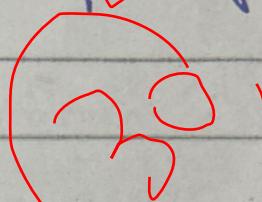Topic :- How Is Terrorism and Its Perception Shaped by the Mass Media

A. Introduction
  a. Hook
  b. Role of media in perpatuating Terrorism and its Perception
  c. Thesis statement.

B. Understanding of Mass Media's Role in Shaping Terrorism and its Perception.

C. Mass Media's Various Roles Attempting to shape Terrorism and Its Perception.
  1- News channels' glorification of crimes.
  2- Print media's immense focus on coverage of terrorist acts.
    a. Using headlines like "Islamic Extremist Groups".
  3- Film industry, through its radical films promoting terrorism and its perception.
    a. Film "The Siege" released post 9/11
  4- Some literature promoting racism which ultimately leads to terrorist acts.

a. Edward Said's "Orientalism" 1997.

5- Social media algorithms operating on most shared data.

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    a. A Pakistani proverb.

7- Political figures leveraging terrorist acts through media for political gains.

    a. Pakistan's Policy of glorifying Talibaans as Mujahideen during Soviet invasion

8- Online propaganda by extremist groups.

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    a. Post 9/11 hate crimes in US due to radical stories' association with Muslims.

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D Measures to stop Mass Media from shaping Terrorism Perception among Public.

    1. Responsible journalism promotion.

a. Stuuart Hall's statements.

2. leveraging media for de-radicalization programs.

   a. UNESCO's "#ThinkAgainTurnAway" campaign.

E. Conclusion.

The Essay

"Knowledge and information can illuminate souls, but when in wrong hands, it can ignite the darkest impulses." In a world of globalization, where information spreads faster than planes, cultures collide instantly and borders blurr, mass media can play a positive role by bringing awareness, but also exacerbates radical ideologies and extremist actions. Mass media, whether print, electronic or digital, have immense implications on shaping the terrorist acts and its perception. Media can exacerbate terrorist acts by glorifying the terrorist acts, impacting the public's psychology and giving ideological justifications for the radical acts sometimes. Not only

it gives rise to such extremism by promoting radical and sensational events, but also normalizing such actions among the public especially youth. This essay highlights that how mass media shapes the extremists' narratives, how it promotes those narratives, which public perceives and later adapts to those narratives. This essay also offers some preventive measures by which such radical ideologies and actions could be stopped from spreading to a great extent.

Beginning with the various news channels, whose continous and recurring glorification of terrorist acts tends to normalization of these actions among audience. This audience then views radical ideology not as radical, but as a personal preference or idea. At this point, crimes make their way which ultimately lead to major crimes i.e terrorism. Later on, such crimes like extortion, abducting etc are used to fund terrorist acts. For example,

according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, reports showed that sites with high crime rates i.e in KP and tribal areas, high number of terrorist attacks were recorded. In essense, recurring glorification of terrorism normalizes such acts among audience which in turn affects the whole society.

Print media, is also imperative in shaping the act of terrorism and its perception. Too much coverage of radical acts impacts the reader's mind. Sometimes, the print media associates such acts with a specific group without proper research. This tends to association of a particular group with radical acts, even if they are not. For example, the print media, especially in west, continously gave headlines like "Islamic Extremist Groups". The result was intense public hate towards Muslims, ignoring the moderate and non-radical teachings of Islam. This shows that how print media could shape public's minds

about terrorism and its perception.

Additionally, the film industry also plays its role in shaping public perception about terrorism. A single film watched by millions of people can impact their minds. If not written the story responsibly, it could have negative impacts on the people. But if carved with care and with the purpose of awareness, it could be beneficial. A Hollywood film named "The siege" – 2011, released shortly after 9/11 incident, in which Muslims were presented as threat to national security, was able to inculcate hate among US citizens towards Muslims. It leads to a vicious cycle of extremism. Hence, films, if not written responsibly, could perpetuate radical ideologies among viewers.

Along with that, few writers, poets etc promote racist and classist ideas through their writings. Such writers and poets could be ideals of multiple people. These racist and classist ideologies can generate people with extremist thoughts, which

is the very first foundation of terrorism. History is full of writers, especially from west who were successful in creating racist societies by presenting westerns as noble and Easterns as conservatives and anti-modernization. Edward Said's "Orientalism" dipicts how Western literature displayed Eastern people and their culture as backward, giving ideological justification to colonial regimes. Such regimes held stringent policies towards the colonized people, — a form of terrorism, thus highlighting how literature shapes the perception of people about terrorism and give ideological justification.

Apart from print media, social media also affects immensely in shaping the perception of terrorism. Social media algorithms are designed in a way, that it promotes the videos and images more which get relatively more clicks, likes and shares. Unfortunately, huge part of global population, especially young ones use social media who likes the radical thoughts and ideas promoted through the platform. These intense

likes and shares makes the others, especially at-risk youth to indulge themselves in such activities. For ~~example, reports are recorded among Canadian teenagers,~~ indulging in crimes like robbery, intimidation and extortion. Such crimes lead to more intense crimes like terrorism. This ~~shows that social media algorithms, if unchecked can affect public to a great extent in perceiving terrorism.~~

Also, psychologically, man tends to believe more on the events which resemble to his Pre-existing experiences. When a slight misinformation is provided to a person through media platforms that resembles to his past experience, it works as a confirmatory notice to his previous perception. This in turn brings in him harsh reaction against that particular group, further leading to extremism. A Pakistani proverb which translates as, "Spread a lie to an extent that it should starts seeming truth" perfectly defines that a slight misinformation presented

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could perpatuate a self replicating cycle of extremism and prejudice.

