



Internet-Supported Recruitment of Terrorist Organizations: An Analysis of the Early Stages of the Recruitment Process and Countermeasures to Prevent Terrorist Recruitment¹

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Abstract: *Terrorism is one of the most critical threats to the stability of democratic societies. It seeks to achieve its political goals by undermining public trust in governments and instilling fear in society. Terrorist organizations need weapons and money for the continuity of their activities and to achieve their goals. However, terrorist organizations that do not have sufficient and qualified human resources are destined to disappear. For this reason, terrorist organizations adapted their recruitment processes to the rapid developments in internet-based technologies, and especially by using online social networks, gained significant momentum in their activities. They use internet-based technologies to help their traditional recruitment processes. By reorganizing their recruitment methods, all citizens of the world become their target audience. Moreover, they now carry out their recruitment processes more confidentially and faster than before, thanks to the communication opportunities provided by internet-based technologies. This study examines how terrorist organizations perform their internet-supported recruitment process, what tools they use, and*

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how the authorities can combat the recruitment of terrorist organizations by intervening in the early stages of the process. In the introduction part of the study, the relationship between terrorism, the media, and the internet are analyzed from a historical perspective to understand the recruitment process better. The second part examines the internet-supported recruitment process with its stages and the internet-based tools used in the process. It will also be mentioned that throughout the study, the internet-supported recruitment process is not defined as a different process from traditional recruitment but as complementary to each other. The last part analyzes how the human resources of terrorism can be rendered dysfunctional with countermeasures and practices developed at the initial stage of the internet-supported recruitment process, in which the bond between recruiters and potential candidates is not strengthened and is not confidential yet. As a result, this research essentially aims to reveal that the human resources of terrorist organizations can be weakened much more effectively with the national and international countermeasures and practices taken at the very beginning of the internet-supported recruitment process.

Key Words: *Terrorism, Internet-Supported Recruitment, Radicalization, Online Social Networks, Countermeasures.*

1. Introduction

Terrorism does not have a specific and widely accepted definition due to the nations' political interests and ideological pressure.³ The well-known statement that "one's man terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" clearly implies the difficulty in defining terrorism objectively.⁴ Although almost every country condemns terrorism, it is understood to be hard to define because it is an issue that can be distorted. Schmid and Jongman, in their research, showed that there were more than 109 definitions of terrorism in the literature.⁵ According to Bruce Hoffman who is the editor-in-chief of *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*:

³ Hayati Hazır, *Demokrasilerde İstikrarsızlığın Sebebi Olarak Siyasal Şiddet ve Terörizm*, (Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, 2001), p. 45.

⁴ Brian M. Jenkins, "International Terrorism The Other World War," (RAND Publication Series, A Project AIR FORCE Report Prepared for the United States Air Force, November 1985), p. 3.

⁵ Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, et al., *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases and Literature*, (Transaction Publishers, 1988), p. 6.

“Terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives, violent – or, equally important, threatens violence, designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target, conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia), and perpetrated by a subnational group or non-state entity.”⁶

The impact and extent of terrorism cannot be measured solely by the number of victims it receives. In reality, terrorism has a greater goal than increasing the number of victims, such as destabilizing democratic societies and demonstrating the weakness of governments.⁷ For this reason, *psychology* is the central strategy of terrorism, which means terrorist organizations are waging psychological warfare to gain their political goals. Thus, violence is used as a means of communication in this warfare.⁸ Moreover, *publicity* is necessary for terrorism since terrorist organizations do not aim to directly or legally influence policy changes. Instead, they use violence to push societies toward responsible institutions indirectly.⁹ For this reason, terrorist organizations struggle to control their target audience by using media as a weapon. German General Erich Ludendorff emphasizes the reality of media during World War I with his meaningful statement; “Wars are no longer being waged with weapons, but with words. The one who uses the word well, not the weapons, wins the war.”

Terrorism tries to reach its ideological and political goals by creating fear, despair, and panic in society and coercing the authorities to take a step in their desired direction. Media is one of the most important tools to realize these purposes because terrorist acts that do not attract the media and the public’s attention cannot reach their goal. Therefore, the issue of how to draw society’s attention, as well as conventional and social media, has become much more essential for terrorist organizations than planning the action itself. In this regard, all the means of media are used by terrorist organizations to quickly deliver their terrorist acts and consequences to the masses and keep the public busy for days.¹⁰

⁶ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 43.

⁷ Walter Laqueur, “Reflections on Terrorism,” *Foreign Affairs*, 65 (1) (1986), pp. 86-100, p. 87.

⁸ Ertan Efeçil, *Terörizm ve Terörle Mücadele Yöntemleri*, (Gündoğan Yayınları, 2019), p. 25.

⁹ William F. Shughart II, “Analytical History of Terrorism, 1945-2000,” *Public Choice*, 128 (1/2) (2006), pp. 7-39, p. 7.

¹⁰ Yusuf Devran, “The Problematics of Media and Terror,” *Gumushane University E-Journal of Faculty of Communication*, 3 (2015), pp. 84-95, p.85.

1.1. Terrorism and Media

Once powerless actors realized the influence of media on public opinion, they employed the asymmetric effect of media for their terrorist acts in a short time.¹¹ Therefore terrorist organizations want to benefit from the media as soft power since they know it is impossible to win the fight by only applying hard power.¹² The primary aim of terrorist organizations is to provoke societies against the state, which ultimately wants to engage the state in an endless war.¹³ This approach is defined as a strategy of attrition,¹⁴ and it is evident in the words of Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was al-Qaeda's second-in-command until his death: "We are in a battle, and more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media."

Indeed, it is unthinkable for terrorism to keep the national and international public busy without the media because the media is accepted as the leading actor in political communication.¹⁵ For years, terrorist organizations have tried to take part in the media to direct or influence the media, convey their messages to their target audience, and make their propaganda. In this context, terrorist organizations have established their traditional media¹⁶ and, eventually, their online social media. Furthermore, terrorist organizations have become "*the media*" with the developments of internet-based communication technology that does not require high costs, such as forums, websites, video/photo sharing sites, and especially online social networks.¹⁷ Hence terrorist organizations reorganized their asymmetrical strategy on a brand new basis.¹⁸ Moreover, technological developments fundamentally have affected the relationship between terrorism and media. In the history of terrorism, the attacks on World Trade Centre and the Pentagon by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001 (9/11) was a significant turning point. Since then, a new age of terrorism has emerged, bringing terrorism to the

¹¹ Hasan D. Pekşen, "The Use of Media in the Transformation of Asymmetric Strategies: Common Logic, Different Methods," *Güvenlik Bilimleri Dergisi*, 10 (1) (2021), pp. 239-258, p. 240.

¹² Zakir Avşar, "Media, Terror and Security in the Age of Internet," *TRT Akademi*, 2 (3) (2017), pp. 117-132, p. 118.

¹³ Pekşen, "The Use of Media in the Transformation of Asymmetric Strategies: Common Logic, Different Methods," p.244.

¹⁴ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, 31 (1) (2006), pp. 49-80, p. 63.

¹⁵ Necdet Ekinci, "A Problem Growing in the Marsh Media: Terrorism," *Karadeniz Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 8 (15) (2016), pp. 217-236, p. 219.

¹⁶ Devran, "The Problematics of Media and Terror," p. 90.

¹⁷ Avşar, "Media, Terror and Security in the Age of Internet," p.119-120.

¹⁸ Pekşen, "The Use of Media in the Transformation of Asymmetric Strategies: Common Logic, Different Methods," p.251.

top of the political agenda.¹⁹ At that time, terrorism was not a recent phenomenon, but the point reached of terrorism terrified the whole world. Without considering the advance in internet technology, we cannot explain the extent of today's terrorism.

1.2. Terrorism and the Internet

Shima D. Keen describes the internet as a double-edged sword from the counter-terrorism perspective. To prevent terrorist organizations from achieving their strategic and operational goals, one side of the blade represents the cyber defense of national digital infrastructure, and the other represents the prevention of using the internet as a communication tool and propaganda tool.²⁰ By using the internet as a tool, terrorist organizations can easily escape the control mechanisms of traditional media and have the opportunity to disseminate their messages to their target audiences at an unprecedented speed. Moreover, this opportunity has increased the scope of the terrorist organizations' target audience at a rate they did not expect.²¹ Contrary to the traditional media order, not only the state-based actors but everyone has become able to share their messages using the internet.²² Therefore terrorist organizations no longer need traditional media institutions to disseminate their messages to their target audiences. Additionally, they have re-functionalized their media strategy and put it at the base of their political strategies. The relationship between media and asymmetric strategy has been moved to a further dimension with the help of new internet-based tools provided by internet technology.²³ Besides, online social networks made this fact possible more quickly and effectively.

