Social Influence in the Online Recruitment of Terrorists and Terrorist Sympathizers: Implications for Social Psychology Research

Influence sociale dans le recrutement en ligne de terroristes et de sympathisants des terroristes : Implications pour la recherche en psychologie sociale

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Abstract

Since its inception, people have constantly found new and unexpected ways to communicate via the Internet. One such use has been the recruitment of new members by terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda (Riedel, 2007). Al Qaeda uses social influence techniques to induce individuals to become terrorist sympathizers (Burton & Stewart, 2008; Gerwehr & Daly, 2005; Al-Saleh, 2007). By starting with simple online requests and then gradually requesting increasing commitments to the cause, a terrorist organization may influence its

Résumé

Depuis sa création, les gens ont toujours trouvé des méthodes de communication nouvelles et inattendues via l'Internet. L'une de ces pratiques a été le recrutement de nouveaux membres par des organisations terroristes comme Al Qaeda (Riedel, 2007). Al-Qaeda utilise des techniques d'influence sociale pour inciter les individus à devenir sympathisants des terroristes (Burton & Stewart, 2008 ; Gerwehr & Daly, 2005 ; Al-Saleh, 2007). En commençant par de simples demandes en ligne, puis en augmentant progressivement l'engagement à

targets to support far more extreme ideologies than they otherwise would. As proposed by self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), the new converts may form increasingly radical attitudes to be consistent with their increasingly radical behavior. At the same time, enhancing the salience of the social identity of group membership may also amplify the influence of such recruiting tactics. Implications for social influence research on online terrorist recruiting are discussed.

une cause, l'organisation terroriste peut influencer ses cibles afin qu'elles soutiennent des idéologies bien plus extrêmes qu'elles ne l'auraient fait. À l'image de ce que propose la théorie de l'auto-perception (Bem, 1972), les nouveaux convertis peuvent se forger des attitudes de plus en plus radicales consistantes avec leurs comportements qui se radicalisent. Le renforcement de la saillance de l'identité sociale d'appartenance à un groupe peut également amplifier l'influence de telles techniques de recrutement. Les implications pour la recherche sur l'influence sociale dans le recrutement en ligne des terroristes sont discutées.

People have a psychological need to belong to groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). While the function of groups may vary, group membership is a universal characteristic of the human existence (Coon, 1946; Mann, 1980). Group characteristics include the ability of members to influence each other, interdependence, a shared social identity, and some sort of hierarchical relationship between members in the group (Hogg, Abrams, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004; Kipnis, 1984). Social science research on groups indicates that people tend to show a marked preference or *ingroup* bias towards members of their own groups as compared to members of *outgroups* (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1982). This tendency is enhanced when such groups oppose each other.

Under conditions of intergroup conflict, recruiting new group members is an essential priority. One such contemporary example of intergroup conflict is terrorism. Terrorism is defined by the U.S. Department of Defense (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006, p. 37) as: "The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological." Since the terrorist attacks that

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occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda has become the most prominent and influential terrorist organization in the world; it has inspired many subsidiary branches and has sparked the ultimate intergroup conflict: a global war on terror and perhaps even a "clash of civilizations" (Forst, 2009). Al Qaeda's long-term success in this broader struggle will be rooted in its ability to win the war of ideas and to continue to recruit new members to its cause (Lankford, 2009b; Stern, 2003). In its attempts to accomplish this critical objective, Al Qaeda employs a range of new media technologies, and it has made the online recruitment of terrorist sympathizers and terrorist operatives a primary element of its overall strategy (Gruen, 2006; Nacos, 2006; Riedel, 2007; Weimann, 2004; Whitlock, 2008).

In this paper, we aim to review and examine the methods terrorist organizations employ to recruit new members online. We will do this by reviewing both observational research on terrorist behavior and empirical evidence from the social influence literature that is most relevant to online terrorist recruiting: social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) in computer-mediated contexts (Spears & Lea, 1992) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) via the foot-in-the-door effect (FITD; Freedman & Fraser, 1966). We will also make suggestions for empirical research that integrates these perspectives and has implications for the personality and situational determinants of susceptibility to social influence. The elements of new media terrorist recruitment campaigns that are most critical for success or vulnerable to countermeasures will also be reviewed. Our specific aim is to focus on the use of new media, and particularly the Internet, to recruit new members to terrorist groups. As a result, our review will not discuss in detail the range of recruitment tactics that start with personal, face-to-face interactions.

Terrorist Groups' Online Recruiting Tactics

Evidence suggests that Al Qaeda has been quick to embrace modern technology, despite its attempt to restore what its members consider a glorified past, and avoid the dangers of modernization, globalization, and democratization that threaten to upset traditional ways. Nowhere is this more apparent than in

Al Qaeda's use of the Internet and other new media technologies to build its support base and recruit new terrorists and terrorist sympathizers. From 2005 to 2006, Al Qaeda quadrupled its production of videos and used an estimated 4500 jihadist websites to spread its messages (Riedel, 2007). These Internet and multimedia recruitment campaigns have only continued to grow (Whitlock, 2008). Through these channels, Al Qaeda provides audio and video streams, forums and discussion boards, online chat sessions, email distribution lists, downloadable leaflets, cassettes, CDs, videotapes, DVDs, and several other means of persuasion (Gruen, 2006; Nacos, 2006). Video recordings of suicide attacks are often uploaded to the Internet and disseminated widely, presumably to show the commitment and courage of Al Qaeda's terrorists, as well as their skill in destroying their superior-armed enemies.

