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Social Media as Weapon for 5th generation warfare

1- Introduction

"Social media has become a significant tool in fifth-generation warfare; it is because of its global outreach and rapid dissemination of information. Concerted efforts are required to address the existential challenges of social media."

2- Dilemma of fifth-generation warfare and role of social media

3- Potential of Social Media to be a tool for warfare

3.1 - Global outreach of social media

i - 5.1 billion users of social media globally

3.2 - Dissemination of information rapidly

i - Connect communities and transcends borders

ii - Instant sharing and updates

3.3 - Helps in mobilising actions

i - Organising gatherings and protests

ii - Building solidarity around a cause

4- How Social Media is being used as Weapon for Fifth-generation warfare

4.1 - Spreading false information

i - Manipulates public opinion

ii - Molding people attentions towards desired cause

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4.2 - Social and political instability

- i - Exploited portrayals compel people to violence
- ii - May 9 incidents in Pakistan are example

4.3 - Recruitment of individuals for radicalisation

- i - Pew Research states; social media users are easy prey to radical tendencies

4.4 - Using Social media for proxy-warfare

- i - Sowing discord and delegitimising opponents
- ii - Hiring individuals susceptible to extremism

4.5 - Empowering Non-State Actors

- i - Helping them coordinate with like minds
- ii - Seeking public support and interference in society

4.6 - Weakening societal resilience due to erosion of trust

- i - Negative portrayal and criticism erode public trust
- ii - Enraging people against state institutions.

4.7 - Exacerbating social divisions

- i - Weakening of social cohesion.

5 - How the use of Social Media can be promoted to confront its negative use

5.1 - Imparting social media literacy

- i - To help users acknowledge drawbacks of its negative use

5.2 - Ensuring responsible use of social media

- i - Avoiding dissemination of invalid news
- ii - Reporting bigot entities

5.3 - Efforts for data protection

- i - Abstain from sharing personal data

5.4- Corroborate multi-stakeholders partnership

i- Effective legislation for social media by government

ii- Identification of radical elements by social media platforms

6- Conclusion

"It's easier to make negative attacks, simplistic slogans and manipulation of masses on social media," says Barack Obama. Social media, with its advancement over the years has become a place to spread radical tendencies.

This actually is the method of modern day warfare called fifth-generation warfare and hybrid warfare.

The use of social media in this regard is because of its potential. Social media has acquired global outreach. It is efficient mode of communication due to rapid dissemination of information and mobilising masses. It is being used by radical minds for spreading of false information and resulting in social and political instability.

It is being used as medium for proxy-warfare by recruiting fanatical individuals for radicalisation. It empowers non-state actors to contaminate the social fabric of society and

~~and~~ weakens societal resilience by eroding public trust. But, social media is a double-edged sword. Where it has negative impacts, on the other hand, it has multiple plus points too. Stern measures are required to confront its negative use and promote positive use. Public must be imparted with literacy of social media, and ensure its responsible use. Efforts for data protection must be done by corroborating multi-stakeholders partnership.

Fifth-generation warfare is a warfare that is conducted primarily through non-kinetic military actions, such as social engineering, misinformations, cyber attacks, along with emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and fully autonomous systems. It has been described by Daniel Abbot as, "a war of information and perception." It blurs the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. Dr. Munawar Sabir says, "one of the key feature of fifth-generation warfare is that people engaged in it would not be able to understand, whether they are in situation of war or peace". One of the key element

in propagation of this warfare is social media, because it contains all the pre-requisites of being a tool to fifth-generation warfare.

The potential of social media to be a weapon for warfare can be understood from its global outreach. Social media is widely used in every country, and no corner of world is without presence of social media. It has turned the world into a global village. According to reports, "there are about 5.1 billion users of social media, representing 66 percent of the total global population with internet access".

Social media has become a part and parcel of life. An average user spends 7 hours per week on social media platforms. It has profound impact on how people communicate, connect and access information.

A diverse range of its platforms cater to various needs and demographics, with each platform having unique user base and content trends. This suits the conditions of social media being a weapon to fifth generation warfare.

The greater outreach of social media is helpful in dissemination of information rapidly

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Social media connects the communities and transcends the borders, with access to wider audience beyond geographical limitations. It empowers the people with treasure of information in their pocket in the form of mobile or alike gadgets. Unlike traditional media with scheduled broadcasting, social media allows for instant sharing and updates. News, events, and personal experiences can be disseminated the moment they happen, reaching large audience in real-time. Social media platforms use algorithms to curate content based on user preferences and connections. This means the information relevant to specific groups can spread rapidly within those communities.