The main reasons why terrorist organizations use the internet, especially online social networks, are

- easy accessibility,
- no censorship,
- little regulation,
- almost limitless target audience,

¹⁹ Shima D. Keene, "Terrorism and the Internet: a Double-edge Sword," *Journal of Money Laundering Control*, 14 (4) (2011), pp. 359-370, p. 360.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 360.

²¹ Avşar, "Media, Terror and Security in the Age of Internet," p. 127.

²² *Ibid*, p. 126.

²³ Pekşen, "The Use of Media in the Transformation of Asymmetric Strategies: Common Logic, Different Methods," p.253.

- the anonymity of communication,
- fast flow of information,
- inexpensive development and maintenance of a website/accounts of online social networks,
- a multimedia environment, and
- the ability to shape coverage in the traditional media.²⁴

These valuable elements allow terrorist organizations to carry out their activities with minimal risk.

1.2.1. The use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes

Terrorist organizations can use internet technologies, especially online social networks, for various purposes. Information is the basis of these usage purposes. Because of the internet and its facilities, terrorist organizations can obtain, control and assimilate the information in line with their goals, and disseminate it to their target audiences, even the entire world.²⁵ In this respect, terrorist organizations can achieve their goals by promoting their ideology through online social networks, which have an unlimited and cheap source of information. With the advent of decentralized and inexpensive global communication networks, terrorist organizations have had the opportunity to convey their messages to more audiences than they previously could not reach.²⁶ For this reason, online social networks have become their leading information provider.

Various classifications can be made regarding the usage of internet technologies by terrorist organizations. Nevertheless, it is crucial to make the following distinction. Firstly internet can be used as a weapon to the national and international digital infrastructure. Secondly, it can simplify terrorist acts, providing privacy and significant superiority to terrorist organizations. The first is a cyber defense concern, while the second is an issue that considerably adds to the presence and continuation of terrorist organizations. That is, the internet is used as both a weapon and a tool.

²⁴ Zsolt Haig and László Kovács, "New Way of Terrorism: Internet and Cyber-terrorism," *Arms Security* 6 (4) (2007), pp. 659-671, p.660 and Gabriel Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," (United States Institute of Peace, Special Report, 2004), p. 3.

²⁵ Mihaela Marcu and Cristina Bălțeanu, "Social Media-A Real Source of Proliferation of International Terrorism," *Annales Universitatis Apulensis Series Oeconomica*, 16 (1) (2014), pp. 162-169, p.162.

²⁶ James A. Lewis, "The Internet and Terrorism," *Proceedings of American Society of International Law*, 99 (2005), pp. 112-115, p. 113.

The terrorist use of the internet as a tool can be divided into various areas such as target selection, recruitment, radicalization, training, planning and coordination, publicity and propaganda, psychological warfare, fundraising, etc.²⁷

1.2.2. WEB 2.0: Development of Internet Technology and Terrorist Presence

Internet is a phenomenon of the modern world and an integral part of our lives, affecting every aspect of human life. Abbreviated from *interconnected networks*, it is a global network system that enables people to reach each other continuously and interactively.²⁸ The invention of the internet was a turning point in human history as it changed our lives significantly. Although it first appeared as a computer network in 1969 due to ARPA (Advance Research Projects Agency)'s research, Dr. Tim Bernes-Lee put the world wide web, Web 1.0, into practice in 1991. In the beginning, the world wide web allowed users only to search and read information,²⁹ and there was no user interaction or content generation. In the late 1990s, shortly after Web 1.0 came into existence, terrorist organizations began using the new technology for their political and operational purposes.³⁰ In this regard, after Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA or Túpac Amaru) had seized the Japanese embassy in Lima, Peru, on December 17th, 1996, a new era in terrorism and media relations began. The terrorist organization's website, which had over 100 pages, informed the entire world and even mainstream media about the terrorist incident. It was the first time a terrorist organization broadcasted its messages to the world without the assistance of the mainstream media.³¹ After Web 1.0 was put into practice, not specific terrorist organizations but all terrorist organizations were engaged in cyberspace and quickly discovered the value and importance of the internet.³² At the beginning of the terrorist presence in cyberspace in 1998, 12 out of the 30 terrorist organizations accepted as foreign terrorist organizations had

²⁷ United Nations, "The Use of The Internet for Terrorist Purposes," (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), p. 3-12 and Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," p. 2 and Keene, "Terrorism and the Internet: A Double-edge Sword," p.364.

²⁸ Kaan Altinkaynak, "Sosyal Medyanın Kavramsal Çerçevesi ve Teknik Altyapısı," in Sosyal Medya Platformları (Mustafa Karaca ed., Anadolu University Press, 2019), pp. 3-15, p. 5.

²⁹ Ibid, p.4.

³⁰ Mark Taylor, "An Analysis of Online Terrorist Recruiting and Propaganda Strategies," E-International Relations, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/07/19/an-analysis-of-online-terrorist-recruiting-and-propaganda-strategies/> (accessed January 9th, 2022), p.1.

³¹ Dorothy E. Denning, *Terror's Web: How the Internet Is Transforming Terrorism*, in Handbook on Internet Crime (Yvonne Jewkes and Majid Yar eds., Willian Publishing, 2009), p. 2.

³² Lewis, "The Internet and Terrorism," p. 112.

their websites. By 2002, 18 terrorist organizations on the U.S. State Department's list of terrorist organizations had 29 active websites.³³ Consequently, the internet has become the fundamental tool for disseminating terrorist propaganda, recruiting new members, training, and fundraising.³⁴

Web 2.0 is based on interactive user-generated content and was put into practice in 2004. Since then, the term "social media or online social networks" has been used as a synonym for Web 2.0.³⁵ Online social networks are the most significant applications of Web 2.0 and have profoundly affected human history. Thanks to this new technology, people can communicate interactively and anonymously and create online communities via websites like Wikipedia, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, etc. Moreover, audiovisual productions have been decentralized thanks to these new internet-based tools.³⁶ However, it soon became apparent that this new technology could be utilized for political purposes, and it was not long before terrorist organizations discovered new opportunities from online social networks. Terrorist propaganda, primarily through online social networks, started to be seen in the 2000s when this new technology began to be used. Unlike Web 1.0 technology, online social networks have completely changed the relationship between terrorist recruiters and their target audience, increasing their ability to disseminate terrorist propaganda beyond the borders and making mass recruitment easier.³⁷

Important research shows that by 2005 all 40 organizations that were agreed as terrorist organizations had their presence in cyberspace with more than 4500 websites.³⁸ Another study about the significance and implications of online social networks in spreading terrorism finds that 9 out of 10 terrorist operations on the internet are based on online social networks.³⁹ According to the reports of the University of Arizona's Dark Web project, almost all terrorist organizations, including those whose names have not even been heard by the world public, exist on the internet.⁴⁰ Today in the era of Web 3.0, almost all terrorist organizations continue their presence through one form of internet technology. Thousands of websites,

³³ Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," p. 2 and Denning, *Terror's Web: How the Internet Is Transforming Terrorism*, p. 3.

³⁴ Taylor, "An Analysis of Online Terrorist Recruiting and Propaganda Strategies," p.1.

³⁵ Altinkaynak, "Sosyal Medyanın Kavramsal Çerçevesi ve Teknik Altyapısı", p. 7.

³⁶ Ekinci, "A Problem Growing in the Marsh Media: Terrorism," p. 218.

³⁷ Taylor, "An Analysis of Online Terrorist Recruiting and Propaganda Strategies," p.1.

³⁸ Ibid., p.1.

³⁹ Marcu et al., "Social Media-A Real Source of Proliferation of International Terrorism," p. 162.