In addition, online recruitment material is often translated into English, French, and other languages, in an effort to enlist supporters in Western nations with easy access to critical targets (Krane, 2007). Overall, Al Qaeda's use of such methods has been extremely effective, and the terrorist organization has successfully transformed many relatively ordinary people into obedient agents who carry out violence on command (Lankford, 2009a). Furthermore, despite enhanced counterterrorism efforts and an aggressive global war on terror, the number of radical anti-American web sites has grown significantly since the attacks against the United States that occurred on September 11, 2001 (National Intelligence Estimate, 2007).

This review follows in the line of Milgram (1974), whose experiments provided evidence of the violent potential of normal human beings under conditions of obedience to authority. His work identified some of the critical factors that predict the conditions under which an individual will enter the agentic state and follow the orders of an authority. Specifically, Milgram defined the agentic state as "the condition a person is in when he (sic) sees himself as an agent for carrying out another person's wishes (Milgram, 1974, p. 133)." In such a state, an individual no longer sees him/herself as responsible for his/her own actions. Milgram hypothesized that there were a number of antecedent conditions that predicted the likelihood that an individual would transition from choosing actions freely to blindly obeying an authority

figure. These antecedent conditions included (1) a general history of socialization into hierarchies (e.g., family, schools), (2) the individual having received rewards for obeying an authority, (3) the perception of an authority figure as being legitimate in a given setting, and (4)the individual having voluntarily committed to joining a hierarchy. In order to better understand terrorist recruiting, we focus on the antecedent condition of voluntary commitment in this review and argue that by using gradually scaling commitments, individuals may be willingly drawn into terrorist groups and once there, may enter an agentic state as indicated by a willingness to commit atrocious acts of terror.

Social science research examining the use of tactics intended to indoctrinate individuals into extreme organizations – not dissimilar from Al Qaeda – supports the notion that small initial requests followed by increasingly larger requests prove most effective (Cialdini, 2001). Therefore, since Al Qaeda cannot transform ordinary people into fully committed terrorist operatives overnight, it uses sophisticated social influence techniques to induce them to become terrorist sympathizers. For example, by starting with simple, seemingly innocuous online requests and then gradually asking for increasing commitments to the cause, the terrorist organization can influence its targets to support far more extreme ideologies than they otherwise would (Gerwehr & Daly, 2005). Although the evidence is primarily observational, it has been well established that, historically, terrorist groups have used this type of foot-in-the-door strategy to guide their face-to-face recruitment of new members (Burton & Stewart, 2008; Gerwehr & Daly, 2005; Weimann, 2004). There is an initial contact between the target and the recruiter, which leads to subsequent and more intense contacts, which triggers the identity transformation of the new recruit. Terrorist recruiters now use a contemporary manifestation of this strategy with the Internet and other new media technologies (Burton & Stewart, 2008; Gerwehr & Daly, 2005; Al-Saleh, 2007).

The first stage of the sequential process often begins with the mere satisfaction of curiosity. Impressionable youth log on to a terrorist website to read about the organization's views for themselves (Al-Saleh, 2007). Sometimes these interested individuals discover the site on their own, having read about it on a flyer or in a monthly journal. More often, they hear about the website

from friends or family, or are encouraged to visit it by someone they have just recently met. During these initial stages, there is no call to dramatic action or pressure to sacrifice oneself for the cause. Recruiters are apparently aware that they might scare away potential members if they come on too strongly at the initial point of contact (Burton & Stewart, 2008; Weimann, 2004). Thus, the initial commitment required by the prospective member is simply the willingness to explore the website. See Table 1 for our proposed model of online terrorist recruitment progression.

As part of the strategy of gradual social influence, the typical extremist website designed for online recruitment downplays its overt description of violent activities. Instead, it makes the social identity of the group salient by providing a basic history of the jihadist movement, information about its general mission and political objectives, a general depiction of its most impressive victories, biographies of some of its most honorable leaders and members, fiery criticism of its adversaries, and updates on the most current news stories (Weimann, 2004). As former head of United States Central Command General John Abizaid told reporters, these terrorist websites cleverly "develop the percep-tion of great strength" and project a "virtual caliphate" to thousands of viewers worldwide, regardless of the true size and strength of the organization (Kaplan, 2006). Furthermore, terrorist recruiters recognize that news reports illustrating recent Western aggression against Islam that has caused innocent Muslims to suffer are a particularly effective tool for capturing the interest of potential members (Burton & Stewart, 2008). These extreme organizations usually define themselves in exclusive terms, so that young website visitors realize they cannot simply join on a whim – even if they want to become members, they would first have to be approved. This is a time-tested technique: although terrorists usually claim that their overall mission will benefit all of society, they reserve their operations for a "chosen few" (Laqueur, 2001). And as much research in social psychology demonstrates, providing individuals with access to special oppor-tunities is a powerful method of influence (Cialdini, 2001). As the typical young website visitor views this material, he or she may begin to develop empathy for the extreme group and begin to identify with it (Al-Saleh, 2007).

