biiss journal

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RADICALIZATION AND YOUTH: ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN BANGLADESH

Abstract

In the world of connectivity and media centrism, the significance of social media can hardly be put into words. Though the use of internet and media has opened up a vast range of opportunities, it has played a decisive role to add a different dimension in the current wave of radicalization. The ongoing acts of terrorism in Bangladesh as well as all over the world draw our attention to this insufficiently addressed issue. Internet has significantly increased terrorists' reach, and person to person contact is no more necessary to indoctrinate people. Mainstream terrorist organizations in Bangladesh are increasing their expertise in the cyberspace to serve their agenda of disseminating their ideologies and radicalize people using propaganda and different narratives. Hence, there is a dire need for identifying the roles played by internet, particularly social media in radicalization process, so that a substantial framework to deal with the phenomenon can be set up. This paper tries to investigate the role of social media, e.g., Facebook, Messenger and YouTube, etc., in dragging the youth into the path of violent extremism in the context of Bangladesh. Furthermore, it focuses on providing a set of mechanisms to combat this ongoing wave of online radicalization.

Keywords: Radicalization, Violence, Social Media, Youth, Religious Terrorism

1. Introduction

In the landscape of religious terrorism, social media have emerged as a crucial role player these days. Religious terrorism is generated from extremist ideas which means the interpretation of religion from a rigid and irrational perspective.[1] The core foundation of religious terrorism lies in the radicalization of individuals and groups. Social identity and beliefs create the path for interactions, discrimination and differences which set up a way for alienation from others. The sense of identity and difference sometimes associated with political interest leads to the way for group-based radicalization and violence to establish their own ideology and transform the

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[1] Susilo Wibisono, Winnifred R. Louise and Jolanda Jetten, "A Multidimensional Analysis of Religious Extremism", *Frontiers*, 18 November 2019, available at https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02560, accessed on 26 February 2019.

society.[2] Though there is no single framework to define radicalization or the process, authors or institutions tend to focus on the concept according to their agenda and experience. The term emerges from the friction of intercommunity relations and is associated with political polarization.[3] According to Schmid,

> "Radicalisation is an individual and collective process, whereby usually in a situation of political polarisation, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in a confrontational tactics of conflict waging. The process is, on the side of rebel factions, generally accompanied by an ideological socialization away from the mainstream or status quo-oriented positions towards more radical or extremist positions involving a dichotomous world view and the acceptance of an alternative focal point of political mobilization outside the dominant political order as the existing system is no longer recognized as appropriate or legitimate."[4]

It is a process through which people develop extreme mindset and justify the hatred and violence against other community or religion. Since it is about shaping one's thinking and influencing minds, social media have come a long way in this regard. With the advancement of technology everything has become easier and accessible but at the same time things also got complicated.

During the series of assassinations carried out by the Ansar ul-Islam from 2013 to 2016, social media played a vital role. The nation saw the spread of hatred, propaganda and upsurge of a group of youth and others supporting these heinous activities by the name of Islam. Also, many of these attacks were openly appreciated and claimed by different transnational terrorist organizations, e.g., Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent and to some extent Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The videos, magazines, tweets circulated by radical terrorist organizations managed to unhinge the youths and led many on the path of violence. The year 2016 saw one of the most gruesome attacks in the history of Bangladesh, where for the first time a group initiated hostage crisis and confronted the security agencies. The attack on Holey Artisan Restaurant was followed by assassination of 22 people.[5] Most of

[2] Kate Barelle, "Disengagement from Violent Extremism", available at http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/radicalisation/files/2013/03/conference-2010-disengagement-from-violent-extremism-kb.pdf, accessed on 26 February 2019.

[3] Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs and Ghayda Hassan, *Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media: Mapping the Research*, Paris: UNESCO, 2017.

[4] Alex P. Schimd, *Radicalisation, De-radicalisation, Counter Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, The Hague: International Centre for Counter Terrorism, 2013.

[5] Nikhil Kumar, "Bangladesh Faces an Uncertain New Reality After the Dhaka Attack", *Time*, 04 July 2016, available at https://time.com/4392553/bangladesh-dhaka-attack-isis-terrorism-holey-artisan-bakery/, accessed on 20 May 2020.

Islamic militants who perpetrated such a brutal terrorist killing were from well-off or middle-class families, and well-educated youths who went missing a few months before the incident took place. Consequently, the incident of mass radicalization of young generation became much more prominent. Since Holey Artisan attack much have been said about the role of technologies like the Internet and global communication networks in sustaining transnational terrorism, the spread of its ideology, and recruitment activities. Over the past few years, in the strategies of contemporary terrorist organizations, the role of social media was worth noticing. After the Holey Artisan incident, the law enforcement agencies got informed of a number of missing persons' reports across the country. Later on, some of them were found to be travelled across the Middle East to join the IS to serve their cause.[6]

In the world of connectivity media, especially social media have made it possible to connect people the easiest way. For radicals and terrorists, it serves as a platform of communication which are less likely to be traceable. As a developing country and committed to the age of technology, Bangladesh has got increasing number of internet users and their presence in social media like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, different messenger applications, etc., are significant. In Bangladesh the total number of internet users reached around 99 million by March 2020.[7] Among them 33 million people are actively using Facebook.[8] It indicates that a large number of population has entered the social media domain, which makes the role of it much more important. Social media has turned out to be a significant tool to radicalize and recruit members for a cause. Around 82 per cent arrested terrorists and associates, arrested after 2015, were radicalized through social media.[9] Terrorist activities and growing use of social media by these groups have set challenges on the way of combatting radicalization.

This paper is an endeavour to analyze the relation between social media and radicalization of the young generation in the context of Bangladesh. Worldwide awareness is required to combat the process of radicalization. Therefore, focus should be shifted on preventing radicalization through social media. It is necessary for the government and concerned stakeholders to work on it while taking lessons from the examples of successful policies adopted by other countries to deter radicalization,

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[6] Shakhawat Liton, Wasim Bin Habib and Tuhin Shubhra Adhikary, "Murky road to radicalization", *The Daily Star,* 21 July 2016, available at https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/murky-road-radicalisation-1256950, accessed on 28 May 2020.

[7] Available at https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/bd.htm, accessed on 17 October 2020.

[8] Available at https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm, accessed on 17 October 2020.

[9] Kamrul Hasan, "Police: 82 percent terrorist radicalization happens through social media", *Dhaka Tribune*, 17 February 2020, available at https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2020/02/17/police-82-of-terrorist-radicalization-happens-through-socialmedia?fbclid=IwAR05fX1CwCWZf_z6IQVEaUdwMdEo0lqG3mwd0VKegi7ijefYaj3NhcURXlM, accessed on 23 February 2020.

especially using the online platform. Taking the underlying mechanisms of radicalization into consideration, the paper provides a set of recommendations in order to tackle the threats emanating from it. For discussion, the paper is divided into nine major sections including introduction and conclusion; the second section encapsulates the methodology of the study. The third section sheds light on the concept of radicalization and defines the boundary of social media that the paper deals with while the fourth section discusses the historical context of religion-based terrorism in Bangladesh. The fifth section highlights the role of social media in the process of radicalization. The sixth section explores the pattern derived from primary data and the seventh section conducts a thorough discussion and analyzes the impact of social media in the process of radicalization in context of Bangladesh. The eighth section comes up with a set of recommendations to deal with the situation. Finally, ninth section concludes the paper.