⁴⁰ United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, "Countering the Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes-Legal and Technical Aspects" (CTITF Publication Series, 2011), p. 27.

countless online social network accounts, online forums, and chat rooms are used by terrorists and their supporters.⁴¹ Furthermore, thanks to the new internet technology, terrorist organizations use not only their native languages but also several different languages for their terrorist acts.⁴²

2. Internet-Supported Recruitment

Terrorist organizations had used traditional recruitment methods before discovering that new internet technology was beneficial for their recruitment processes. Traditional recruitment was limited to some geographical regions and a particular target audience due to the inadequacy and difficulty of communication.⁴³ Furthermore, terrorist organizations relied on traditional media tools such as broadcast media (television, radio) and print media (newspapers, magazines, etc.) to carry out their psychological war and propaganda. They also utilized face-to-face meeting techniques to increase their human resources.⁴⁴ For example, before the 9/11 attacks, the official recruitment of al-Qaeda was provided by their terror camps operating in Afghanistan. With the global war on terrorism, like other terrorist organizations, al-Qaeda also transformed its traditional recruitment methods into a looser, distributed, and interactive structure. After that, new candidates began to be exposed to jihadist propaganda to be recruited via the internet, which is used to disseminate propaganda and communicate between local recruiters and new candidates.⁴⁵ Furthermore, with the help of the internet and online social networks, terrorist organizations now use individual cells to increase the variety of disseminated messages and communication skills.⁴⁶

Recruiters of terrorist organizations currently work independently from the center of the organizations and have the opportunity to live anywhere in the world. Moreover, they take advantage of reaching their target audience living anywhere

⁴¹ Vase Rusumanov, "The Use of Internet by Terrorist Organizations," *Information & Security: An International Journal*, 34 (2) (2016), pp. 137-150, p. 137.

⁴² Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," p. 3.

⁴³ Ergül Çeliksoy and Smith Ouma, "Terrorist Use of the Internet," *Bilişim Hukuk Dergisi*, 2 (2019), pp. 243-267, p. 253.

⁴⁴ Sara Zeiger and Joseph Gyte, "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," in *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness* (Alex P. Schmid ed., The Hague, NL: ICCT Press, 2020), pp. 358-395, p.360.

⁴⁵ Martin Rudner, "'Electronic Jihad': The Internet as Al-Qaeda's Catalyst for Global Terror," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40 (1) (2017), pp. 10-23, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Zeiger et al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p. 360.

in the world previously close to them.⁴⁷ Thus, terrorist organizations have gained a decentralized structure. On the other hand, individuals who sympathize with the ideology of the terrorist organization and who cannot communicate directly with members of organizations because of geographically far from the headquarter now become potential members of the terrorist organization.⁴⁸ The developments in internet technology have made it possible for both recruiters and sympathizers to use opportunities provided by the internet.

Martin Rudner defines the internet as a catalyst that facilitates terrorist activities and describes the emerging threat environment by al-Qaeda as an “electronic jihad.”⁴⁹ Another scholar Marc Sageman describes this threat environment as “Leaderless Jihad,” which provides easy training and propaganda to terrorist organizations from a distance and even their homes. The internet equips the sympathizers and potential members of terrorist organizations with inspirational guidance.⁵⁰ Considering the point reached by terrorism stemming from technological innovations, many different analogies can be made to describe it. However, online recruitment efforts of terrorist organizations have two essential features. First, it is a gradual transition and a process that needs many stages. Secondly, the recruitment process depends on the effective use of online platforms such as websites, online social networks, forums, chat rooms, games, applications, etc., unlike traditional recruitment.⁵¹ In this sense, instead of the traditional institutions such as training camps and minor group affiliates used for radicalization and training, it has begun to give way to online institutions due to the capability of the high level of anonymity and easy communication.⁵²

Whether traditional or internet-supported, the recruitment process is dynamic and often includes radicalization. While radicalization is not intense in the early stages of the recruitment process, it becomes more intense after friendship and

⁴⁷ Denning, “Terror’s Web How Internet is Transforming Terrorism,” p. 12.

⁴⁸ Stuart Macdonald and David Mair, “Terrorism Online: A New Strategic Environment,” in *Terrorism Online: Politics, Law and Technology* (Thomas Chen, Lee Jarvis and Stuart Macdonald eds., Routledge, 2015), p. 6.

⁴⁹ Rudner, “‘Electronic Jihad’: The Internet as Al Qaeda’s Catalyst for Global Terror,” p. 14.

⁵⁰ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁵¹ Gabriel Weimann, “The Emerging Role of Social Media in the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters,” in *Foreign Fighters under International Law and Beyond* (Andrea de Guttry, Francesca Capone and Christophe Paulussen eds., T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016), pp. 77-95, p. 81.

⁵² Abdel R. Alzoubaidi, Doina Prodan-Palade, and Siddik Ekici, “Terrorist Recruitment and Counter Measures in the Cyber World,” in *Countering Terrorist Recruitment in the Context of Armed Counter-Terrorism Operation*, (Siddik Ekici, Hüseyin Akdoğan, Eman Ragab, Ahmet Ekici and Richard Warnes, eds, IOS Press, 2016), pp. 55-66, p. 58.

trust are built between the recruiter and the potential candidate. Radicalization is a part of recruitment, but in fact, these two processes need to be differentiated.⁵³ Although there is no agreed definition of radicalization, it refers to a process of belief modification⁵⁴ in which several factors work to produce extremist outcomes.⁵⁵ On the other hand, recruitment is a dynamic process that takes place according to the evaluation criteria of both the prospective candidate and the recruiter. In this dynamic process, prospective candidate is encouraged or deterred from joining the terrorist organization.⁵⁶ According to Edgar Jones, recruitment “is often divided into push-factors (social, economic, and political factors that create a sense of injustice and discrimination) and pull-factors (sense of belonging to a cause or network, adventure, and an opportunity to do something worthwhile or heroic).⁵⁷”

Furthermore, there are two types of online recruitment processes in internet-based terrorist recruitment: internet-supported recruitment and virtual self-recruitment.⁵⁸ At the center of this study, the former will be examined, and the latter, often referred to as lone wolves, will be excluded from this study and can be the subject of another study.

2.1. Internet-Supported Recruitment Process

Many studies explain the recruitment process of terrorist organizations, and almost all of these studies describe it as a multi-stage process that includes radicalization. Regardless of the recruitment process, this study aims to reveal effective methods to protect the target audience from radicalization rather than to describe this process entirely. Because once the target audience is identified, the countermeasures taken on time by authorities can prevent the radicalization of vulnerable individuals more effectively. Terrorist organizations need much more human resources to reach their political goals than their weapons and financial

⁵³ Edgar Jones, “The Reception of Broadcast Terrorism: Recruitment and Radicalisation,” *International Review of Psychiatry*, 29 (4) (2017), pp. 320-326, p. 322.

⁵⁴ Peter R. Neumann, “The Trouble with Radicalization,” *International Affairs* 89 (4) (2013), pp. 873-893.

⁵⁵ Ahmet Sinan Yayla, “Prevention of Recruitment to Terrorism,” in *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness* (Alex P. Schmid ed., The Hague, NL: ICCT Press, 2020), pp. 412-463, p. 415.

⁵⁶ Jones, “The Reception of Broadcast Terrorism: Recruitment and Radicalisation,” p. 322.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁵⁸ Peter R. Neumann and Brooke Rogers, “Recruitment and Mobilisation for Islamist Militant Movement in Europe,” (The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) at King’s College London for the European Commission (Directorate General Justice, Freedom and Security)), pp. 49-53.

resources because human resources are critical for carrying out attacks and sustaining operations. Therefore it is essential to develop efficient counter-terrorism policies to prevent terrorist organizations from recruiting new members.⁵⁹ Counter-terrorism policies that intervene in the early stages of the recruitment process can make the survival of terrorist organizations much less possible. For this reason, it is necessary to mention the recruitment process of terrorist organizations briefly.

It is difficult to propose a one-size-fits-all recruitment approach employed by terrorist organizations because each terrorist organization follows a distinct recruitment process. Moreover, each terrorist organization uses different recruitment procedures for different target audiences. According to Gabriel Weimann recruitment process of terrorist organizations can roughly be divided into four stages: instruction, preparation, training, and launching.⁶⁰ In another study supported by RAND, Al-Qaida's recruitment model is defined as four stages: the net, the funnel, the infection, and the seed crystal.⁶¹ Although the stages of the recruitment process are named differently in the literature, at the beginning of the process, there is a stage of identifying prospective candidates to make the first contact with them. And after this stage radicalization process starts. For this reason, it is crucial to describe the recruitment process for defense against terrorism. In this study, the very beginning of the recruitment process is examined, regardless of the whole recruitment process of terrorist organizations, because this study aims to render this process dysfunctional from the very beginning.

Terrorist organizations cannot mainly use internet-supported recruitment but also use traditional recruitment for their survival and human resources. With the opportunities provided by internet technology, internet tools contribute to the traditional recruitment process as a communication and propaganda tool. To put it simply, there are no two types of recruitment process used by terrorist organizations, and in fact, they use internet-supported recruitment as a complement to traditional one. The internet-supported recruitment process represents the starting point of the overall recruitment process and consists of two stages. After that, the process generally continues with the traditional recruitment methods. In this part of the study, firstly target audience of the internet-supported recruitment is examined, then its stages and the internet-based tools used in the process are analyzed in detail.