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Behavior	Social Identity Process	Self-Perception Process	Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Factors
Initial request: Invitation for recruit to visit website.	Social identity as a member of terrorist group is not salient to the recruit	Recruit perceives him- or herself as an ordinary individual.	Initial request can be made face-to-face, via CMC, or through religious magazine, journal, or flyers.
Initial commitment: Recruit visits website, just to look around.	Social identity as a member of the terrorist group is made salient as the recruit explores the website. The group is portrayed as an exclusive ingroup with a virtuous mission. The recruit begins to identify with the group.	Recruit perceives him- or herself as someone willing to learn about the terrorist group from the source.	Commitment is anonymous, at a safe distance, with time/pace controlled, and no complications from nonverbal cues.
Escalating commitment: Recruit expresses desire for more info/access through site "membership" or login codes; it's granted. Access and information is provided.	Social identity as a member of terrorist group becomes more salient as the recruit begins to support the group and see him- or herself as a member of the ingroup with shared religious and political beliefs.	Recruit perceives him- or herself as a new member of an important online community that supports the political agenda of the terrorist group.	Commitment is primarily anonymous, based on login usernames & aliases. Communication is still at a safe distance, with time/pace controlled, and no complications from nonverbal cues.
Escalating commitment: Recruit proves loyalty by posting in online forums, disseminating radical propaganda, videos, etc.	Social identity as a member of the terrorist group becomes more salient and important to the recruit as he or she becomes a terrorist sympathizer. Internalization of the group's beliefs starts to occur.	Recruit perceives him/herself as a full-fledged terrorist sympathizer who supports the group's larger mission.	Desire for anonymity within ingroup dissipates. Anonymity remains as protection from the outgroup. Communication is still at a safe distance, with time/pace controlled, and no complications from nonverbal cues.
Final commitment: Recruit meets face-to-face with other terrorists, engages in group prayers, foreign travel, and training exercises.	Social identity as a member of the terrorist group is most salient and important, as recruit becomes established member of the terrorist ingroup and fully internalizes group's beliefs.	Recruit perceives him- or herself as a full-fledged terrorist group member, willing to carry out violence on command to meet organizational goals.	Anonymity remains as temporary protection from the outgroup. Recruit gives up control of own behavior to authoritative terrorist leaders.

TABLE 1: Model of Online Terrorist Recruitment Progression

Membership in an international terrorist organization typically requires the general qualities outlined in the *Al Qaeda Training Manual*, including "commitment to Islam and the organization's ideology, maturity, sacrifice, listening and obedience, keeping secrets, health, patience, 'tranquility and unflappability,' intelligence and insights, caution and prudence, truthfulness, … [the] ability to observe and analyze, and the 'ability to act'" (Stern, 2003, p. 249). Since these qualities are framed in almost unarguably positive terms, the young man or woman who wants to be identified as mature, unflappable, intelligent, etc., is more likely to be attracted to the group. For most potential terrorist recruits, this desire to be part of the ingroup and to establish social bonds with other members of the organization is just as important, if not more important, as the ideological appeal of the group (Sageman, 2004). Commitment to the group offers an immediate benefit to one's social identity as a member of the ingroup, immediate protection from the possibility of being portrayed as part of the enemy outgroup, as well as the long term religious benefit of spiritual fulfillment and heavenly rewards (Larsson, 2006).

Once the recruit expresses an initial desire to join the organization, he or she may be given access to more extreme material, including videos and other media (Burton & Stewart, 2008). In the online environment, this often requires login and password information for encrypted websites, which further helps the new recruit appreciate the exclusive social identity of the ingroup. Nevertheless, leaders make sure that risks are minimized, so that even a traitorous new recruit has limited access to critical information and cannot sabotage the overall mission. To gain the organization's trust, the new recruit generally must prove his or her loyalty with further commitments. These small commitments may serve to both demonstrate the recruit's loyalty to the leaders and also to him- or herself. We will discuss the implications of behavior change on subsequent attitudes and behavior below.

In the past, terrorist groups such as the Red Brigades have asked fledgling members to distribute propaganda or store weapons, money, and materials at their homes as a first step and then engage in more risky second steps, such as spraying identifying graffiti on walls or sending intimidating messages to the enemy (Jamieson, 1990). Today, further online commitments might

require the new member to send out feeler emails to other new contacts, post lengthy diatribes against the enemy on online message boards, contribute to online fundraising ventures, or research and distribute information about attack strategies (Kaplan, 2006). At some point, the new recruits are required to attend face-to-face meetings with other members of the group, where loyalty can be further tested and social bonds can be cemented.

While the literature on terrorist groups' online recruiting tactics reviewed above is based on observational research, it can be more fully understood in the context of empirical findings from social psychological research on social influence: an overt change in attitudes or behavior caused by real or imagined pressure from others (Cialdini, 2001). By reviewing the empirical evidence from social influence literature, we may be able to better understand the ways in which successful online terrorist recruiting campaigns function. We take a person-by-situation interaction approach to this social psychological analysis of online terrorist recruitment, examining the contributions that both the situation (e.g., online social influence tactics) and the individual differences (e.g., level of identification with the group; preference for consistency; self-concept clarity) make towards predicting the likelihood of transformation from an average person to a terrorist sympathizer.