2. Methodology

The paper attempts to explore and analyze the existing information and evidences on impact of social media in the process of radicalization. Both primary and secondary data were used to conduct this study. Bulk of information has been collected from relevant research projects, special reports, articles published in renowned journals, daily newspapers and reliable websites. Primary data was collected as well through a structured questionnaire-based survey to explore the pattern of using social media by the young people and connect the output with the existing literature.

People from different educational background aged from 18 to 30 had been the target for the survey. Though there is no universally agreed definition of youth age group, according to many countries people within 15 to 24 years old are considered to be youth. But article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child tends to define persons up to 18 years old as 'children'. Hence, considering these arguments and the context of Bangladesh, persons ranging from 18 to 30 years old have been selected as target sample. Besides, the paper intends to focus on the people who are mostly university going students or have recently completed their study.[10] The survey was conducted with a representative sample of 86 people who have been chosen through random sampling. There was 69.8 per cent male and 30.2 per cent female respondents and majority of them were students from universities based in Dhaka, Chattogram and Gopalganj belonging to diverse socio-economic strata. Due to the convenience of carrying out the study, these specific areas were chosen. The timeline of data collection was the month of March 2020; while

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[10] Available at https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/youth-0/, accessed on 15 October 2020.

undertaking the survey reviewing the existing literature and rounds of discussion with students based in Chattogram helped develop the paper. Google Forms was used to conduct the survey. The data were converted into percentage and presented in charts and analyzed.

However, there are certain limitations that could not be avoided while conducting the survey. Since issues regarding religious extremism and such involvement are sensitive ones, the answers of the respondents might get affected for that reason. While preparing the questionnaire it was taken into consideration and questions were set in such a way so that it might not generate any discomfort among the respondents. Apart from that, data collection had to be conducted online and with a very small size of the sample due to time constraint and sudden outbreak of the pandemic situation.

3.   Defining Concepts

3.1   *Radicalization*

> "Radicalisation is a process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence. It is both a mental and emotional process that prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behaviour."[11]

The concept of radicalization involves range of ideologies inducing from political, social or religious ideas in order to obtaining certain purposes; that might be from left wing politics, right wing politics, anarchist, religious or nationalistic ideologies, etc. Radicalization got no specific or universal definition of its own; rather all these definitions and concepts got moulded according to time, necessity, experience and agenda of concerned authority or people. The term came to limelight in the post-9/11 era specifically after the suicide bombing attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005. In both of the attacks innocent civilians were targeted.[12] In this study, the concept of radicalization or extremism is aligned to religious radicalization, which has been a top priority issue after the second wave of terrorism emerged in Bangladesh after 2013. There is a range of catalysts that expedites the possibility of

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[11] Alex S Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, "Home Grown Terrorism and Transformative Learning: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Radicalization", *Global Change, Peace & Security*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2010, pp. 33-51.

[12] Diego Muro, "What does Radicalisation Look Like? Four Visualisations of Socialisation into Violent Extremism", available at https://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionals/n1_163/what_does_radicalisation_look_like_four_visualisations_of_socialisation_into_violent_extremism, accessed on 13 May 2020.

radicalization. First of all, socio-political alienation paves the way for diverting the minds of young people. Lack of integration to the mainstream society and culture might create the sense of isolation and despair.[13] Also the resentment created from personal failure and dissatisfaction might ignite the sense of isolation in different socio-cultural context, which may lead people to the path of violent extremism. Secondly, cause of religion might play a vital role in the process of radicalization. The purpose of becoming a dedicated Ummah (follower/community) leads them to justify their violent activities and indulgence. Due to technological advancement, a de-territorialization of religious practice and indoctrination takes place in a large scale. Lastly, motivation might come from reaction to foreign policies like invasion in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, sufferings of Muslims around the world induced from Islamophobia, etc.[14]

A sophisticated model of radicalization has been provided by Professor Fathali M. Moghaddam, which is known as the "staircase model". It involves the notion of a large number of people belonging to the ground floor living with dissatisfaction and sense of injustice and very few of them get motivated to find a way to fight it and go right up to the highest floor.[15] Another model is the "pyramid model" of radicalization by McCauley and Moskalenko, which implies that the process of radicalization is the gradual selection of full-fledged followers from a wide range of sympathisers; followers who possess the sense of identity and go for a construction of 'us'. McCauley and Moskalenko describe about 'us' as follows:

> "We are a special or chosen group (superiority) who have been unfairly treated and betrayed (injustice), no one else cares about us or will help us (distrust), and the situation is dire-our group and our cause are in danger of extinction (vulnerability)".[16]

Also, the impact of other discourse-based approaches that significantly explore the power of language to persuade young minds are worth looking forward to. In the era of technological advancement and social media it is highly important that these approaches to be taken into consideration while working on the impact of media and specifically social networks on the process of radicalization.

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[13] Alex S. Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, op. cit., p. 38.
[14] Ibid., p. 42.
[15] Diego Muro, op. cit.
[16] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways toward Terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2008, p. 416.

3.2   *Social Media*

Over the last two decades social media have turned up to be an indispensable platform of social interaction, organizational communication and business. Though there is no universally agreed definition of social media, Bercovici has attempted to define social media as an emerging web-based communication platform that provides broad opportunities for online interaction through the use of multiple devices.[17] The definition encompasses the idea of a channel largely focussed on disseminating ideas, knowledge and reciprocal actions on a global scale. When it comes to sharing information, messages that people exchange or the posts or files are exposed to everyone in that existing network and prevails for longer period of time. Some try to put emphasis on the highly interactive feature of social media (platforms like messenger applications, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram) while others tend to focus on platforms that provide with opportunities to create and consume user generated contents (YouTube, blogging websites, etc.).[18]

With the onset of twenty first century, internet was being widely used in Bangladesh, most importantly, the popularity of email reached higher as a platform of instant communication for both official and personal use. With the passage of time the consumption of common social media platforms escalated to a large extent. The paper has focussed its discussion most importantly on social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, different messenger applications like Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, WeChat, blogging websites, etc., that provide a significant ground of spreading propaganda materials and decentralized recruitment for the terrorist organizations. The messenger applications might be used as extensive platforms which are available and easily installed ensuring anonymity to some extent. Group of people can sign up there forming different chat groups or rooms in order to spread radical ideas, and share personal experience, values, and manuals. Other application users like LINE, Telegram, and Threema are gradually becoming popular due to their innovative features. Moreover, these applications allow different individuals to introduce like-minded persons to relevant groups and motivate them to move further into the path of extremism. On the other hand, though Facebook, YouTube might not be serving as a direct channel for recruitment, this might be the most important tool used in terms of persuading young minds through extensive sharing of propaganda news, hate speech against other communities and misinformation. Besides, Twitter, a micro blogging site, is preferred by different terrorist organizations for the purpose of exposure and being vocal about incidents since it is harder to track the origin of

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[17] Jeffrey W. Treem, Stephanie L. Dailey, Casey S. Pierce and Diana Biffl, "What We Are Talking About When We Talk About Social Media: A Framework for Study: Social Media", *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 10, No. 9, 2016.
[18] Ibid.

the tweets.[19] Apart from the social media platforms, there is the concealed network of different sites, called dark web, where contents are not easily accessed by the traditional search engines rather specialized browsers are required. Though dark web platforms recently have gained popularity among the terrorist organizations due to the assurance of anonymity, the paper does not look into the area extensively.