⁵⁹ Scott Gerwehr and Sara Daly, "Al-Qaida: Terrorist selection and Recruitment," (RAND Publication Series, 2006), p. 73.

⁶⁰ Weimann, "The Emerging Role of Social Media in the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters," p. 78.

⁶¹ Gerwehr et. al., "Al-Qaida: Terrorist selection and Recruitment," p. 83.

2.2. Target Audience of the Internet-Supported Recruitment

Terrorist organizations utilize the internet and online social networks as propaganda and communication tool. Almost all internet-based platforms and tools are used to identify prospective candidates and establish first contact with them. Thus, it is possible to develop trust-based relationships. Gabriel Weimann, who has been working on the use of the internet by terrorist organizations for more than ten years, defines the use of the internet for recruitment purposes as cyber-fatwas.⁶² Before explaining the stages of the internet-supported recruitment process, the first question is who responds to cyber-fatwas mentioned by Gabriel Weimann, since determining the target audience of internet-supported recruitment is crucial.

Terrorist organizations can reach an unlimited target audience thanks to open-source websites and online social networks throughout the internet-supported recruitment process. For this reason, the recruiters of terrorist organizations aim to reach everyone, regardless of gender, age, faith, or geography, including thrill seekers, ideologically motivated individuals, lone wolves, and groups from not only the Middle East but also Western societies.⁶³ To illustrate, terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front and Daesh use the internet to recruit new members from Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere across the Muslim world.⁶⁴

The active recruiters of terrorist organizations are between 40 and 50 years, and the involved terrorists are between 20 and 35 years. According to the studies on the captured terrorists, it is seen that the age range of terrorists is 18-32 years old and overwhelmingly male. Furthermore, most of those who joined terrorist organizations from developed countries are well-educated individuals from middle-class families.⁶⁵ On the other hand, more than half of internet and social online network users are between 22 and 44 years old.⁶⁶

⁶² Gabriel Weimann, "Cyber-Fatwas and Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34 (10) (2011), pp. 765-781.

⁶³ Weimann, "The Emerging Role of Social Media in the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters," p. 78.

⁶⁴ "Foreign Jihadists in Syria: Tracking Recruitment Networks," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/foreign-jihadists-syria-tracking-recruitmentnetworks> (accessed April 23rd, 2022) and "Up to 11,000 Foreign Fighters in Syria; Steep Rise among Western Europeans," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, available at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans> (accessed April 23rd, 2022).

⁶⁵ Alzoubaidi et. al., "Terrorist Recruitment and Counter Measures in the Cyber World," p. 56.

⁶⁶ Marcu et al., "Social Media-A Real Source of Proliferation of International Terrorism," p. 166.

Considering the relationship between the average age of those who joined terrorist organizations and internet users, it is seen that the main protagonists of internet-supported recruitment are the young generations. The internet is a tool used by terrorist recruiters to radicalize the youth rather than the older generation. It is easier to find individuals with a higher tendency to radicalize in the young generation because socially depressed, angry and marginalized individuals are more common among them. Also, the young generation is prone to spend more time online than others.⁶⁷ As a result, terrorist recruiters mainly aim to make the young generation the leading actor in the recruitment process because it is easy to reach them through the internet and online social networks.⁶⁸

2.3. The Stages of Internet-Supported Recruitment

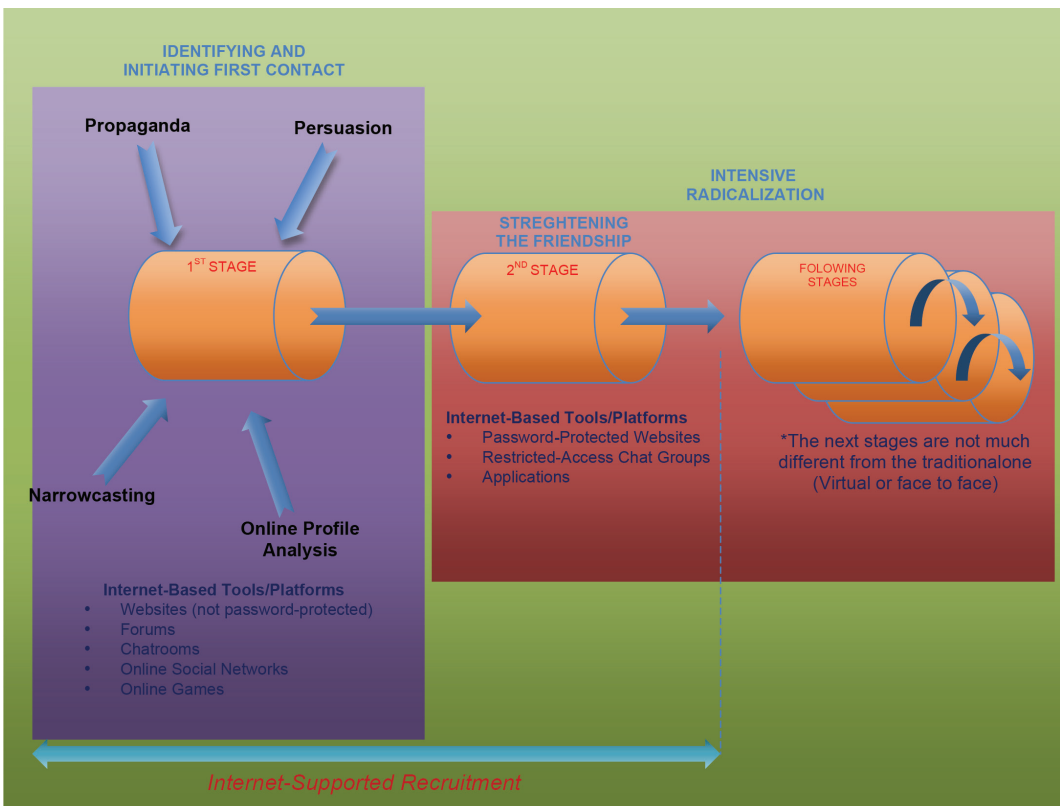


Figure 1. Internet-Supported Recruitment's Stages

⁶⁷ Tina Freiburger and Jeffrey S. Crane, "A Systematic Explanation of Terrorist Use of the Internet," *International Journal of Cyber Criminology* 2 (1) (2008), pp. 309-319, p. 313-314.

⁶⁸ Çeliksoy et. al., "Terrorist Use of the Internet," p. 254.

During the internet-supported recruitment process, terrorist organizations use all the opportunities provided by today's internet technology and can instantly adapt their recruitment processes to changing situations. In this regard, the internet and mainly online social networks are used for two purposes in the recruitment process. Moreover, these two objectives constitute two successive stages of the internet-supported recruitment process. The first one is using the internet and online social networks as a means of propaganda and increasing the visibility of the terrorist organization to identify prospective candidates. This stage can be described as "*Identifying and Initiating First Contact*" with the possible candidates.⁶⁹

The second aim of using internet technologies by terrorist organizations is to radicalize the identified candidates who want to be a member of a terrorist organization. While these two purposes constitute the two stages of internet-supported recruitment, they also determine the entry points of prospective candidates into the recruitment process. The first stage can be skipped if the prospective candidate positively views joining a terrorist organization. After the first stage, monitoring the recruitment process can be difficult for the authorities because of the confidentiality provided by internet technology. Furthermore, it could be troublesome to disrupt and intervene in the process. As a result, this research aims to discourage potential candidates from proceeding to the second stage of the internet-supported recruitment process, referred to as "*Strengthening the Friendship*." Therefore, the countermeasures and practices taken towards the first stage of internet-supported recruitment can disrupt this process and minimize the efforts of terrorist organizations to recruit new members and provide significant advantages to the authorities in the defense against terrorism. In this regard, Figure-1 delivers a diagram of stages of internet-supported recruitment based on these purposes and shows the tools used in each stage.

There is no intensive radicalization throughout the first stage, "*Identifying and Initiating First Contact*." Internet-based tools such as online social networks, open-source websites, forums, and online games are utilized to disseminate propaganda, present personal narratives, and initiate first contact with potential and vulnerable candidates to prepare them for radicalization. It should be mentioned that these internet-based platforms are worthy of identifying and connecting with prospective candidates in addition to other benefits of internet-supported recruitment.⁷⁰ Methods

⁶⁹ Yayla, "Prevention of Recruitment to Terrorism," p. 423.