Research on social influence indicates that a variety of factors impact compliance with influence appeals (Cialdini, 2001). One such factor is consistency. Research showing that individuals tend to be consistent in their behavior has been examined within the framework of self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). This theory posits that individuals look to their own behavior when determining their attitudes and opinions. Additionally, further research on social influence indicates that people tend to behave in a manner consistent with the norms, or social rules for behavior, of groups in which they are members (Levine & Moreland, 1998; Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & De Groot, 2001). Making such a social identity salient will enhance the extent to which individuals change their attitudes and behavior to match group norms. As we will now review, both lines of research have been examined in conventional "offline" and computer-mediated environments (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2005).

Social Interaction via the Internet

Overall, the research on social influence in computer-mediated contexts such as the Internet suggests that individuals generally respond to computer-mediated influence appeals in a manner similar to the way they respond to other forms of written media, although there are a few notable differences (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2005). More generally, research has found more marked differences between face-to-face (FTF) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) (see Bargh & McKenna, 2004; McKenna & Bargh, 2000, for review). McKenna and Bargh (2000) propose four domains in which social interaction via CMC differs from other more conventional interaction mediums: relative anonymity, reduced importance of physical appearance, attenuation of physical distance, and greater control over the time and pace of interactions.

Anonymity

For terrorist organizations, perhaps the most attractive feature the Internet has to offer is that of relative anonymity (see discussion in Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2002). The Internet offers its users relatively anonymous social interactions – if they so choose – in instant messaging, email, chat rooms, message boards, games, and personal websites. Specifically, the ability to be relatively anonymous in an online social interaction reduces accountability and leads to the depersonalization and deindividuation of users. Depersonalization is a state in which a normal sense of personal identity and reality is lost. Deindividuation is a state in which the impact of an individual's internal standards for behavior are decreased, while the salience of situational cues are heightened. Both depersonalization and deindividuation lead to elevated group salience and polarization between groups by taking the focus off the self and thus increasing adherence to group, rather than individual, norms which then become predictive of behavior. Thus, individuals may be more likely to engage in questionable behaviors and may interact differently than they otherwise would because of the anonymous nature of the online communication medium. Furthermore, when deindividuated, individuals will experience a decreased sense of personal respon-

sibility for their actions. Research on deindividuation indicates that when an individual is deindividuated the following emerges: uninhibited behaviors, reduced self-evaluation (i.e., a reduction in focus and scrutiny of one's own behaviors and mental states), as well as reduced evaluation of others (Zimbardo, 1969, 2007). A reduction in accountability and increase in depersonalization make it increasingly likely that individuals will engage in anti-normative behaviors (i.e., both external societal norms and the internal norms of the individual). Thus, terrorist recruitment efforts that begin using CMC are likely to have greater success than other methods, such as those that begin FTF, because the recruits' perception of increased anonymity and likely state of deindividuation removes attentional resources away from internal standards of behavior, allowing for greater propensity to engage in negative behavior.

Physical Appearance and Distance Online

Along with increased anonymity, McKenna and Bargh (2000) also note that the importance of physical appearance is reduced for individuals interacting over CMC. If interacting via CMC (e.g. instant messaging or emailing), individuals need not worry about physical appearance issues that are normally associated with FTF social interactions (e.g., owing to the textual nature of most forms of CMC, race, ethnicity, and gender are not salient). In addition to physical appearance, McKenna and Bargh (2000) also state that physical proximity, normally associated with FTF inter-actions, is not an issue when interacting with CMC, considering that one need not be physically near another to engage in social interaction. That is, the users of certain kinds of CMC, such as email and chat rooms, can occupy the same virtual space, bringing about feelings of physical closeness while still being thousands of miles from one another. Thus, a distinction between physical and social distance may be warranted when discussing proximity over the Internet. We define *physical distance* as the measurable amount of space between two indi-viduals. We define *social distance* as the perception of remoteness or closeness between two individuals. When examining social interaction in CMC, researchers must not only take into account physical distance, but must also consider how social distance and

accessibility affect individuals interacting using CMC modalities. It seems likely that many terrorist recruits would feel safer making commitments via CMC than FTF, because, in CMC, they benefit from increased physical distance that protects them from any immediate harm.

Greater Control over Time and Pace of Interactions

McKenna and Bargh (2000) also suggest that the time and pace of interactions differ when interacting via CMC. Specifically, they indicate that individuals using CMC have greater control over the duration of their social interactions. Individuals communicating via most forms of CMC (video mediated chat excluded) have an increased time period with which to think about, formulate, and re-formulate their responses during the interaction (e.g., unlike in face-to-face interactions, it is not the norm for individuals to reply immediately to email). In addition, McKenna and Bargh also note that individuals using CMC modalities such as email have the ability to send messages without the intended recipient being ready to receive them at that moment in time. Thus, individuals using email are not constrained by some of the traditional norms of social interaction such as the hours in which traditional communication takes place. When compared with FTF communications, these CMC features and added forms of user-control could potentially embolden online terrorist recruits, making their initial communications with the terrorist organization feel far less threatening than if they were conducted in person.