The use and influence of social media have been fairly reflected in the ideas provided by Erving Goffman. He denotes that the way one represents himself or his values on social media must have an objective and that is to influence the others. According to him, the agent must express him/herself in a way to create such kind of impression that would lead the others to act voluntarily in that specific way. The whole idea lies on the concept of mutual exchange of moves which might be termed as 'strategic interaction'.[20] However, there are other socio-economic backdrops and behaviours that play significant role in shaping the people's minds and indoctrinate them with different ideologies.

4. Historical Context of Religious Terrorism in Bangladesh

4.1 The First Wave of Violent Radicalization

In Bangladesh, the rise of left-wing militancy came into focus with frequent hit and run attacks by different radical factions after 1972. However, these groups gradually lost their appeal. The void created by the decline of these left-wing groups created the space for the rise of different religious movements, like Ahle Hadith.[21] During the time of military rulers, changes to the constitution of Bangladesh took place undermining the concepts like secularism and democracy, which remained a debated issue in the later years worsening the crisis of identity between secularism and Islamism.[22] Moreover, the Afghan war in 1979-1989 drew the attention of Muslims all over the country. Osama bin Laden, the then leader of Al-Qaeda, took an oath to fight against the enemies to free their land and establish Islamic rule. This motivated a lot of young people from every corner of the world and Bangladesh too. Of the estimated 3,000 volunteers joined the war of which 24 died in the battlefield.[23] After 1992 Shafiqur Rahman, a warrior in the Afghan war came back home and

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[19] Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs and Ghayda Hassan, op. cit.
[20] Jiayin Qi, Emmanuel Monod, Binxing Fang and Shichang Deng, "Theories of Social Media: Philosophical Foundations", *Engineering*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2018, pp. 94-102.
[21] Saimum Parvez, "Terrorism and Counter- Terrorism in Bangladesh", in Ali Riaz and Mohammad Sajjadur Rahman (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh*, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 425.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ali Riaz, "Who are Bangladeshi 'Islamist Militants'?" *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2016.

tried to establish contacts with Pakistani organization, e.g., Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI). Thus, the history of religious terrorism in Bangladesh began.[24] Over time the religion based political parties resurged; specifically, Jamaat-e-Islam was the leading group, whose leaders were accused of committing war crimes during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. The victory of the BNP-led coalition during 2001-2006 led the penetration of fundamentalist elements into political and administrative structure of the country. In this era, the formation of numerous groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh (HT-B), Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) led the ways for further radicalization and terrorism.[25]

The years from 1998 to 2005 have been an era of horror all across the country due to terrorist attacks to destabilize the existing order. Targeted killings, abduction, suicide bombings had been the salient tactics adopted by these groups. In 1999, bomb explosion at cultural programme of Udichi in Jessore in 2001, bomb explosion in Ramna Batamul on Pohela Baishakh, attack on poet Shamsur Rahman in 1999, attack on poet Humayun Azad in 2004, bombing in four cinema halls in 2002 were some significant strikes by HuJI-B. Besides, in 2005, detonation of 500 bombs within a short span of time across the country made it the most dreadful attack in the history of Bangladesh, which was orchestrated by JMB.[26] In 2006, the government of Bangladesh arrested many of the top leaders of these groups; leaders of JMB, Shaykh Abdur Rahman and Siddiqul Islam aka Bangla Bhai were apprehended and later executed in 2007.[27] A number of radical groups were declared banned in Bangladesh. The first wave radical groups mostly targeted the secular state system. HuJI-B addressed a press conference at National Press Club in Dhaka demanding the conversion of Bangladesh into an Islamic State.[28] Outfits like JMB and JMJB targeted the cultural activists, cinema halls, NGOs and shrines as well. The cadres recruited in these groups belonged to diverse strata of society mostly from madrassa and university students, teachers and ordinary people. After the series of bomb blast the JMB leaflets claimed, "We're the soldiers of Allah. We've taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law the way Prophet, Sahabis and heroic Mujahideen have done for centuries. It is time to implement Islamic law in Bangladesh. There is no future with man-made law."[29]

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Saimum Parvez, op. cit.

[26] Abul Barakat, "Political Economy of Fundamentalism in Bangladesh", available at http://scd.rfi.fr/sites/filesrfi/Politicalpercent20Economypercent20ofpercent20Fundamentalismpercent20inpercent20Bangladesh.pdf, accessed on 30 June 2020.

[27] Ali Riaz, op. cit.

[28] Available at https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/huj.htm, accessed on 22 November 2020.

[29] South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), "Terrorist Profile: JMB", available at https://www.satp.org/terrorist-profile/bangladesh/jama-atul-mujahideen-bangladesh-jmb, accessed on 22 November 2020.

4.2   *The Second Wave*

Iftekharul Bashar, an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), first used the term first wave and second wave in the context of the rise of religious extremism after 2013 to express the intensity of the situation. He stated, "Bangladesh which experienced the first wave of violent radicalization during 1999-2005, might be on the way its way to witness a second wave."[30] Ansar ul-Islam (known as Ansarullah Bangla Team as well) emerged at first as 'Jama'atul Muslemin' in 2007. However, it stopped its activities due to lack of funding and made a comeback in the scene in 2013.[31] The second wave of religious terrorism was ignited by the Awami led government's tribunal in 2010 in order to try the 1971 war criminals, most of whom were the leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami. Besides, the establishment of 'Shahbag Gonojagoron Moncho' by the pro-secular, urban, liberal communities mobilized support in demand of capital punishment for them. Activists and bloggers went vocal in social media criticizing the role of religion in the secular political landscape of Bangladesh. The circumstances provoked resentment among the Islamists who took this as an assault to Islam. It generated the momentum for different radical organizations.[32]

The first strike came in January 2013, when Asif Mohiuddin, a blogger was stabbed. Later on, a secular blogger whose writings strengthened the Shahbag protest regarding the war criminal trial was hacked to death at Pallabi, Mirpur on 05 February 2013.[33] After the assassination, the existence of Ansarul Islam came to the forefront. Afterwards, five students of North South University were arrested for having a connection to the murder of Ahmed Rajib Hyder. The suspicion of having nexus with Al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) branch with Ansarullah Team seemed to have valid ground when the arrested students were claimed as the 'Lions of Ummah' in an Al-Qaeda affiliated website.[34] The activities of Ansarullah Team slowed down after the capture of its leader. However, in November 2014, Professor Shafiul Islam of Rajshahi University was hacked to death for restricting his students from wearing full face veil in his classrooms and examination hall. The Ansarullah Team cell 2 claimed responsibility for this murder and wrote in its website that "Our

[30] Iftekharul Bashar, "Violent Radicalization in Bangladesh: A Second Wave", *RSIS Commentaries*, No.187, 2013, available at https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CO13187.pdf, accessed on 30 June 2020.