In this way, social media can be a powerful tool for mobilising actions in various ways, both positive and negative. Platforms like Facebook events, Twitter hashtags, and online forums can be used to organise gatherings, protests, and other actions.

This streamlines communication, coordination, and logistics allowing large groups to mobilise efficiently. Social media platforms connect people with shared interests or concerns, overcoming geo-

graphical barriers and facilitating the formation of online communities.

This allows individuals to connect, share information, and build solidarity around a cause.

These are few qualities of social media which makes it the best choice for becoming a weapon for fifth-generation. How it is used in this regard is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Social media is widely used for spreading false information. Lack of proper check and balance mechanism on social media allows the radical agents to spread information unchecked. This

information can be fatal for society in various ways. The extremist entities use social media to manipulate public opinion. They provide the general masses with tempered news and mold their attention towards their specific goal.

It can create propaganda and deception within a state or society, and enrages the public against any targeted religious faction, political party or bureaucratic institution. Social media through its algorithms engages the related audience. In the case of misinformation of such content that evokes strong emotions the

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concerned audience reacts hastily, regardless of its accuracy. Thus, social media is openly being used as a manipulative tool.

The dissemination of misinformation eventually results in social and political instability. Social media in this way, by creating unrest in society help the bigots achieve their dream. The propaganda scheme and exploited portrayals of events compel people to violence and provocation in society. American journalist Germany Kent says; "be careful not to let a negative social media life attract you to a dark way of thinking". If ~~we~~ ^{one} see this situation in the context of Pakistan, it is critical enough.

Owing to fragile internet infrastructure, Pakistan is more vulnerable to fifth-generation warfare internally and externally.

The recent incident on 9 May showed everyone beyond doubt or debate how things can really go once fifth-generation warfare is used to promote one's philosophy through social media.

So, the social media is liable to create unrest in society.

Social media is also responsible for recruitment of individuals for radicalisation. There is no doubt

that social media can be used to spread extremist ideology, and to connect individuals with extremist groups. It provides them with platform to engage with and manipulate individuals. In this regard people from developing countries are their easy prey, because they do not have proper digital literacy. A recent study by Pew Research Center demonstrates that; "people who use social media are more likely to be exposed to extremist content than those who do not use social media".

The echo chambers created by social media contribute to the spread of radical content in those areas, where users are only exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs.

The recruitment of individuals helps the foreign actors to use them as agents for proxy-warfare. In this way they exploit public opinion to sow discord, delegitimize opponents, and rally support. In present era, proxy warfare using social media is ubiquitous. It is suitable for weakening the social infrastructure of a country, enraging the public against national

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institutions. They hire individuals, who are susceptible to radicalisation for various reasons, including personal experiences, social isolation, and feeling of marginalisation. The establishment of links and delivery of task is easy through social media.

Unlike the traditional methods of proxy warfare like, arranging secret meetings and providing with necessary gadgets to harm a country, fifth-generation warfare use soft power via social media as a weapon of attack. Thus, social media is fostering the tactics of proxy warfare.

Also, social media is empowering non-state actors. Terrorist organisations and the militant groups heavily rely on social media for their activities. Gone are the days when such radical elements existed in caves and jungles, and use only guerrilla warfare as military strategy.

They can easily coordinate and engage with alike minds. They also seek to gain public support and interference in society, because social media provides them with equal opportunities of expression. Brian Solis, one of the world's

leading digital analyst says; "the good thing about social media is, it gives everyone a voice. The bad thing is, it gives everyone a voice". So, the social media platforms are providing non-state actors opportunities to communicate with public.

Moreover, social media weakens the societal resilience by eroding public trust. Contaminating social fabric of society is a potent tool of fifth-generation warfare. The constant barrage of negative portrayal and criticism on social media can erode public trust in institutions, including government, military, media and science. The recent few months have seen an uprising opposition of public against state institutions in Pakistan. The society has taken a turn, to confront the national institution Pakistan alleged its arch-rival for these propaganda narratives and spreading misinformation to erode public trust in state institutions. This weakens the social bonds and reduces opportunities for collaboration and collective actions in times of crisis. Thus, the spread of negativity and cynicism on social media can

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discourage people from engaging in civic activities, further weakening the social fabric and resilience of communities.