Nonverbal Cues

Another difference between CMC and FTF communication is the impact of the absence of visual cues from communication partners. Computer mediated communication is perceived by some as a severely limited environment due to a lack of nonverbal cues such as hand waving, eye gaze, voice inflection, etc. Researchers even distinguish CMC from other methods of communication that lack visual cues such as the telephone, citing that telephone users have real time communication and still receive some nonverbal cues, such as voice inflection. This lack of nonverbal cues leads to an even greater sense of anonymity when using CMC (Sproull & Kiesler, 1985). Anonymous online social interac-

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tion has been described as limited, depleted, less rich, and impoverished (Hiltz, Johnson, & Turoff, 1986; Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986) due to its absence of nonverbal cues. The lack of nonverbal cues has been the focus of much research since the adoption of email for interpersonal communication. Again, by increasing anonymity, the lack of non-verbal cues in CMC could bolster online terrorist recruits' willingness to make their first few crucial commitments to the group.

Of the domains in which CMC differs from other communication mediums, the most relevant to the question of online recruitment into terrorist organizations is the relative anonymity afforded by computer-mediated communication. This anonymity may lead normal individuals to seek out information about extremist groups out of curiosity without realizing that this decision may be the first of many that deepen their commitment to this new cause. In addition, the physical distance between recruit and recruiter, the recruit's personal control over time and pace of interactions, and the lack of non-verbal cues in CMC may all combine to increase the terrorist recruit's overall comfort and feelings of security as he or she makes escalating commitments towards eventually joining the terrorist organization.

Self-perception Theory and the Foot-in-the-Door effect

Of particular relevance to the current topic is a social influence phenomenon called the foot-in-the-door effect (FITD; Freedman & Fraser, 1966). According to the FITD, when individuals comply with a small request, it increases their likelihood of complying with a larger, related target request (Burger & Guadagno, 2003; Cialdini, 2001; Guadagno, Asher, Demaine, & Cialdini, 2001). The self-perception theory explanation of the FITD states that the reasons why individuals who complied with the small initial request then comply with the target request at higher rates than those who did not receive the first request is that the act of agreeing to the first request leads them to infer that they are the type of person who agrees to such requests. As such, complying with a small request may be the first of many steps toward

committing an act an individual never thought he or she would engage in.

Burger (1999) conducted a meta-analysis on the foot-in-the-door and found support for a number of factors that affect whether an attempted FITD procedure will be effective in increasing compliance. The first, as we have already mentioned, is self-perception. Individuals who see the act of complying with the first request as indicative of the type of person they are will be more likely to comply with the target request (the request that the influence agent actually wants the influence target to agree with) than will individuals who do not experience this self-perception change. For instance, Burger and Caldwell (2003) reported that a monetary reward for compliance with the first request reduces compliance with the second, target request. They explained this finding as indicating that a monetary reward led people to believe that they agreed to the first request because of the money, not because of the kind of person they were. In addition, Burger and Guadagno (2003) reported that individuals who have a clear self-concept (indicating that they have a clear idea about the type of person they are) are more susceptible to the FITD than are individuals who have a less clear sense of self. This is because individuals who have a clear sense of themselves are more likely to alter their self-concepts to integrate new information about themselves as compared to individuals with less clear self-concepts. Thus, after complying with the first request in the FITD manipulation, high self-concept clarity individuals are more likely than individuals low in self-concept clarity to experience a resulting change in self-perception that will make them more likely to agree with the second request.

Although self-perception impacts the likelihood of a successful FITD, other factors are critical as well. For instance, according to the Burger (1999) meta-analysis, if the influence target complies with the initial request as a result of reciprocity – the target thinks he or she owes the influence agent something – the person is less likely to agree with the target request. The perceived reciprocity produces a boomerang effect because the targets come to believe that they only agreed with the initial request to return a favor. For instance, if individuals receive a free gift for signing a petition to change the speed limit (first request), they are then less likely to

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agree to attend a demonstration on the topic (target request) than if they had not received the free gift.

Individual differences in consistency needs also have an impact on the likelihood of the success of the foot-in-the-door effect. Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom (1995) introduced the Preference for Consistency scale that measures individual differences in the desire to be both internally and externally consistent. For individuals who score high on this scale, consistency is very important. Conversely, individuals who score low on the PFC scale have less interest in consistency and may actually prefer to behave in an inconsistent manner. Cialdini et al. demonstrated that level of PFC moderated the effectiveness of the FITD in a phone interview in which experimental participants answered 3 short questions as the initial, small request and were subsequently asked to fill out a related 50-item questionnaire as the target request. As predicted, high PFC individuals were more susceptible to the FITD effect (i.e., likely to comply with the target request) as compared to low PFC individuals. In a replication and expansion of the Cialdini et al. study, Guadagno, Asher, Demaine, and Cialdini (2001, Study 2) found that for high PFC individuals, reminding them of the concept of consistency between the first and second requests increased the magnitude of the FITD effect. But for low PFC individuals, reminding them of the concept of consistency had the opposite effect and actually led to levels of compliance that were significantly *less* than the control condition.