[31] Surya Valliappan Krishna, "Bangladesh's Ansarullah Bangla Team- Analysis", *Eurasia Review*, 2016, available at http://www.eurasiareview.com/08012016-bangladeshs-ansarullah-bangla-team-analysis/, accessed on 22 November 2020.

[32] Sudha Ramachandran, "A Profile of Bangladesh's Ansarullah Bangla Team", *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 13, No. 16, 2015.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Mamunur Rashid, "Ansarullah BT deeply rooted in Al-Qaeda ideology", *The Daily Observer*, 07 November 2014, available at http://www.observerbd.com/2014/11/07/53132.php, accessed on 25 May 2020.

Mujahideens have murdered an apostate who had prohibited female students from wearing veils."[35] On 25 May 2015, Bangladesh government banned Ansar ul-Islam under the anti-terrorism laws.[36]

Between February and October 2015, four secular bloggers and one publisher were stabbed. to death.[37] On 27 February 2015, Avijit Roy, son of Ajay Roy and founder of Muktomona blog was killed near TSC on Dhaka University campus. Exactly one month after killing Roy, Washiqur Rahman Babu, another blogger was assassinated at Begunbari of Tejgaon industrial area. Likewise, blogger Ananta Bijoy Das, activist of Sylhet Ganajagaran Mancha was hacked to death by a group of terrorists in broad daylight in Sylhet city. On 07 August 2015, blogger Niladri Chottopaghyay Niloy was killed at his own flat at Goran. Initially, though the killings of Avijit Roy was similarly claimed by Ansarullah Bangla Team, later on it was AQIS who claimed the responsibility.[38] There was another hit list issued on social media by Ansar ul-Islam which included secular bloggers, writers, and activists.[39] The series of killings continued in the early 2016, Professor Rezaul Karim Sidique was hacked to death in Rajshahi in April 2016. Before this killing, a Jagannath University student Nazimuddin Samad was killed in the same manner. Surprisingly, the murder of Professor Rezaul Karim was claimed by IS, as reported by the SITE Intelligence group that monitors Jihadist websites, though the news remained controversial.[40] Just a few days later two Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) right activists, Xulhaz Mannan and Tonoy Mojumder, were murdered in Dhaka. The responsibility of which have been claimed by Ansarullah Team.[41] A killing of a Sufi leader in Rajshahi took place after that in 2016 in the same way.[42] The AQIS's targets had mostly been confined within the pro-secular activists, bloggers, atheists, people who demeaned Islam or tended to criticize their rituals. A parallel war was going on over the social media and blog sites. For instance, anti-secular pages like Basher Kella, campaigned for mobilizing support for the war

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[35] Smruti Pattanaik, "Bangladesh: Hacking Free Thinking to Death", available at http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/BangladeshHackingFreeThinkingtoDeath_spattanaik_210515, accessed on 22 November 2020.
[36] Sudha Ramachandran, op. cit.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Smruti Pattanaik, op. cit.
[39] "Bangladeshi secular publisher hacked to death", *BBC News*, 31 October 2015, available at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34688245, accessed on 28 June 2020.
[40] "Islamic State claims it killed Bangladeshi academic", *The Guardian*, 23 April 2016, available at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/23/bangladeshi-professor-hacked-to-death-rajshahi-islamists, accessed on 28 June 2020.
[41] Eliott C McLaughlin, Don Melvin and Tiffany Ap, "Al Qaeda group claims responsibility for Bangladesh LGBT hacking murders", *CNN*, 28 April 2016, available at http://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/25/asia/bangladesh-u-s-embassy-worker-killed/, accessed on 03 July 2020.
[42] "Bangladesh: Sufi Muslim murdered by suspected extremists", *BBC News*, 07 May 2016, available at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36237022, accessed on 02 July 2020.

criminals along with the murders of bloggers and atheists.[43] On the contrary, social media was overwhelmed by the series of assassinations of bloggers, writers and atheists. Criticism went on with regard to the entrenchment of radical elements into the mainstream society, especially after the murder of Avijit Roy.

Five militants stormed Holey Artisan Restaurant on 01 July 2016, which is considered to be the most consequential terrorist attack in Bangladesh. The crisis ended with the death of 22 hostages. Within a few hours IS claimed the credit of the attack through Amaq News agency. Within a week of the incident another attack took place in Sholakia. Following these attacks, Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies launched a series of anti-terrorist campaigns throughout the country which led death of almost hundreds of militants including the mastermind of Holey Artisan attack, Tamim Ahmed.[44] Series of attacks that targeted the minorities, non-Muslim foreigners, Ahmadi mosques, shrines, temples and Shiite festivals had occurred since 2016. After March 2017, there were several attacks in Dhaka and Sylhet though the casualties were less. Despite the claim of IS, the government denied their presence in Bangladesh and law enforcement agencies put the responsibilities solely on Neo-JMB, the re-emerged fraction of the previous organization. According to them, the local group is using the IS propaganda to drag the young generation to the path of extremism. After the Holey Artisan attack, it became prominent that many of the jihadists from Ansar ul-Islam and JMB shifted their allegiance towards IS and some of them crossed the borders to join the war in Syria on behalf of IS.[45] Since these home-grown and transnational radical groups have ideological convergence, there prevails a ground of greater cooperation among these groups. Following the IS agenda of establishing a global Caliphate and becoming a part of it, Neo-JMB is acting upon it in the local context.

One of the major traits of the second wave of terrorism in Bangladesh has been the organizational structure and shift in strategy of these militant groups. The previous generation of radical organizations used to maintain a hierarchical structure. After the capture and execution of the top leaders of JMB, it collapsed and partly lost its strength. On the other hand, Ansar ul-Islam or Neo-JMB has been following a different pattern, where there is no exact single hierarchy. The main hold is probably allotted in several hands that are individually connected to different intertwined

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[43] "Online campaign on to save the war criminals", *The Daily Star*, 09 March 2013, available at https://www.thedailystar.net/news/online-campaign-on-to-save-war-criminals, accessed on 23 November 2020.

[44] Michael Kugelman and Atif Ahmed, "Why Extremism is on the rise in Bangladesh", *Foreign Affairs*, 27 July 2017, available at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2017-07-27/why-extremism-rise-bangladesh, accessed on 03 July 2020.