⁷⁰ Gregory Waters and Robert Postings, "Spiders of the Caliphate: Mapping the Islamic State's Global Support Network on Facebook," (Counter Extremism Project (CEP) Report, 2018), p. 10-11.

such as persuasion, narrowcasting for a specific target audience, propaganda, and online profile analysis are used to identify and select vulnerable individuals.⁷¹ However, using such platforms, especially online social networks for recruitment, provides advantages for the recruiters but also has disadvantages. Transparent and non-protected communication with a potential candidate on online social networks can leave recruiters and prospective candidates more open to police monitoring. Therefore efficient countermeasures and practices taken for turning individuals on this path can prevent terrorist organizations from recruiting new members since this stage is almost entirely done through open internet resources. Moreover, it is easier for the authorities to monitor and neutralize recruiters' efforts in the first stage.

In the second stage of internet-supported recruitment, once a recruiter identifies potential candidates, the recruitment process continues with more secure platforms such as password-protected websites and one-to-one messaging applications such as Whatsapp, Telegram, Kik, etc. Recruiters utilize unregulated mobile messaging apps and password-protected websites to accelerate radicalization while strengthening friendships and trust with possible candidates. After the first stage, it is much more difficult for authorities to infiltrate the recruitment process and reach victims because the second stage of internet-supported recruitment is done very confidentially.

Consequently, the intensity of radicalization and the degree of confidentiality of communication differentiate these two stages from each other. So it can be concluded that it is essential to develop efficient active and passive countermeasures in the first stage of internet-supported recruitment to prevent the recruitment of terrorist organizations. Also, this concludes that terrorist organizations use different types of internet-based tools in the different stages of the recruitment process. While some internet-based tools are used for spreading propaganda to a broader target audience, others help the recruiter guide individuals towards one-to-one, eventually, face-to-face communication.⁷²

2.3.1. The First Stage: Identifying and Initiating First Contact

Terrorist organizations initially used internet-based technologies to disseminate propaganda, attract the international public's attention, and spread their organizational structure and ideologies. Moreover, they continue to use internet-based technologies for these purposes. While they achieve these goals by disseminating information

⁷¹ Zeiger et. al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p.364

⁷² Ibid, p. 365.

through websites and other tools,⁷³ usage purposes of the internet have increased with the opportunities provided by new internet-based platforms. Whether used as a propaganda tool or for further recruitment efforts, the internet and especially online social networks have facilitated terrorist organizations to spread their ideologies unprecedentedly and reach unlimited target audiences without geographical limitations.

Terrorist organizations increasingly use websites, chat rooms, and forums for propaganda and recruitment since such internet-based tools are successful in creating virtual communities.⁷⁴ Unradicalized passive candidates exposed to the materials on these platforms are simply readers rather than active members. For this reason, these kinds of venues powered by images and video clips are used to facilitate the radicalization of these individuals.⁷⁵ Recruiters can succeed in attracting the attention of those who sympathize with terrorist organizations via websites, chat rooms, and forums supported by digital materials. Many studies show that chat rooms and virtual meeting points bring individuals together and strengthen the recruiter's efforts in the recruitment and radicalization process.⁷⁶

In their recruitment strategies, terrorist organizations have recently used online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., because these platforms provide them with more opportunities than websites, chatrooms, and forums. As well as using mainstream online social networks, terrorist organizations use various online social networks such as Soundcloud, Vimeo, and Flickr.⁷⁷ For example, Al-Shabaab, whose recruiting efforts and trends are documented by studies,⁷⁸ successfully uses online social networks, chat rooms, and Youtube to contribute to its recruitment process. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., are used effectively in recruitment. But platforms with video content, such as Youtube, are used as the primary propaganda sources by terrorist organizations.⁷⁹ Recruiters mainly use these platforms to attract the attention of

⁷³ Alzoubaidi et. al., "Terrorist Recruitment and Counter Measures in the Cyber World," p. 59-60.

⁷⁴ Anna Stenersen, "The Internet: A Virtual Training Camp?," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20 (2) (2008), pp. 215-233.

⁷⁵ Çeliksoy et al., "Terrorist Use of the Internet," p. 250.

⁷⁶ Keene, "Terrorism and the Internet: a Double-edge Sword," p. 365.

⁷⁷ Zeiger et al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p.364

⁷⁸ Ken Menkhause, "Al-Shabaab and Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 20 (2) (2014), pp. 309-327.

⁷⁹ Eddy Lynton J., Gerg Gullion, and James L. Williams, "Countering Terrorist Recruitment: Social Media, Cyber Terror, and Peaceful Platforms," in *Countering Terrorist Recruitment in the Context of Armed Counter-Terrorism Operation*, (Siddik Ekici, Hüseyin Akdoğan, Eman Ragab, Ahmet Ekici and Richard Warnes, eds, IOS Press,2016), pp. 67-81, p. 70.

the young generation because the presence of young users provides an excellent ground to recruit and disseminate extremist ideologies.⁸⁰

These platforms not only provide opportunities such as chatting, sharing clips, music, and documents but also provide terrorist recruiters to track those who log into these platforms. This way, the recruiter can narrow its target audience and reach a specific audience. By roaming online social networks or chatrooms, terrorist recruiters select prospective candidates by following those who access the content they upload and monitoring their activities.⁸¹ With this simple method, recruiters can have personal data, interests, thoughts, and tendencies, which help them choose prospective candidates to recruit. Then recruiters send friend requests to suitable prospective candidates, and in this way, recruiters identify promising candidates for their organizations.⁸² Efforts to gather information about prospective candidates lie at the heart of the internet-supported recruitment process. For this reason, all these kinds of online social networks and electronic bulletin boards can serve as a vehicle to reach prospective candidates, particularly the young generation.⁸³

Furthermore, online games are designed and used by terrorist organizations to radicalize the young generation and to select future candidates. They use online games to attract their attention, so recruiters try to persuade prospective candidates by taking advantage of their weaknesses. Online games, which are offered in multiple languages, are used for recruitment and training. With these games, young prospective candidates are encouraged to use violence against states and prominent political figures to achieve virtual successes and then be motivated to adapt these successes to real life.⁸⁴ For example, "Special Force" and "Special Force 2," released by Hezbollah, are designed to spread the terrorist organization's values and ideas.⁸⁵ Another example is the "Quest for Bush game," released by The Global Islamic Media Front associated with al-Qaeda, which gives the young generation the goal of killing President George W. Bush. These are just a few examples of using online games as a platform for recruitment and radicalization of the game-loving young generation.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Alzoubaidi et al., "Terrorist Recruitment and Counter Measures in the Cyber World," p. 60-61.

⁸¹ Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," p. 8.

⁸² Marcu et al., "Social Media-A Real Source of Proliferation of International Terrorism," p.162.

⁸³ Weimann, "How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet," p. 8.

⁸⁴ United Nations, "The Use of The Internet for Terrorist Purposes," p. 5

⁸⁵ Denning, *Terror's Web How Internet is Transforming Terrorism*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Rusumanov, "The Use of Internet by Terrorist Organizations," p. 144 and Zeiger et.al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p. 362.

Another advantage of internet-based technologies in the first stage of internet-supported recruitment is to help recruiters to overcome language challenges. Thanks to web providers, including Netscape and Internet Explorer, whichever language the internet user provider set, they can be directed to the content that the recruiters explicitly designed for internet users' native language. Hence this makes it easier for the recruiters to reach new prospective candidates from all nationalities and help to increase the target audience.⁸⁷

2.3.2. The Second Stage: Strengthening the Friendship

When prospective candidates are convinced and gain the recruiter's trust, they are ready to move on to the second stage of the recruitment process. Password-protected internet tools and encrypted messaging services are used for intensive radicalization by recruiters in the second stage.⁸⁸ The difference between the second stage and the first stage is that prospective candidates now believe in the ideology of the terrorist organization. Therefore recruiters invite prospective candidates to the hidden pages of the internet and launch the intensive radicalization and training process.

In this stage, platforms such as password-protected websites and restricted-access internet chat groups are used as a means of clandestine recruitment.⁸⁹ Cyber platforms with restricted access and password protection offer a venue for recruiters to meet with prospective candidates for radicalization.⁹⁰ This privacy provided by internet-based technologies to terrorist organizations is called *Dark Web* or *Deep Net* in the literature.⁹¹ The most important criterion for candidates to reach this recruitment stage and meet with members of a terrorist organization through such fully or partially restricted access platforms is either proof of their loyalty or recommendation from those members of the terrorist organization.⁹²

Furthermore, we now witness that they can develop software for communication among themselves and even make some downloadable applications since the members of terrorist organizations need to communicate secretly. For example,

⁸⁷ Keene, "Terrorism and the Internet: a Double-edge Sword," p. 365.