In addition to that, social media exacerbates the social divisions in society. Although the essence of social media lies in global connectivity and fostering communication among the masses, the reality is different from it.

It worsens the situation of social cohesion. It can be understood in the context of Pakistan. Pakistani society is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. But the condition of social cohesion was not as deteriorated as it is now. It fulfills the goals of fifth-generation warfare, which focuses on weakening the internal unity of state and society.

The misinformation spread through social media sow discord between different factions and subsequently results in unrest and violence. In case of religious and sectarian conflicts people react hastily without confirming the validity of news, which badly affect the peace.

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and amplify the conflicts. Therefore, social media more divides than unite people.

In the above paragraphs, role of social media being used as a weapon for fifth-generation warfare is discussed. But, advocates of social media negates this stance, and emphasise that alledging social media for all discrepancies is an oversimplification of the problem. Social media is just a tool, and its use both for positive and negative purposes depends solely on humans. That's why it is called a double-edged sword.

British activist Millie Bobby Brown says, "There are positive things that come of social media as well as negative". Thus, ^{social} media must be treated as a medium, and the culprits behind heinous activities must be confronted. How ^{social} media can be saved from such pursuits is discussed in paragraphs below.

Firstly, literacy of social media must be imparted to its users. Social media literacy ensures its healthy use for society. Many of the problems arise

by illiterate users who unknowingly spread misinformation and generate complex problems. In this regard, a guideline must be provided by social media platforms to have it acknowledged by users. Users must be provided with necessary information to help them save from negative consequences. A criterion must be set for users to get access to social media platforms that only sensible individuals will be able to get hands on such engines. Thus, education of social media is necessary for users to foster its positive use.

Secondly, responsible use of social media must be ensured. It requires efforts from both the expressing individuals and audience. Users must check the validity of any news before sharing, and avoid spreading misinformation. Audience on their end must keep a check and balance on the activity of their concerned users. They must report any contradictory claim and misinformation. People must have to assure the responsible use by discouraging

any anti-religious, anti-state, and anti-nation claims. Indian scholar Sadhguru says, "social media is one of the most potent tools of change in the hands of citizens. We may use it responsibly to shape the world we live in". Hence, it lies with individuals to guarantee its responsive use.

Thirdly, stern efforts must be done to protect data. It demands responsibility both by users and social media platforms. The data of individuals is used by radical entities to communicate and engage with them. It results in cyber attacks and continuous surveillance of users. With the advent of social media, privacy of people is diminishing gradually. As Pete Cashmore says, "privacy is dead, and social media holds the smoking gun". Users should not share their personal and critical information on social media platforms. It has been seen that lack of privacy and fear of monitoring has generated reluctance of social media among educated population. Therefore, measures must be taken to protect users' data.

Lastly, partnership of multi-stakeholders must be corroborated to confront challenges of fifth-generation warfare via media. An effective mechanism must be established for its check and balances. As Elon Musk says; "I think there should be regulations on social media to the degree that it negatively affects the public good". The stakeholders include, social media platforms, law enforcement agencies and governments. On government's end effective legislation is required against negative use of social media for promoting radical tendencies. The social media platforms must curb the non-identified accounts and bots in system. Also, they must work ~~with~~ in collaboration with law enforcement agencies to identify extremist actors in society. A collective approach of all stakeholders help address the challenges of fifth-generation warfare. In a nutshell, one can say that, social media is being widely used as a potent tool for fifth-generation warfare. The use of social media is because of its unique

qualities of instant sharing and updates, and building solidarity of people around a cause. It is a community of around 5.1 billion people. This is why it is helpful to radical elements for easily manipulating public opinions. They compel people violence, one such incident was experienced on 9 May in Pakistan. They use social media for proxy warfare and hire individuals susceptible to extremism. In this way, they weaken the social fabric of society, and destroy internal unity. This is one of the basic goal of fifth-generation warfare, which media helps them to accomplish. It helps them to enrage the public against state institution and further exacerbating social divisions in a country. Stern measures are required to address this problem. Users must be provided with digital literacy to promote its responsible use. Multi-stakeholders partnership is required to protect user data and identify extremist entities. This issue needs to be confronted immediately, otherwise social media ~~along with~~ as a weapon of fifth-generation warfare has potential to cause irreparable loss.

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