[45] International Crisis Group, "Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh," 28 February 2018, available at https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/295-countering-jihadist-militancy-bangladesh, accessed on 22 November 2020.

networks. The root level actions are performed by groups of 5/6 people, which is called slipper cell. Most significant aspect of these groups is the use of social media to recruiting cadres, spreading misinformation and propaganda easily. This fluid structure gives them advantages to perform under any condition. If a comparison between the recruiting patterns of previous generation terrorist organizations and contemporary organizations is put forth, it would be noticeable that HuJI-B, JMB and such groups used to target recruits mostly from Qawmi Madrassas and other movements like Ahl-e Hadith. However, Ansar ul-Islam which initially started as an online community inspired by the preaching of Al-Qaeda leader Anwar Al Awlaki as well as Neo-JMB is mostly urban based and scattered in structure. They have been able to drag members not only from the previous home-grown terrorist organizations but also young people with no previous affiliation with terrorism.[46] These organizations hold separate wings that are tech-savvy so that media platforms can be utilized for recruitment as well as coverage. Using platforms like Facebook, messengers, YouTube, different websites through posting radical contents and propaganda, these groups have been creating the ground for self-radicalization, which gives rise to the lone-wolf terrorist attacks.[47] On 03 December 2019 the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime Unit (CTTC) revealed that JMB recently has been using an online platform that ensures anonymous communication for the purpose of recruiting new members.[48] Consequently, young people are being easily accessible by these groups, who are radicalized and allured to think in an extreme way, no matter what the range of their age are, what occupation they belong to or what family background they come off.

5.   Radicalization and Use of Social Media

Due to the increasing trend in the use of social media, a whole generation of youth has grown to be much aligned with it. There are several mainstream channels of social media that are used to a large extent, e.g., Facebook, different messenger applications, YouTube, Twitter blogging sites, etc. According to Sageman, messenger or chat rooms might serve as an active participation platform where one can easily get exposed to extremist thoughts and communicate with other radical minds and develop personal relationship without much hassle.[49] Other media serve as platforms for sharing ideas, news, and spreading propaganda to get in touch with the pro-radical persons on the internet. Also, YouTube and other video sharing platforms serve as a powerful media to share relevant videos, songs, speech, propaganda, etc.

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[46] Iftekharul Bashar, "Islamic State Ideology Continues to Resonate in Bangladesh", available at https://www.mei.edu/publications/islamic-state-ideology-continues-resonate-bangladesh, accessed on 22 November 2020.
[47] International Crisis Group, op. cit.
[48] South Asian Terrorism Portal, "Bangladesh Assessment 2020", available at https://www.satp.org/terrorism-assessment/bangladesh, accessed on 23 November 2020.
[49] Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs and Ghayda Hassan, op. cit.

Now the question that largely comes up in this regard has been addressed by many researchers; why do social media work as a feasible platform for extremist groups or individuals? First of all, the convenience of internet is the most crucial point here. Since internet connection and social media applications are available all around the world, it has become less burdensome for the extremist groups to utilize the best out of it to spread their ideologies and serve the agenda. Secondly, it is much easier to spread propaganda and bring in support for any cause or ideology on the internet since social media easily make connections among people which generally involve large number of audiences.[50] Here mutually, ideas are exchanged and the audiences act over them. Social media is far more different than the previous media platforms. Traditional media platforms used to be marked by one-to-many patterns of disseminating views. On the other hand social media make anyone capable of sharing anything they feel like, which is more a way of interactive exchange session within a limitless audience. It is more technologically beneficial and effective way to communicate. Thus, one gets to come in contact with the like-minded people and creates a possibility for recruitment. That is why internet is considered as an 'eco-chamber', where people find their favoured ideas getting echoed by others.[51] Furthermore, these channels are mostly not bound to national jurisdiction, informal, cheap, decentralized and anonymous.[52] Therefore, radicals and terrorist groups find these social networks suitable to continue their activities.

This process of online radicalization is a multimodal transition one. The phases include 'The Net', 'The Funnel', 'The Infection' and lastly 'The Activation'.[53] The first step 'The Net' considers the unlimited population as the possible ground for recruitment and exposes them to the materials shared by the groups. Then comes up the second stage called 'The Funnel'. Through the first step a number of audiences get indoctrinated by the views and ideas and turn out to be the members when they come out at the other end of the funnel. This process has several catalysts by which the possibilities and vulnerability of the 'would be' members get forged. In the next stage, 'The Infection' those members lead themselves to the path of self-radicalization. And finally, 'The Activation' phase brings out the newly indoctrinated extremists, who might gradually turn out to be terrorists.[54] In the recent times, ever increasing rate of youths getting introduced to extremist ideologies through

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[50] Robin Thompson, "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media", *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2011.

[51] Ines Von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards and Luke Gribbon, "Radicalization in the digital era: The use of the internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism", available at https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR453.html, accessed on 28 May 2020.

[52] Séraphin Alava, Divina Frau-Meigs and Ghayda Hassan, op. cit.

[53] Gabriel Weimann, "Terrorist Migration to the Social Media", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2015, pp. 180-187.

[54] Ibid.

online sources and materials, especially by IS. The materials, videos, news, online magazines have played vital role in influencing the youths from all over the world and inspiring themselves to get involved in the lone-wolf terrorist attacks. According to UK Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit, there are active radical groups who are using internet to spread propaganda. The unit investigated and removed around 45,000 contents by those groups in 2013.[55] Due to the use of social media and its ever-growing reach, the necessity of physical contact and direct training, planning, programming is not that relevant these days. Rather one can get motivated by the online media, declare his or her allegiance to the cause of extremist groups and get involved in terrorist attacks on their own. Such practice has made the young generation more vulnerable than ever. For example, prominent spokesman of Al-Qaeda Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) Anwar al Awlaki apparently got successful in persuading people to commit attacks in the name of Almighty; Nidal Hasan, the Fort Hood shooter who shot his 13 fellow soldiers and Michael Finton, the would-be bomber, got inspired from Anwar al Awlaki.[56]

## 6.   Pattern of Social Media Use and Behaviour of Youth

The study mainly highlights certain aspects regarding the exposure of the young generation of Bangladesh towards social media, how the youth perceives the online sources and materials, their opinion on extremism and propaganda, social network they use the most, etc. Figure 1 shows that majority of the respondents (59.3 per cent) use Facebook, 32.6 per cent use YouTube and rest of them prioritize using messenger applications (such as WhatsApp, WeChat, LINE, etc.) and other blogging sites.[57]

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[55] Raffaello Pantucci, Clare Ellis and Lorien Chaplais, *Lone Actor Terrorism*, London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2015.
[56] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011.
[57] These four categories were chosen out of the review of the existing literature in context of Bangladesh. Young generation of Bangladesh largely uses social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, messenger applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, and WeChat.

Figure 1: Usage of Social Media
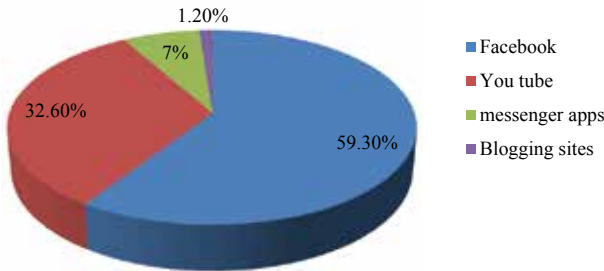
Facebook pages like 'Basher Kella', 'Islamic Online Activist'[58] were allegedly involved in propagating radical views and fabricating information in Bangladesh.[59] Around 57 per cent youth have known such pages in social media, which is more than half of the respondents. Hence, it might be assumed that a significant number of youths is aware of these online pages, groups used in order to spreading propaganda and radical contents. It is evident from the study that 24.4 per cent respondents follow such pages on Facebook, 7 per cent used to follow. The page 'Basher Kella' had been one of the prominent Facebook pages that used to spread hate speech, false information and propaganda since early 2013. Since the misleading information and narratives generating hatred might influence individual's mindset turning them up against the 'other' communities, it can be speculated that a significant number of respondents are vulnerable to contents of such pages and websites.