⁸⁸ Zeiger et al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p. 366.

⁸⁹ Gerwehr et al., "Al-Qaida: Terrorist selection and Recruitment," p. 83.

⁹⁰ Denning, *Terror's Web How Internet is Transforming Terrorism*, p.15.

⁹¹ Lynton J. et al., "Countering Terrorist Recruitment: Social Media, Cyber Terror, and Peaceful Platforms," p. 70.

⁹² Marcu et al., "Social Media-A Real Source of Proliferation of International Terrorism," p.164.

Daesh released a free application called The Dawn of Glad Tidings, which could be downloaded from the android market. By using this application, members of Daesh and prospective candidates could receive instant information from the news about the organization. Once the application is downloaded, users can monitor and see tweets, links, hashtags, images, videos, and posts of specific accounts.⁹³ Besides, instead of special-downloadable applications, terrorist organizations also use well-known free messaging applications such as Telegram, which allows users to send text messages, voice messages, pictures, videos, and documents. Terrorist organizations prefer these applications because they provide their users secret messaging with an end-to-end encryption feature.⁹⁴

2.4. Operating Principle of Internet-Supported Recruitment Process

One of the new emerging trends used by terrorist organizations in their recruitment process is narrowcasting.⁹⁵ In other words, terrorist organizations can shape their propaganda and persuasion processes according to their specific target audiences. In this process, they use different methods with the help of various internet-based tools instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. Moreover, they choose their internet-based tools according to the internet usage tendencies of their target audience. For example, the propaganda they make for those living in Europe is much different from the propaganda they make for those living in Muslim countries. Narratives they developed to recruit women are different from those designed for the young generation. Therefore, profile analysis is one of the most effective techniques that make possible narrowcasting for each target audience. For this reason, terrorist organizations try to reach personal data, tendencies, grievances, cultural symbols, and anthropological codes through the profile analysis that they make on the internet. And this is the beginning point of the first stage of the internet-supported recruitment process, actually the whole process. In this regard, Figure-2 provides a diagram about the process of internet-supported recruitment, which starts with profile analysis, continues with the narrowcasting for a specific target audience, and ends with building friendships by exploiting anthropological codes and manipulating grievances. So, The first stage of the internet-supported

⁹³ "ISIL using Twitter App 'Dawn' to Keep Jihadists Updated," The Washington Times, available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/18/isil-using-twitter-app-dawn-keep-jihadists-updated/> (accessed April 24th, 2022).

⁹⁴ Zeiger et al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media, and the Internet," p. 365.

⁹⁵ Weimann, "The Emerging Role of Social Media in the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters," p.81.

recruitment process mainly consists of profile analysis, narrowcasting, and techniques used for building friendships.

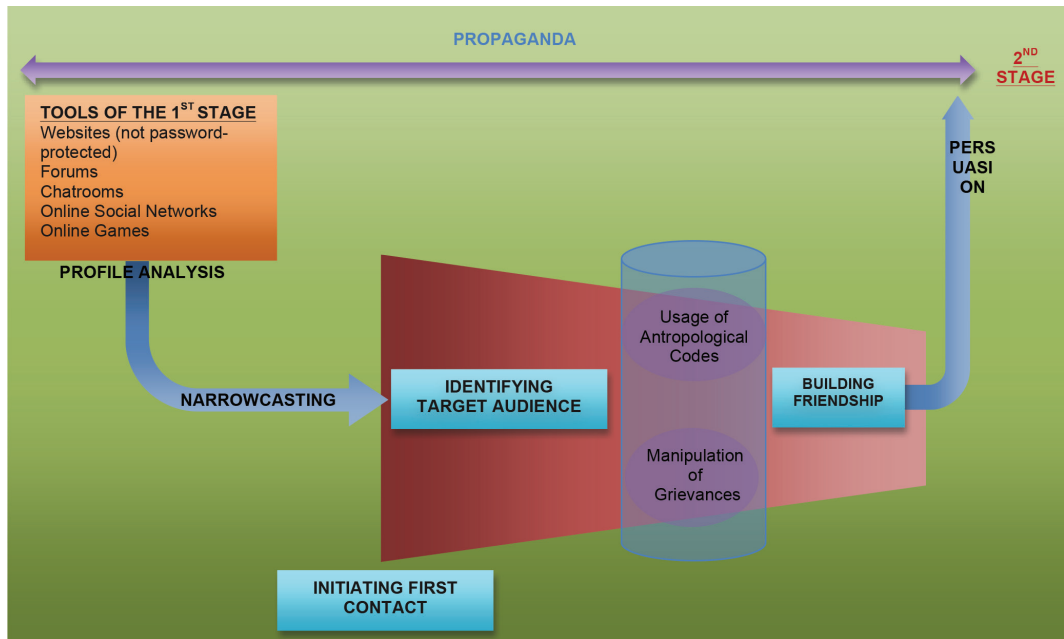


Figure 2. The First Stage of Internet-Supported Recruitment in Detail

2.4.1. Profile Analysis for Narrowcasting

All techniques used in the internet-supported recruitment process, from candidate selection to persuasion, aim to influence and guide vulnerable individuals' minds. As a communication tool, the internet is very effective for finding prospective candidates interested in the ideology of terrorist organizations and willing to support their terrorist activities. Moreover, due to group polarization, like-minded individuals can search for each other and reinforce their ideas and behaviors with the help of the fast communication capability of the internet.⁹⁶ The recruiter's essential purpose is to identify individuals who share their ideology and include them in the recruitment process. As a result, propaganda is valuable in identifying prospective candidates by utilizing all the opportunities provided by the internet.

When propaganda appeals to vulnerable individuals, the possibility of preventing them from becoming radicalized decreases gradually because terrorist narratives contain push and pull factors created by effective profile analysis methods.

⁹⁶ Alzoubaidi et al., "Terrorist Recruitment and Counter Measures in the Cyber World," p. 57.

This complex process is designed to capture the hearts and minds of vulnerable prospective candidates to mobilize and recruit them. For example, the media wing of the Daesh terrorist organization, Al-Hayat Media Center, portrays life within Daesh territory as a spiritually gratifying location while declaring European states of being immoral and unlawful to the possible target audience living in Europe. While terrorist organizations propagate through the dissatisfaction of their target audience, they try to include them in the recruitment process by offering them an alternative.⁹⁷

Terrorist organizations use internet-based tools as a part of their propaganda throughout the first stage of the internet-supported recruitment process to convince prospective candidates. The first stage ultimately can be described as an election and selection part of the recruitment process in which individuals who are susceptible to the ideology of the terrorist organization are chosen. Therefore, profile analysis of the target audience is one of the most important instruments to identify candidates who respond to their propaganda and attract them to the persuasion process. With the help of profile analysis, terrorist organizations capture detailed information about those who browse and access websites, social media accounts, videos, movies, games, etc., created by recruiters. Then they use this information to develop their presentations and narratives.⁹⁸ Recruiters especially attach importance to profile analysis of online social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which are used extensively by the young generation. For this reason, such platforms have become an open venue where terrorist recruiters look for prospective candidates for their human resources. By examining the personal profiles of such platforms, recruiters learn about personal interests and weaknesses.⁹⁹ In this way, recruiters convert their broader target audience into a specific target audience.

2.4.2. Narrowcasting and Recruitment

Recruiters, who identify their target audience with a detailed profile analysis, initiate first contact with them after determining the anthropological codes and grievances of the target audience. The ultimate goal of this narrowcasting, based on using anthropological codes of candidates and manipulating grievances, is to take the convinced individuals to the next stage. Effective persuasion techniques are used to achieve this goal, but the target audience must also be thoroughly

⁹⁷ Logan Macnair and Richard Frank, "‘To My Brothers in the West...’: A Thematic Analysis of Videos Produced by the Islamic State’s al-Hayat Media Center," *Journal Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 33 (3) (2017), pp. 234-253.

⁹⁸ Weimann, "The Emerging Role of Social Media in the Recruitment of Foreign Fighters," p. 80.