In addition to consistency needs, several other processes increase the likelihood of a FITD effect (Burger, 1999). For instance, the greater the action or involvement required to comply with the initial request, the greater the effectiveness of the FITD. Hansen and Robinson (1980) reported a stronger effect when participants elaborated on their answers to questions as compared to a condition in which participants simply provided responses. Of course, if the initial request is too demanding, participants may never begin the FITD process. Labeling the behavior as helpful also increases the likelihood of a FITD effect unless the target is low in preference for consistency (Guadagno *et al.*, 2001). Making the target request a continuation of the initial request also increases the effect.

As the literature reviewed above on terrorist recruiting tactics suggests, successful social influence in online contexts may manifest as commitment and consistency tactics. Research on this topic does indicate that social influence tactics such as the FITD have been successful when implemented online. Guadagno and Cialdini (2005) reviewed the literature on social influence in online contexts and found that compliance-gaining attempts via the FITD function online just as well as offline. This may be due to the internal nature of self-perception change. That is, people are more likely to comply with an initial request because they begin to see themselves as the type of person who agrees with similar requests, so the requestor does not need to be physically present to influence the target.

Terrorists appear to apply these same social influence techniques of escalating commitments in their online recruiting campaigns. Most online terrorist recruits do not appear to be motivated by money or direct reciprocity, so their likelihood of compliance has not been prematurely compromised. Furthermore, many terrorist recruits may likely be high in PFC, given their desire to establish a rigid consistency between their personal religious values and what they deem "acceptable" standards of behavior for their societies. Given the recruits' likely susceptibility to FITD, it is easy to see how his or her initial curiosity and willingness to visit a jihadist website becomes the first commitment. The recruit's expression of interest and request for website "membership" or login-access to more extreme material, including videos and other media, may function as the second, larger commitment (Burton & Stewart, 2008). Subsequent escalating commitments may require the new recruit to prove him or herself through involvement in the creation of new extremist material, by making personal political commentary on current events or by engaging in the online endorsement and/or distribution of existing material to new target areas (Kaplan, 2006). The terrorist recruit reaches an even more serious level of commitment with phone calls, face-to-face meetings, prayer sessions, training exercises, or foreign travel to forge a shared social identity with established terrorist members and honored terrorist leaders. By this point, the terrorist organization's influence over the recruit would be quite powerful; even if the recruit wished to undo his or her initial commitments to the organization, the coercive pressures

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against leaving the group – such as risks of retaliatory mutilation and murder – would provide strong incentives to remain loyal (Lankford, 2009a).

Social Identity and Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) model

Also relevant to online social influence is the Social Identity and Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) model (Spears, Postmes, Lea, & Wolbert, 2002). The SIDE model explains the conditions under which individuals interacting anonymously (i.e., when interacting online) will exhibit deindividuation or behavior consistent with the social identity – the emotions and beliefs we hold about the groups that we perceive ourselves to belong to (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The SIDE model predicts that when social identity is made salient under conditions of anonymous online social interaction, the social identity and corresponding group norms can influence individuals.

Specifically, the SIDE model (Spears & Lea, 1992) places an emphasis on the way in which individuals adapt in interactions that lack social information such as nonverbal cues. The SIDE model acknowledges that social group memberships, whether implied or actual, are important for conveying social information about an individual (Becker & Stamp, 2005). The model proposes that when cues are limited in interactions, individuals become more responsive to categorization cues such as gender (Lee, 2007). That is, when nonverbal information that may be important to impression formation is restricted, people come to focus more on "stereotypical characteristics" of themselves and others (Postmes & Spears, 2002). In computer-mediated communication, the lack of cues leads individuals to behave and act in ways that are more consistent with stereotypes (Lee, 2007). In other words, in mediated interactions where few cues may be available, people are more likely to seek information from whatever cues *are* available, and will specifically focus on their own individual characterizations/group memberships (i.e., gender or ethnicity). In turn, they will be more likely to behave more consistently with those characterizations, leading to others perceiving this consistency as well (Postmes *et al.*, 2002). This may be exacerbated for people who score high on certain individual difference measures

such as need for closure (Kruglanski, Webster, & Klem, 1993) or are less tolerant of ambiguity or complexity (Tajfel, 1969), as they are more likely to engage in heuristic processing, particularly under conditions of uncertainty.

In a series of studies, Postmes, et al. (2001) illustrated the conditions under which individuals will behave in a manner that is consistent with group norms in an online environment. In the first study designed to test the SIDE model, the authors found that under conditions of anonymity, when different group norms (efficiency or prosocial behavior) were made salient, group members displayed behavior consistent with these norms. However, this was not the case for group members interacting without anonymity. Their second study replicated and expanded this finding by illustrating that, within the group, the norms were also socially transmitted. This suggests that when individuals are interacting anonymously, as they often do online, they will be influenced by the group norm or social identity that is most salient. In the case of terrorist recruitment, the social identity that is likely to be most salient is that of the terrorist group.