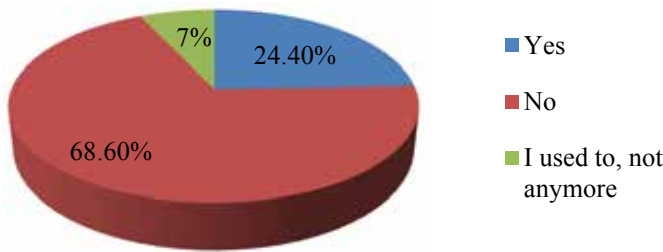**Figure 2: Respondents Who Follow Pages Like Basher Kella on Facebook**

Figure 3 infers that majority of the respondents believe that online extremist contents and materials can largely influence the minds of young people. When they

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[58] Currently, the page "Islamic Online Activists" does not exist.
[59] "Basherkella chief' held", *The Daily Star*, 13 March 2015, available at https://www.thedailystar.net/online/basherkella-chiefpercentE2percent80percent99-held-dhaka-71402, accessed on 20 May 2020.

were asked about their opinion regarding the radical ideas and similar narratives shared in different social media, more than half of the respondents replied that those were harmful and might lead one to the path of extremism (Figure 4). The rest of them, somehow, are sympathetic towards those thoughts. According to 12.8 per cent of them anyone can share what they feel is right, which means, a number of respondents are confounded over the issue.

Figure 3: Probability of Young Users Getting Influenced by Radical Contents Online
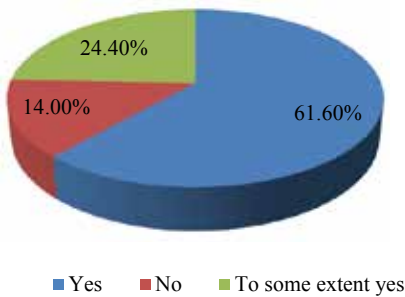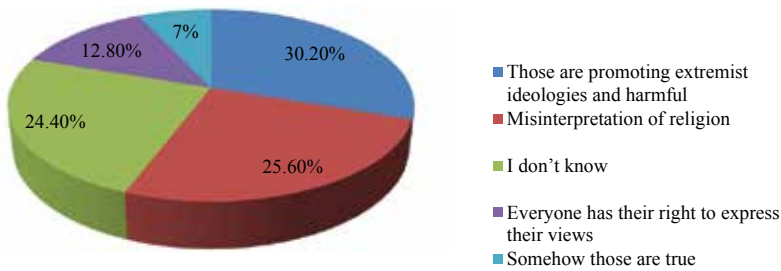

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ To some extent yes

Figure 4: Respondents' Opinions about Radical Contents on Social Media

■ Those are promoting extremist ideologies and harmful
■ Misinterpretation of religion
■ I don't know
■ Everyone has their right to express their views
■ Somehow those are true

From figure 5, it is evident that around 30 per cent of the respondents tend to ignore it or report it when they go past posts or online contents that induce extreme ideas. Rest of the respondents go through those materials either just out of curiosity or genuine interest. So, it can be assumed that the influence of social media is certainly capable of triggering the interest in young people to explore stuff no matter if those are healthy or not. A significant number of the respondents (33 per cent) browse for radical documentaries on YouTube or other platforms out of curiosity (Figure 6). A little bit of curiosity might cause no harm to anybody, but little enthusiasm sometimes can lead people towards over-thinking. Also, those social media platforms tend to recommend more videos related to the previous ones the user already browsed for.

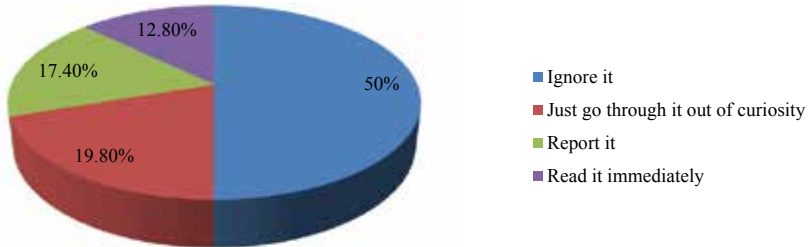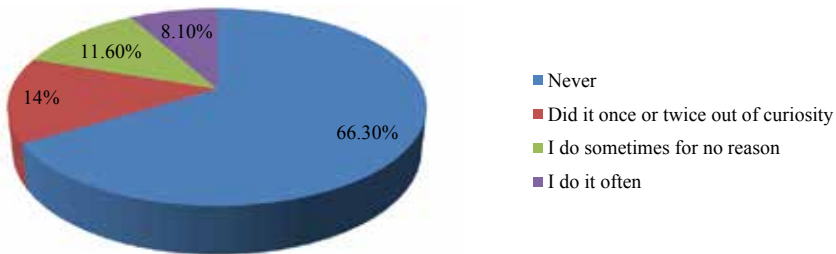**Figure 5: Respondents' Reactions to Radical Posts Online**

Figure 6: Frequency of 'Search' for Radical Documentaries/News Online

Majority of the respondents, around 86 per cent claimed that they were not contacted by any extremist groups or people. About 9.3 per cent of them were contacted and the rest simply refused to answer the question (Figure 7). Those who were contacted either ignored or blocked the person. Sometimes, they are invited in different closed groups on Facebook or messenger applications where compatible people get together and have discussions on sensitive issues, interpretations of verses of religious books, jihadist thoughts which are indirectly or directly aimed at provoking people. Also, some of the respondents have minimal ideas about dark websites, which are currently favourable platform for the terrorist organizations for recruitment and propaganda activities. Since it is hard to trace or hack those platforms; only a few participants tried using those websites. IS and other extremist groups have been using different online applications through which vast number of members can communicate with other followers. Conventional social media platforms are mostly vulnerable to the active observation and digital surveillance of the law enforcement agency while these dark web platforms can perform numerous activities without living a single trace.[60]

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[60] Gabriel Weimann, "Terrorist Migration to the Dark Web", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2016, pp. 40-44.