⁹⁹ Çiğdem Erdin, "Radikal Selefi Örgütlerin Sosyal Medya Kullanımı: IŞİD Örneği," *Bilge Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 1 (2) (2017), pp. 124-130, p. 128.

researched. As a result, the narratives should contain strong messages. To achieve these objectives, recruiters embellish the process with symbols based on the anthropological codes of the candidates they select via the internet and exploit the target audience's grievances. In this respect, individuals and society's social anthropological codes originating from the past are crucial because these codes may have different meanings for each community. Likewise, beliefs, cultural values, and associations with high symbolic meaning can mobilize the masses. Each community can attach value to some symbols having historical and cultural importance, which are identified with that society.¹⁰⁰

Social anthropological codes refer to physical and biological characteristics of the society, geographical weaknesses, belief systems, cultural sensitivities, symbols, attitudes and habits, memory breakdown, traumas, and so on.¹⁰¹ However, demographic factors such as age and gender, as well as social and economic circumstances, can shape this stage.¹⁰² The ultimate goal of this stage is to change the attitudes and behaviors of the target audience. The usage of propaganda by terrorist organizations is identical to the history of terrorism. Developments in internet-based technologies have changed the form and content of propaganda. Terrorist organizations now usually use websites, online social networks, chatrooms, online forums, movies, TV series, games, etc., to spread their ideologies and ideas to gather supporters and ultimately create the perception that they are "right." Furthermore, with the opportunities provided by internet technologies, they intensely use internet-based tools in the context of social anthropological codes.¹⁰³

2.4.3. Exploiting Grievances

Terrorist organizations not only use the internet as a propaganda tool but also to manipulate people's grievances, especially the young generation who feel excluded from society. The target audience of terrorist organizations in their internet-supported recruitment strategies is generally vulnerable and marginalized groups. In this recruitment process, terrorist organizations typically prefer individuals who are humiliated and alienated in society.¹⁰⁴ Thanks to the communication opportunity

¹⁰⁰ Sefer Darıcı and Ebru Karadoğan İsmayıl, "Popüler Kültür, Oyunlar ve Propaganda: Terörizmin Antropolojik Kodları", *Bilge Strateji*, 10 (19) (2018), pp. 39-65, p. 44-45.

¹⁰¹ Darıcı et al., "Popüler Kültür, Oyunlar ve Propaganda: Terörizmin Antropolojik Kodları," p. 45.

¹⁰² United Nations, "The Use of The Internet for Terrorist Purposes," p. 3.

¹⁰³ Darıcı et. al., "Popüler Kültür, Oyunlar ve Propaganda: Terörizmin Antropolojik Kodları," p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, "Radicalisation Processes Leading to acts of Terrorism," (European Commission, 2008), p.13, available at https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20080500_cscp_report_vries.pdf (accessed May 3rd, 2022).

provided by the internet, it is not difficult for individuals to reach communities where they can make sense of their identities. Thus, the internet has become a valuable place that allows them to contact others for companionship and support.¹⁰⁵

Terrorist organizations such as Daesh perform user profile analysis on online social networks such as Twitter and expertly use online hate as a propaganda and persuasion tool in their recruitment process.¹⁰⁶ For this reason, recruiters reaching the prospective candidate through online networks try to define prospective candidates as a loser and lonely individuals and hit their souls with promises by using their weaknesses and chosen traumas. Then the recruiter tries to convince them that only they can help them to establish a new order. After finding individuals who are psychologically depressed and looking for an environment to express themselves, terrorist organizations use these individuals for their terrorist purposes.¹⁰⁷

Most of the time, the feelings of dissatisfied individuals are exploited throughout the recruitment process, and try to make them feel important and indispensable. In this process, the propaganda of the terrorist organization is supported by the facilities provided by the internet, especially videos, forums, Facebook, and Twitter posts. Furthermore, recruiters eventually try to persuade their target audience to pass to the second stage by establishing friendly relations.¹⁰⁸ During this procedure, there may be those eliminated and those who break away from the process. On the other hand, recruiters not only look for dissatisfied individuals when performing profile analysis but also try to reach adrenaline and excitement seekers and sympathizers, which are much easier to convince.¹⁰⁹

Consequently, profile analysis is the most crucial milestone in the first stage of the internet-supported recruitment process because recruiters determine the target audience' anthropological codes and grievances in addition to just selecting the target audience as a result of profile analysis. The data obtained from this analysis constitutes all the propaganda developed during the first stage. Naturally, these processes are the foundation of the persuasion process.

¹⁰⁵ Freiburger et. al., "A Systematic Explanation of Terrorist Use of the Internet," p. 310.

¹⁰⁶ Imran Awan, "Cyber-Extremism: Isis and the Power of Social Media," *Social Science and Public Policy*, 54 (2017), pp. 138-149, p.138.

¹⁰⁷ Erdin, "Radikal Selefi Örgütlerin Sosyal Medya Kullanımı: IŞİD Örneği," p. 129

¹⁰⁸ Awan, "Cyber-Extremism: Isis and the Power of Social Media," p. 139

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 148.

3. Countermeasures to Prevent Recruitment Efforts of Terrorist Organizations

Terrorist organizations, which continue their recruitment efforts with the support of the internet according to the developing and changing world conditions, now have an unlimited target audience for their human resources. The younger generations, who spend most of their time on the internet, are more vulnerable to terrorist organization propaganda and continue to be the leading actors in this process. For this reason, countermeasures and practices limiting terrorist organizations' access to human resources can provide numerous benefits to authorities because terrorist organizations require more human resources to use and operate their weapons and financial resources than they did previously. In the previous parts of this study, how the internet-supported recruitment process works, which internet-based tools are used in this process, and which stage of the process should be given importance by the authorities to prevent the recruitment of terrorist organizations are described. This part discusses countermeasures to be implemented in the first stage of the internet-supported recruitment process, namely the earliest stage.

The use of the internet for terrorist purposes creates both challenges and opportunities for the defense against terrorism.¹¹⁰ In the internet-supported recruitment process, while the internet is an ally to terrorist organizations that facilitates the process, they also unwittingly cooperate with their enemy.¹¹¹ The traditional recruitment process is an activity that is carried out confidentially and more securely in a specific geography and with a particular target audience. However, as analyzed in the second part of the study, anonymity and security are less in the first stage of the internet-supported recruitment process than in the traditional one and the second stage of the internet-supported recruitment process.¹¹² In that case, this is the stage where the authorities should focus on preventing recruitment efforts of terrorist organizations and the radicalization of vulnerable individuals.

In this regard, it is necessary to categorize the countermeasures taken by authorities to prevent terrorist organization recruitment. This study classified countermeasures to prevent terrorist organization recruitment efforts as active/hard and passive/soft. While active countermeasures aim to prevent terrorist organizations from obtaining human resources via internet-based technologies,

¹¹⁰ United Nations, "The Use of The Internet for Terrorist Purposes," p. 3.

¹¹¹ Manuel R. Torres Soriano, "The Vulnerabilities of Online Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35 (2012), pp. 263-277, p. 264.

¹¹² Gabriel Weimann, "Terrorist Migration to Social Media," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 16 (1) (2015), pp. 180-187, p.185.

passive countermeasures aim to bridge the gap between vulnerable individuals, their families, and authorities. Furthermore, passive/soft countermeasures are intended to protect those exposed to terrorist recruiters' propaganda with the help of their efforts or the efforts of society and their relatives.

3.1. Active/Hard Countermeasures

Authorities aiming to prevent online radicalization and recruitment face some challenges because defining the recruitment process and radicalization "*online*" or describing it by adding the word "*online*" brings to mind the necessity of finding online solutions to prevent terrorist recruitment. There are many national and international countermeasures and practices to prevent terrorist organizations from recruiting new members, such as blocking online content and filtering/removing content that encourages radicalization.¹¹³ However, many online platforms that facilitate communication and information sharing are operated by private companies. Moreover, each country has law enforcement regarding accessing and blocking online platforms.

Considering the convenience and freedom of access provided by today's internet technology, such countermeasures remain a temporary solution to prevent terrorist organizations from recruiting new members. Because blocked sites/user accounts can easily continue to exist on the internet with different IP addresses or user names.¹¹⁴ According to a study conducted on 1000 pro-Daesh Facebook user accounts from 96 countries in 2018, it has been revealed that the organization's presence on this platform continues to grow despite the efforts to block and restrict these accounts. Furthermore, authorities may remain in an operational dilemma while taking these active/hard countermeasures. One side of this dilemma consists of the need for the protection of individuals, especially the young generation, who are inclined toward the ideology of terrorist organizations. On the other hand, the other side consists of controlled permission for these activities of the terrorist organization to gather intelligence about the recruitment efforts, propaganda tools, narratives, and target audience of terrorist organizations. It is impossible to hamper the recruitment process of terrorist organizations by just blocking their websites

¹¹³ Zeiger et al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p. 359.