Research on social identity in conventional "offline" contexts suggests that the level of identification with the group may moderate the extent to which an individual conforms to group norms (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999). For instance, Terry *et al.* (1999) demonstrated that individuals were the most likely to recycle when they perceived recycling as normative for their group and they were highly identified with their group. Additionally, Terry and Hogg (1996, Study 1) reported similar results for the impact of social identity and group identification in a physical exercise context. Specifically, they reported that individuals were more likely to exercise when they were highly identified with the group and perceived regular exercise as normative for the group. In turn, the recruits who begin to identify with online terrorist sympathizers and supporters may ultimately be more likely to engage in violent terrorist behavior.

General Discussion

Terrorists groups such as Al Qaeda have long been portrayed by the mainstream media as deranged, crazy, and fanatical (cf.

Passini, Palareti, & Battistelli, 2009). But despite the extreme nature of their values and ideology, their operations are generally guided by rational decision making, careful deliberation, and a range of informed and sophisticated strategies (Emerson, 2006; Hoffman, 1998; Lankford, 2009a). It is unlikely that the use of social psychological techniques in their online recruitment campaigns is a mere coincidence. As the preceding review of the social psychological literature indicates, there are many reasons why the online recruitment of terrorist sympathizers and terrorist operatives appear to be calibrated for success.

Overall, the literature on social influence and social identity in computer-mediated contexts suggests that the online recruitment of terrorist sympathizers will be most successful when 1) individuals are allowed to remain anonymous during initial contacts, 2) individuals can initially contact the group from a safe physical and social distance, 3) individuals can control the pace of their early interactions with the group, 4) the group's social identity is initially made salient in a non-extreme, non-violent manner that resonates with the potential recruit, and 5) the actions requested by new recruits are consistent with the established norms for the group. By luring potential recruits over the seemingly anonymous, distant, user-controlled and generally safe medium of computer-mediated communication and then letting them discover the group's true aims for each recruit only after a gradual series of commitments, terrorists gain a powerful psychological momentum over the recruits' social identity and self perception. See our proposed model of online terrorist recruitment progression in Table 1.

The lack of non-verbal cues in CMC may play to both the advantage and/or disadvantage of a terrorist group attempting to recruit new members online. On the one hand, it is possible that the lack of cues could actually make it more difficult for these groups to recruit members by preventing a potential recruit from perceiving the non-verbal cues transmitted by a convincing and passionate recruiter. On the other hand, it seems likely that the restriction and/or fabrication of credibility cues (e.g., a terrorist website may masquerade as a news, religious, political, or academic site) may actually work in the opposite direction – to the recruiter's advantage. That is, a convincing and passionate recruiter working for an extremist group may actually be off-

putting if the initial contact were to take place in a more rich interaction medium such as FTF. The non-verbal cues of such an extremist will not be apparent to a potential recruit online, and thus he or she may be more easily recruited and sympathetic to the group. By the time the recruit is confronted with the true nature of the group, he or she may be already psychologically committed to membership through small commitments, willingly enacted.

It may also be that the level of identification with the group moderates the susceptibility of individuals targeted with these types of recruitment tactics. Specifically, individuals who have a preexisting high level of identification with their national, ethnic, tribal, or religious group may be more likely to conform to group norms, as opposed to individuals who have low levels of identification with the group. We would also suggest that the same may be true for those with a high preference for consistency: individuals who are high in PFC may be the easiest to recruit because they are more likely to behave in a manner that is consistent with their prior actions. This would appear to be particularly relevant for recruitment into terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, since fundamentalists of all types may be high in preference for consistency.

Many scholars believe that becoming an active terrorist sympathizer is the required precursor to becoming an active terrorist, in accordance with the pyramid theory of radicalization (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). We urge researchers to consider conducting social psychological research on Internet-based terrorist recruitment using the integration of theoretical perspectives reviewed above. Such a research program would further knowledge of self-perception and social influence processes by increasing our understanding of the conditions under which consistency and commitment, social identity, and anonymity play a role in recruiting individuals into terrorist groups using Internet-based recruiting tactics. If simply through online recruitment methods, ordinary research participants can be compelled to fulfill actions that further the goals of a terrorist group, the implications for future terrorist scholarship and specific countermeasures to terrorism are profound. Research that examines these questions could provide evidence that terrorist sympathizers are indeed relatively ordinary people and show exactly how their recruit-

ment can be achieved. In turn, further insights would be gleaned about whether there is a specific personality profile or particular background characteristics which predispose a normal person to becoming a terrorist sympathizer. Furthermore, empirical work in this area would potentially allow for researchers to isolate the characteristics of online terrorist recruitment and discover exactly which elements of the online recruitment strategy are most critical for success, as well as which are most vulnerable to countermeasures. Beyond the scientific value of such findings, they could directly help global efforts to combat Al Qaeda's terrorist campaign.

