded their attack mechanisms through acquiring a hybrid, multimedia community participant strategy designed to circumvent far-reaching, multinational counterterrorism operations and transform citizen extremists into regional operatives and homegrown terrorists (Kunkle, 2012).

Presently, more than 30,000 foreign terrorist fighters from over 100 countries have succumbed to these radicalization efforts, joining the conflicts in Iraq and Syria or inciting acts of terror in their home countries (The United Nations, 2015). Most worrisome of this is that there is increasing evidence that the youth population represents a particularly susceptible cohort, being drawn into the ranks of terrorist organizations operating around the world (The Homeland Security Institute, 2009). In fact, by systematically marauding upon the vulnerabilities of the youth population in multiple contexts and offering a range of incentives—from financial support, to acceptance and social bonding, and to the promise of excitement—terrorist organizations portray their intentions in an attractive manner (The Homeland Security Institute, 2009).

One method considered for countering youth radicalization in the United States involves efforts to ban the use of social media for the population deemed most at risk. While several minimally democratic and non-democratic countries (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, China, Vietnam, and North Korea) have implemented such policies, the question of its effectiveness and constitutionality for our Nation has surfaced (Liebelson, 2014). Accordingly, this paper seeks to explore this idea in depth: addressing the pros and cons of social media banning, its effects on constitutional rights, and its effectiveness towards decreasing radicalization and recruitment. The sections of this article will be as follows:

- The Process of Radicalization
- Why Youth Join Terrorist Cells: The Social Media Influence
- Opposing Viewpoints: Pro Banning and Con Banning
- Is Controlling the Internet Feasible in the United States?
- Alternative Solutions

THE PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION

Since terrorists have always embraced the newest information and communication technologies, it was hardly surprising that they recognize the utility of the Internet and other new communication means early on. Therefore, in order to understand the interplay between terrorism and media fully, one must be aware of all kinds of media that terrorists exploit for their purposes. Video- and audiotapes, cassettes, and DVDs have been used by al Qaeda and like-minded groups in the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere to spread propaganda and condition teens and young adults for recruitment (Nacos, 2007).

Consequently, just as these groups historically have recruited and enslaved young village children face to face, their ability to access these young children has transferred to the online setting. Connecting both emotionally and psychologically with this vulnerable population, in an effort to grab their attention (emotional gratification), these organizations transition into the correct capacity to amend thoughts on the United States and radicalize.
Stealing Consciousness: Using Cybernetics for Controlling Populations
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