¹¹⁴ Dodik Wirantoko and Bambang Wahyudi, "Counter Narrative Strategy of Terrorism Mitigation National Agency in Preventing Terrorism through Online Media," *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies*, 1 (1) (2018), pp. 47-58, p. 55.

and user accounts.¹¹⁵ Therefore, authorities should balance this operational dilemma by implementing passive/soft countermeasures because it is not to be able to intervene in the recruitment process with active/hard measures alone to prevent the recruitment of terrorist organizations completely.

3.2. Passive/Soft Countermeasures

The blocking of websites, forums, blogs, and user accounts, as well as the arrest of those who run these platforms, is critical for preventing online radicalization. However, it is impossible to prevent terrorist organization recruitment completely with only these countermeasures, and passive/soft countermeasures should be integrated into them.¹¹⁶ In this regard, building digital resilience and improving society's internet literacy are key points for preventing internet-supported recruitment of terrorist organizations. Passive/soft countermeasures should include the following practices to improve these abilities of society:

- Counter-narrative strategies,
- Positive message campaigns and,
- Training of vulnerable individuals, their families, and peers.

Terrorist organizations use narratives to promote violence and values contrary to human rights norms. They aim to exploit and radicalize vulnerable individuals to involve them in the cause.¹¹⁷ In this regard, narratives are based on two approaches in the form of push or pull factors or their combination. While narratives focusing on pull factors consist of personal incentives, those focusing on push factors point out negative political, economic, and social issues that affect the living conditions of the target audience.¹¹⁸ Terrorist organizations develop their narratives by using any of these approaches or a combination to establish a suitable environment for online recruitment since "*narratives are powerful resources for influencing target audiences.*"¹¹⁹ For this reason, counter-narrative should not only include vulnerable

¹¹⁵ Freiburger et al., "A Systematic Explanation of Terrorist Use of the Internet," p. 317.

¹¹⁶ Wirantoko et al., "Counter Narrative Strategy of Terrorism Mitigation National Agency in Preventing Terrorism through Online Media," p. 47.

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Russel and Haras Rafiq, *Countering Islamist Extremist Narratives: A Strategic Briefing*, (Quilliam, 2016), p.3.

¹¹⁸ Zeiger et.al., "Prevention of Radicalization on Social Media and the Internet," p.361.

¹¹⁹ Steven R. Corman, "Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication," in *Countering Violent Extremism Scientific Methods & Strategies*, (Laurie Fenstermacher and Todd Leventhal, eds, OH: Air Force Research Laboratory, 2011), pp. 36-43, p. 42.

individuals but also individuals on the path or already radicalized¹²⁰ because counter-narratives are not just counter-statements but messages that offer a positive alternative to terrorist propaganda.¹²¹ Therefore, the original narrative should be identified, decrypted, and understood to fight against terrorist recruitment efforts. Moreover, authorities should examine the target audience's characteristics not only to produce better counter-narratives but also to capture the hearts and minds of vulnerable individuals.¹²² Detection techniques and artificial intelligence can assist in identifying contents and narratives posted by terrorist organizations, and thereby authorities can have starting points for counter-narrative strategies.¹²³

It can not be enough to hamper the recruitment of terrorist organizations with counter-narrative strategies created by the early detection and analysis of the narratives and propaganda materials of terrorist organizations. Especially the peers of the vulnerable younger generations can significantly contribute to the defense against terrorism. As discussed in the previous sections, the target audience of terrorism in the internet-supported recruitment process is the young generations who use online platforms the most. The most important reason for the terrorist organization to target this generation is to exploit their feelings, especially those foreign to their society, much easier. In other words, those unfamiliar with society cannot adequately establish a connection between the community and themselves due to the unaccepted attitudes of their peers and social environment. In that case, they can quickly become alienated from society. For this reason, it is essential to involve the peers of those inclined to terrorist ideology and alienated from society. In this regard, there are some good initiatives, such as *the Peer to Peer(P2P): Challenging Extremism Program* sponsored by U.S. federal agencies, including the Departments of Homeland Security and State, and *Peer to Peer (P2P): Facebook Global Digital Challenge*, which is a joint initiative with EdVenture

¹²⁰ Michael Jacobson, "Learning Counter-Narrative Lessons from Cases of Terrorist Dropouts," in *Counter Violent Extremist Narratives* (National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2010), pp. 72-83, p. 75.

¹²¹ Henry Tuck and Tanya Silverman, *The Counter-Narrative Handbook*, (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2016), p. 4.

¹²² Amanda Langer, Marc-André Kaufhold, Elena M. Runft, Christian Reuter, Margarita Grinko, and Volkmar Pipek, "Counter Narratives in Social Media-An Empirical Study on Combat and Prevention of Terrorism," in *Social Media in Crises and Conflicts Proceedings of the 16th ISCRAM Conference*, (Zeno Franco, José J. González, and José H. Canós, eds., 2019), pp.746-755, p.747.

¹²³ Langer et al., "Counter Narratives in Social Media-An Empirical Study on Combat and Prevention of Terrorism," p. 753.

Partners.¹²⁴ Such initiatives use a competitive model to engage student teams from universities worldwide to develop and implement social media campaigns to repel terrorist propaganda. They aim to create social media campaigns by engaging student teams from universities around the world to neutralize the narratives and propaganda of terrorist organizations. Such campaigns developed by students offer positive messages, promote tolerance and understanding of differences in society, and emphasize the possible contribution of diversity to society.¹²⁵

The young generation can access unlimited and free information from anywhere, thanks to internet technology. They are exposed to different information content than those who are conventional media audiences because they were born into the computer-aided environment of the information era. Compared to previous generations, the young generation interacts with the internet almost daily, and their awareness of internet threats should be increased through training. In this regard, seminars, workshops, and even school-based lessons should be held to improve the young generation's internet literacy. Furthermore, this generation's families and relatives should be informed, and their support should be used to improve their children's awareness of internet-based threats. As a result, we should teach our children how to perceive various forms of information in developing technologies accurately and critically so that they can quickly identify disreputable websites and information resources.¹²⁶ In this way, internet literacy in the community can improve, which helps strengthen society's resilience to terrorist recruitment.

4. Conclusion

The opportunities provided by today's internet technology not only provide unprecedented benefits to terrorist organizations in terms of communication and recruitment but also leave them vulnerable to police monitoring because most of the activities of terrorist organizations over the internet are carried out through open sources. Authorities should focus on the initial stage of internet-supported recruitment, which is the most critical stage. Besides, they should take countermeasures to this recruitment process in combating human resources of terrorism since it has less confidentiality and is more open to police monitoring.

¹²⁴ See for detailed information at <https://counterspeech.fb.com/en/initiatives/p2p-facebook-global/>

¹²⁵ Szmania et al., "Countering Violent Extremism Online and Offline," p.2.

¹²⁶ John Curtis Amble, "Combating Terrorism in the New Media Environment," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35 (5) (2012), pp. 339-353, p. 349-350.

Otherwise, after this stage, terrorist organizations take advantage of the confidentiality provided by internet technology to recruit new members and carry out their activities in areas where it is difficult for the authorities to detect. For this reason, the differences between the stages must be considered while developing countermeasures to render the recruitment process dysfunctional.

It is hard to combat the human resources of terrorist organizations just by blocking the websites or social media accounts by which terrorist organizations disseminate their narratives and propaganda. Moreover, legally arresting those who operate these websites/accounts is insufficient to hamper terrorist recruitment. As a result, authorities should combine hard countermeasures with soft ones comprehensively and effectively. In this context, while authorities can prevent terrorist organizations from operating their websites and social media accounts by practicing hard countermeasures, they also can take precautions against terrorist organizations' narratives and propaganda with soft countermeasures. In this way, authorities can raise awareness of the target audience and include the target audience's peers and relatives in the chain of countermeasures. Furthermore, increasing society's digital resilience against terrorist activities and improving internet literacy can significantly contribute to consolidating the chain of countermeasures. Figure-3 shows internet literacy and digital resilience that can be developed by integrating hard and soft countermeasures.

Consequently, the very early stage of the internet-supported recruitment process of terrorist organizations is examined in detail throughout the study. Although recruitment is a process and consists of stages, the first stage requires the most work and attention to combat the terrorist organizations' human resources. Because, as this study shows, after the first stage, terrorist organizations use internet technology to carry out their activities in complete secrecy. Therefore, it is hard to fight internet-supported recruitment of terrorist organizations only with hard countermeasures. In this regard, digital resilience against terrorism should be established, and the internet literacy of individuals should be improved to render the recruitment efforts of terrorist organizations dysfunctional.

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