These types of breakthroughs are essential, because, thus far, international attempts to thwart the influence of terrorist websites as a recruiting mechanism have accomplished little. For instance, the Europol project "Check the Web" was intended to help European Union member states pool their information on terrorists and terrorist websites in order to produce better counterterrorism results.   However, legal controversies and personal privacy issues have largely stymied this effort (Europol, 2009). Similarly, U.S. counterterrorism agents have often found themselves unable to actively respond to the massive amounts of terrorist information circulating on the Internet.   The recent attack by U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan on the Fort Hood base in Texas, which left 13 dead and 30 wounded, is an example of this systematic difficulty. In an Internet posting six months before his deadly attack, Hasan had expressed his belief that suicide attacks should be viewed as heroic acts of sacrifice (Times Online, 2009). However, a formal investigation was never mounted, and the chance to prevent this attack was missed.

It may also be that there are other individual difference moderators of the receptivity of terrorist messages in potential recruits. For instance, another potentially relevant individual difference measure is Need for Cognition (NFC; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). NFC measures the extent to which people derive enjoyment from cognitive activities that require effort to accomplish. People who are high in NFC find thinking things through enjoyable, while people low in NFC find such cognitive effort tiresome and will only engage in this activity when they receive a reward or incentive to do so (Petty, Briñol, Loersch, & McCaslin, 2009). Applied to the question of social influence, the literature on NFC indi-

cates that NFC moderates attitude change and therefore may have some impact on the likelihood that an individual will be receptive to persuasive communications from terrorist groups. The relationship between NFC and behavior change is less clear as the growing literature on this question indicates that there is no relationship between NFC and certain types of behavioral compliance (Key, Edlund, Sagarin, & Bizer, 2009). Therefore, it remains an empirical question as to whether individuals high vs. low in NFC will vary in their susceptibility to self-perception change via incremental increases in commitment. Future research should further examine this question.

As new research on the social influence processes involved in terrorist recruitment emerges, new research on developing methods of resistance to influence should also be conducted. Sagarin and Wood (2007) identified public consistency as one of several factors that make it difficult to resist influence. This suggests that resistance programs should likely attempt to reach a potential recruit prior to the initial act of exploring a terrorist group's website. Thus, a resistance appeal designed to forewarn or inoculate an individual from ever taking that first, public commitment may likely work best (Freedman & Sears, 1965; McGuire, 1964; Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Finally, another potential means of resistance is to make a conflicting social identity salient to potential recruits through the design of websites that promote pacifism or the peaceful resolution of intergroup conflict.

One additional avenue of future research scholars should examine is issue involvement as a moderating factor in the consistency between attitudes and behavior (Fazio & Zanna, 1981). Specifically, when an issue is important to an individual, the relation between behavior and corresponding attitudes will be stronger, and this has been demonstrated within the framework of self-perception theory. Zanna, Olson, and Fazio (1981) demonstrated that individuals who first reported past behavior relevant to their religion reported more positive attitudes toward religion than did controls. Applied to the present paper, this suggests that the impact of self-perception change via increasing commitments will be stronger for individuals who have a pre-existing belief that issues presented by terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda are valid. Such individuals may be particularly susceptible to their groups' recruiting tactics.

In this case, the proposed methods for resisting influence outlined above may be ineffective.

Another question for future research to address is that of the generalizability of self-perception-based behavior change via escalating commitments such as the FITD. The existing research indicates the members of terrorists groups such as Al Qaeda who originate from Arab nations may be more collectivistic in nature than the typical Western individuals who are widely represented as research participants in the social influence literature (Al-Zahrani & Kaplowitz, 1993; McCabe, Feghali, & Abdallah, 2008). Additionally, there is some literature on social influence indicating that, although commitment and consistency-based influence tactics such as the FITD work across cultures, they are not as strong in collectivistic cultures (Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, Butner, & Gornik-Durose, 1999).

In online contexts, the overall pattern is similar, but with an interesting variation in terms of compliance with an initial request (Guadagno & Cialdini, 2005). Specifically, Petrova, Cialdini, and Sills (2007) examined the effectiveness of a computer-mediated foot-in-the-door cross-culturally. In this study, American-born and Asian international students were first asked to fill out a short online survey; then, one month later, they were asked to fill out a more lengthy similar survey. Interestingly, their results indicated that, although American participants were more likely to refuse the initial request, those who complied showed higher rates of compliance with the subsequent request than did the Asian participants. The authors interpreted these findings in terms of cultural differences: American students are more individualistic and, therefore, their internal commitments are centrally important, whereas Asian students are more collectivistic and their individual internal commitments are less directive because they define themselves in terms of their group membership, rather than their past behavior. Overall, this study raises the possibility that compliance tactics such as the FITD may not be as powerful among potential recruits of terrorism groups that are based in the Middle East.

Conclusion

This review attempts to integrate theory and generate hypotheses for new research in an attempt to fill a gap in the literature owing to a paucity of experimental research with direct relevance to terrorism. By conducting further research on online terrorist recruiting tactics within the framework of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), scholars can provide the field with rigorous and methodologically sound empirical evidence which indicates that, at least in the early stages, real terrorist sympathizers and terrorist recruits behave almost exactly like other ordinary people. If the findings support the hypotheses we present, it should spark new interest and enthusiasm, both nationally and internationally, for creative psychological experiments which observe established research ethics, employ ordinary subjects, and have direct implications for our obtaining a better understanding of the social psychology of terrorism.

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