Figure 7: Respondents Contacted by Radical Groups Online

■ Yes

■ No

■ Refuse to answer
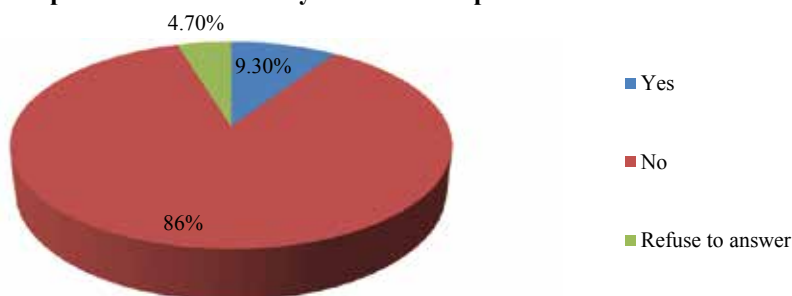
7.   Analysis

Since the vast amount of time the youths invest in social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other messenger applications, they get exposed to different groups or individuals spreading radical ideas or propaganda contents. Some Facebook pages or groups, YouTube channels generate and share contents that directly or indirectly influence the minds of young users, though sometimes, those get reported or simply changed names to avoid getting banned. In between 2013-2016, a number of Bangladeshis swore their allegiance towards IS and tried to leave the country to join them in Middle East. Different investigations found that different social media platforms played vital role in radicalizing those young people. A Facebook group named 'Ex Cadet Islamic Learning Forum' appeared to be the recruiting ground of these militants, which was administered by Saifullah Ozaki, an Associate Professor in Kyoto.[61] Among the respondents around 40 per cent holds ambiguous opinion on the moral ground of sharing those very contents and narratives ignoring the fact that those might influence the subconscious mind of people which later on affect their perspective as well as behaviour. Also, many young users go through those posts deliberately out of curiosity, consequently they are suggested to similar posts or video contents. That is how the sensitive users become the part of 'The Net' through which they happen to enter 'The Funnel' of radicalization though the advancement towards 'The Injection' of radical doctrines are influenced largely by various personal and socio-economic factors and experiences. Thus, the opportunities provided by social media are effectively exploited by the terrorist organizations projecting their values, ideologies and persuading young minds responding to those. It can be presumed that the large segment of the radicalization process involves the role of social media these days. According to a survey conducted on 250 arrested militants 82 per cent of the detainees were inspired to get involved in the path of jihad through Facebook contents

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[61] Nuruzzaman Labu, "How many Bangladeshis have joined IS?", *Dhaka Tribune*, 28 June 2017, available at https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2017/06/28/many-bangladeshis-joined/, accessed on 17 October 2020.

and majority of the communication among the group members took place through messenger applications. Even, in some cases, they developed separate applications for that very purpose.[62] The majority of the perpetrators of Holey Artisan Attack were internet users; even one's family blamed the influence of social media contents in indoctrinating their son with radical ideologies.[63]Another close associate of Dhaka Attack, Rashed (pseudo name) was largely influenced by the propaganda videos and contents online in his early college years, specifically those by Anwar al Awlaki and Ansar ul-Islam's ex-chief, Jashimuddin Rahmani. Eventually, he came into contact with other Neo-JMB militants and became the in-charge of media and recruitment.[64] It is evident from the investigation on Ansarul Islam militant Sumon that social media not only serves as the breeding ground of radicalization but also strengthen and sustain those views in the long run.

Social media serves as an eminent channel of psychological warfare for the terrorist organizations and provides immense possibility of brewing connection between individuals and extremism. Majority of the population here are people from the marginalized part of the socio-economic system, who do not have proper education or resources. These people are much more aligned to their religious identity. Thus, whenever they are being exposed to such contents on online platforms where they can easily observe issues, write, express whatever they feel like, they get highly addicted to it and prone to believe the people with misinterpreted version of religious texts and sometimes influenced by them. It is imperative to mention that the recent trend of radicalization and religious terrorism in Bangladesh shows that the young generation specifically who are coming from well-off families with standard educational background, are easily getting drawn to the path of extremism. In case of Holey Artisan Attack, most of the perpetrators were from well off background. Three of them were studying at Monash University, Malaysia while others had English medium school background. Investigation brought up the facts that most of them were influenced by their social networks and foreign power links.[65] These facts support the claims of Cristina Archetti, "individuals who turn to terrorism might be unemployed, excluded, alienated, vulnerable young people, but they could also be members from the educated, middle class, and even come from the well-off class."[66]

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[62] Kamrul Hasan, op. cit.

[63] Ali Riaz and Saimum Pervez, "Bangladeshi Militants: What Do We Know?", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 30, No. 6, 2018.

[64] Nuruzzaman Labu, "How Rashed got involved in terrorism", *Dhaka Tribune*, 29 July 2017, available at https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2017/07/29/how-rashed-got-involved-in-terrorism/, accessed on 17 October 2020.

[65] Intelligent Security Solutions, *ISS Risk Special Report: Dhaka Terrorist Attack—An Assessment*, Hong Kong: Intelligent Security Solutions, 2016.

[66] Christina Archetti, "Terrorism, Communication and New Media: Explaining Radicalization in the Digital Age". *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2015, pp. 49-59.

To drag the young generation irrespective of their class and background into the path of extremism, religious motivation plays a significant role. Since many young people have a blurry idea of religion, sacred texts and their interpretations, it gets easier for the groups to attract the target audience with radical contents. Since online media have vast resources, videos on those ideologies, audience might get easily influenced by those. The propagandas are mostly based on faith and claim that what they say is the purest version of Islam. The concepts of getting blessed in after life and promises of eternal glory in Ummah by eliminating those who do not follow the path are used to convince and allure the youth. Most importantly, the ever-increasing trend of Islamophobia since 9/11 paves the way for garnering support of young generation for violence against those who are the cause for such hatred against Muslims. These narratives, stories of sufferings of the Muslim brothers and sisters especially in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan are largely used for fostering the sense of anger, rage and empathy. They are targeting the young minds ranging from Madrassa students to well-educated students from universities along with different professionals and exploiting the sense of alienation, despair, and frustration in the existing society. Successfully stroking their personal failure and misery with sympathy, it becomes easier for the culprits to create a space of religious fraternity and inflicted responsibility to serve for afterlife glory. Thus, actions of individuals are constructed from a range of linguistic and rhetorical materials that persuade and shape the reality for them in a socio-cultural context.[67] Social media like blogging sites, Facebook, YouTube are the major role players in this regard exposing the young people to such narratives and ideologies. A plethora of messenger applications serves as a way of communication between the recruiters and the vulnerable groups. Unlike previous wave of terrorism in Bangladesh where person to person direct communication used to be a prominent feature, the second wave of terrorism is distinct in terms of radicalization strategy where the role of social media is significant.

8.   Recommendations

Countering radicalization should be the top most priority for the relevant policymakers and law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh. Due to the zero-tolerance policy to contain terrorism, government was able to ensure the detention and execution of large number of terrorists. However, the government and concerned agencies should concentrate on the process of radicalization that is taking place at the root level. In current circumstances and changed strategies extremist groups require much more attention of the government and policymakers. To form effective

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[67] Wiliam A Constanza, "Adjusting Our Gaze: An Alternative Approach to Understanding Youth Radicalization", *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2, p. 5, 2015.

policies for countering radicalization on online platforms, it is necessary to keep focus on several issues, e.g., disrupting the flow of online radical contents, ensuring punishments to the propagators, creating the atmosphere to de-radicalize the minds of youths, identifying the transnational terrorist organizations links to the home-grown groups and taking necessary steps to eliminate those threats, and ensuring dedication and efficiency at government level to accomplish the tasks.