Apart from that, political figures use media to spread terrorist acts for their political gains. Politicians, because of their back channel relationships with radical groups, can glorify the extremist groups using the media. A public of thousands watches them who can be profoundly affected by the narratives of such politicians. This can be illustrated by the policy of Pakistan, when it glorified "Talibaans" as "Mujahideen", which resultantly saw immense group of people joining "Mujahideen" groups for their perceived religious sanctity. Resultantly, the extreme harsh ideology of "Mujahideen — Talibaan groups" turned back against Pakistan itself and were reported in multiple terrorist attacks. Hence, responsible use of media platforms by politicians, and other public figures is imperative to protect spread of terrorism.

In addition to above arguments,

the online propaganda done by the extremist groups themselves have a profound impact on public in shaping the terrorist ideologies. Due to rise of technology, and weak accountability of authorities, the extremist narratives given by radical groups spreads exponentially among public, even spreading cross borders multiple times. This information sharing and narrative building helps radical groups in expanding their networks and ult ultimately spreading their ideology. For example, the **ISIS networks** were reported for using media networks for spreading their ideology, intimidation and

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fear. Hence, one could say that unchecked media platforms could be arenas which are can be used by radical groups to shape their ideology among public.

Unchecked journalism, most importantly, is one of the major reasons, that fertiles the grounds for spread of terrorism perception. When information is shared without a proper research, or through

unauthentic sources, most likely it leads to misinforming people. Associating of a particular group with radical thoughts and actions without counter checking the information can bring among public hate, and prejudice towards that particular group. For example, in US, hate crimes were increased against Muslims after the 9/11 incident due to association of vague criminal stories to Muslims by journalist. Hence, one can not deny the importance of responsible and checked journalism to prevent the spread of radical ideologies and activities.

And last but not the least, it is the role of public itself who gives great importance to most sensational events occuring on media. This leads to unstoppable spread of such sensational content which might affect ideologically hundrends of people. As mentioned earlier, social media algorithms designs which spread most attention given data, further

enhances the spread and coverage of such incidents. Furthermore, any slight incident resembling to pre-existing experience of a person works as a final stamp to his radical ideology towards a particular group. This could be illustrated by a proverb "Prejudice, when dressed as fear, spreads faster than the virus it pretends to fight against" means that people may guise their hate and extremism towards a certain group as fear, giving an ideological justification for their thoughts. Thus, immense public attention towards sensational content available on media also perpetuates radical ideologies and terrorist acts.

The negative role of media in spreading terrorism and its perception can not be denied, but as it is said, "To every ill, there is a remedy". A wise use of it could be helpful in mitigating its role in spreading radical ideologies, but could be used for human

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benefit. It can be leveraged in multiple ways but ₍two₎ most important measures are discussed below.

Firstly, by promoting a responsible journalism, the spread of radical ideologies could be mitigated to a great extent. Journalists have a great power in narrative building or breaking among public. By promoting soft ideologies, tolerance and awareness through responsible journalism the negative spread could be reduced to a great extent. As a media person Stuart Haull says, " Narratives are not neutral. They carry power." Hence, by using that power in a meaningful positive way, the harsh ideologies could, if not eradicated thoroughly, be mitigated to large extent.

Secondly, leveraging the social media platforms themselves to spread awareness and de-radicalization programs could be beneficial. De-radicalization could be inculcated among affectees by promoting awareness, civic and ethical

education, critical thinking promotion and online awareness campaigns. Because a large portion of a population around the globe uses such online platforms, exposure to such initiatives could build in them positive thoughts and dilute the pre-existing harsh narratives to large extent. The UNESCO's media literacy campaign "#Think Again Turn Away" was seen successful in deradicalizing the prejudicial and radical ideas across the globe. Hence, a positive use of media for spreading awareness and stopping radical ideologies help greatly.

In conclusion, the role of mass media is diverse, both in spreading misinformation and inculcating radical ideologies, and in spreading rational and critical thinking and generating responsible citizens. It is up to the choice of the public that how it leverages a facility, either for the benefit of society or for disaster for society. Mass media threatens the social cohesion by perpetuating

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extremism, and conversely benefits the social cohesion by promoting tolerance, rationality and education. Every society has to fight against its monsters, but only the wise societies tame them rather then perpatually punish them. It is the moral responsibility and obligation of the people to stop the spread of wrong ideologies, and promote positivity. Rather then stigmatizing the people involved in such extremist acts, allow them to get benefit from rational and moderate education, because according to **Martha Naussburn**, it is the moral responsibility of societies to provide room for growth, even for those who are involved in serious offenses. Only through civic education and awareness could be success possible, not harsh military operations, because though necessary, such operations might strengthen the radical ideologies of extremist groups. Afterall, true success lies in educating radical

groups by leveraging mass media platforms because as a Pakistani proverb ᴛ says " jo dushman ko dost bana le, wohi asal kamyabi hai", translated as true success lies in turning the enemy into friend.