First of all, the surveillance system to monitor the online radical websites, pages, e-mail, etc., is mandatory in order to minimizing risk and early detection of any kind of susceptible activities. The National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC) under Ministry of Home Affairs became functional in 2013 as one of the preeminent monitoring organizations in Bangladesh. Though NTMC was authorized to conduct extensive surveillance, initially it lacked updated system and mechanisms.[68] After 2015 necessary steps have been taken to purchase updated equipment and foster coordination with the law enforcement agencies. Till now, it has shut down 54 websites used for terrorist activities and banned plenty of fake Facebook ids and pages.[69] Besides, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act 2006 was enacted to prevent cybercrimes like fake e-publications, hacking, and unauthorized access to systems, disclose confidentiality and maintain e-commerce.[70] Later on, in 2018 Digital Security Act was enacted as a revised version of it. Article 31 of the act depicts the provisions of punishment for publishing contents that disrupt communal harmony or create hatred among people.[71] Since it does not specifically mention about radicalization or spread of extreme ideologies, the act yet to specify and recognize the crimes dealing with spreading extremist thoughts and propaganda in order to radicalize people. Moreover, responsible authority needs to be more prompt to identifying and punishing the online radical propagandists and miscreants. In some cases, the law enforcement authority brought admins of several Facebook pages under detention that used to spread propaganda.[72] But once they got banned, other followers tend to open other pages or groups. Hence, proper surveillance is the utmost necessity to identify the Facebook pages, most importantly the secret or closed groups that induce extreme and jihadist discussion. Coordination between social media companies, Internet service providers and law enforcement

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[68] Rejaul Karim Byron, "Bangladesh to purchase modern surveillance equipment", *The Daily Star*, 03 August 2015, available at https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/govt-buy-new-surveillance-tools-120967, accessed on 22 May 2020.

[69] Arifur Rahman Rabbi, "NTMC to develop a central data hub", *Dhaka Tribune*, 21 February 2019, available at https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2019/02/21/ntmc-to-develop-a-central-data-hub, accessed on 17 October 2020.

[70] Bangladesh Computer Council, "ICT Act-2006", available at http://www.bcc.gov.bd/site/page/348e6377-bec0-4727-bfe7-28b0609ccfdb/ICT-Act-2006-, accessed on 17 October 2020.

[71] Available at https://www.cirt.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Digital-Security-Act-2018-English-version.pdf, accessed on 22 November 2020.

[72] "Basherkella chief" held", op. cit.

agencies could be more effective to maintain a proper watch on online activities of suspected individuals and tackle online radicalization.[73]

An important aspect of counter-radicalization strategy on social media platform might be involving the religious leaders, their speeches on spreading peace and harmony through religion.[74] Circulating those on social media, different websites can help the young generation understand what the right path should be. After the Holey Artisan attack the government adopted certain ad hoc measures for de-radicalization of the youth that need to be coordinated and furthered. Besides, Bangladesh Islamic Foundation initiated projects regarding working with Imams, especially to ensure a pre-sermon speech on Friday prayers also needs to be continued. A two-year anti-militancy campaign countrywide by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is a good start. Likewise, attention needs to be paid on the issue of integration and rehabilitation of the militants released from prison.[75]

Besides, community leaders, civil society, intellectuals have greater roles to play on social media spreading counter narratives. This should be an effective way since such initiatives might bridge the gap between the general people and 'to be' radicalized youths. Civil society can create awareness programs through campaigns, meetings, workshops, cultural programs, skill development training mostly engaging the youths.[76] Educational institutions might launch workshops as well as campaigns on fruitful use of social networks, pros and cons of these platforms and possible misuse of these. Disseminating knowledge and information might be a better way to build up defence mechanism in the young generation against the vicious circle of radicalization and also the people who try to inject those in social media.

Furthermore, ensuring sufficient funding, coordination between policymakers and law enforcement agencies are important factors that need to be taken into consideration. The formation of CTTC in February 2016 was praiseworthy. Since then, it has been working on countering terrorist activities and most importantly, the issue of social media and its role in radicalization has been prioritized in their agenda recently. As South Asian countries fall under the risk of ever-increasing trend of radicalization and terrorism, they might put up together all their expertise

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[73] Ines Von Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards and Luke Gribbon, op. cit.
[74] Iftekharul Bashar, "Countering Violent Extremism in Bangladesh", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 9, No. 6, 2017.
[75] Syed Samiul Bashar Anik and Arifur Rahman Rabbi, "Experts: No coordination in Bangladesh Government's deradicalisation Programs", *Dhaka Tribune*, 29 November 2020, available at https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/militancy/2018/11/29/experts-no-coordination-in-bangladesh-govt-de-radicalization-programs, accessed on 23 November 2020.
[76] Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, "The Role of Civil Society in Countering Radicalization in Bangladesh", available at http://bei-bd.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The-role-of-civil-society-in-countering-radicalization.pdf, accessed on 23 November 2020.

and cooperate to fight the battle against online radicalization. While forming and implementing policies, it is important to take lessons from other countries' policies. For example, to counter extremist narratives, Malaysia went for setting up a regional digital counter messaging Centre for Southeast Asia, the Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communication Centre in October 2015.[77] To put up a successful counter-radicalization framework, it is an utmost necessity to put aside the ongoing power politics that somehow patronizes the fundamentalist groups and their followers in Bangladesh.

Along with military and criminal justice approach to battle extremist violence focus should be given more on public health approach to deal with radicalization. Public health approach involves close connection and scrutiny at the grass root level. It focuses on not only curing someone holding the radical thoughts but also identifying those who are prone to get radicalized and take actions thereby.[78] Moreover, intensive and community level approach is needed to deal with the process of radicalization. Educational institutions like public universities, private universities and madrassas are the mostly targeted areas by the radicals. Hence, it is important to keep these students away from any kind of provocation in Jihadist thoughts.

9. Conclusion

In the emerging context, it is going to be a Himalayan task to eliminate the threats stemming from religious extremism. All the trends that have been found are directing towards a harsh reality ahead.

The political silence regarding murders of bloggers, writers, atheists, and teachers proved the fact that these extremist ideologies are creating a stronger space day by day. Hence, government needs to continue its already adopted steps for de-radicalization. The motive of the radical groups is not only to counter atheists, but also liberal voice, sanity and freedom of the people. The series of murders in 2015 and the attacks in 2016 inferred that if this on-going trend of radicalization continues, majority of the young generation might get lost to the path of extremism. The Holey Artisan attack put the issue of vulnerability into the forefront. Therefore, the country needs context specific policies and proper surveillance system in order to battle the threat of new wave of radicalization, which is shrinking the liberal space for freedom of individuals in Bangladesh day by day.

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[77] Muhammad Haziq Bin Jani, "Countering Violent Extremism in Malaysia: Past Experience and Future Prospects", *Counter Terrorist Trend and Analyses*, Vol. 9, No. 6, 2017.
[78] Kamaldeep Bhuian and Edgar Jones, "The challenge of Radicalization: A Public Health Approach to Understanding and Intervention", *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2017.