

The Role of Digital Media in Countering Extremism Narratives: The Case of Jordan

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Abstract

This study examined how digital media, particularly Facebook short videos, countered and facilitated extremist narratives in a Jordanian context. It employed a descriptive-analytical design and qualitative multimodal content analysis on six purposively selected short videos posted between May 1 and July 31, 2025. The analysis coded verbal (spoken and on-screen text), visual (symbols, composition, overlays), and audio elements (tone, pacing, music/effects) to identify dominant frames and recruitment-oriented persuasive patterns. The findings showed a recurring cross-case configuration in which religious legitimization established moral certainty, grievance and victimhood intensified outrage, us/them binaries and othering narrowed moral boundaries, and emotional appeals (anger, fear, pride, shame) accelerated judgment and strengthened in-group alignment. In several videos, these frames culminated in a shift from ideological positioning to action orientation. The study indicated that effective counter-narratives in Jordan should target the same persuasive architecture by reopening interpretive space, decoupling grievances from violence-supportive solutions, reducing polarization and moral exclusion, and addressing emotional urgency through credible, context-sensitive messaging and resilience-oriented education.

Keywords: digital media, Facebook, extremism narratives, counter-narratives, Jordan

1. Introduction

Online platforms are the central arenas where political, religious, and ideological ideas are produced, circulated, and contested at speed (Shanks, 2024; Tarawneh & Alhalalmeh, 2025); they organize interpretation, shape identity boundaries, justify conduct, and engender group identities (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025). Public communications management must engage with extremist content according to platform affordances, user practices, and institutional responses, rather than solely as a security concern (Shanks, 2024; Tahat et al., 2024). Recent evidence suggests that healthier media ecosystems can reduce susceptibility to extremist influence by strengthening information reliability, critical literacy, and social cohesion (Abdullah, Amiruddin, Dewi, & Mannan, 2025; Al-Qudah, 2022). However, extremist messaging online often operates multimodally, orchestrating language, imagery, and sound to intensify affect, constrain interpretive alternatives, and increase memorability and shareability (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Mok, Ismail, & Basha, 2026), leveraging slogans, symbols, and emotional cues to heighten polarization and moralizing persuasiveness (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023). Short, fast-paced video formats amplify dynamics by lowering attention costs and accelerating circulation, through platform sharing and recommendation logics (Mok et al., 2026; Shanks, 2024). Consequently, it is essential to examine how recruitment-oriented persuasion is assembled across modes, and to consider how counter-messaging can disrupt that persuasive architecture without reproducing or amplifying harmful content (Bélanger, Snook, Dzitac, & Cheppih, 2023; Juntunen & Ruohomäki, 2024).

Hosting massive expatriate refugee populations from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, Jordan offers a valuable context for such analysis, because local social ties shape pathways into and out of extremist involvement, lived concerns, and community dynamics (Bondokji, Mhadeen, Bint Faisal, & Štikovac Clark, 2025; Chirchi, Torrekens, & Vidal Bertran, 2025), while national legal and policy environments condition what is posted and how institutions respond (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2025). Facebook is particularly consequential in this milieu, given its dense networked publics and its video, sharing, and interaction features that support rapid diffusion and engagement with narrative content (Ismail, 2025; Shanks, 2024). Four organizing concepts guide this study:

- “Extremism narratives” are understood as messages that morally partition communities, legitimize violence, or promote identity-based recruitment (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).
- “Countering extremism narratives” refers to weakening these messages through peaceful, credible, and locally grounded

alternatives that reduce harm and expand interpretive space (Bélanger et al., 2023; Juntunen & Ruohomäki, 2024).

- “Digital recruitment indicators” are cues that press audiences toward alignment or action through urgency, division, moral pressure, or emotional escalation (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026).
- “Multimodal content” denotes the meaning-making integration of text, images, and sound within a single communicative artifact (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

While existing scholarship documents recurring patterns in extremist language, highlights the role of social media dynamics and conflict-linked religious content in intensifying division, and underscores the protective role of education and credible messaging (Abdullah et al., 2025; Al-Qudah, 2022; Ismail, 2025; Naveed & Anwar, 2025; Tahat et al., 2024), two gaps remain particularly salient. First, there is still a limited fine-grained understanding of how short-form videos integrate multiple semiotic modes to produce recruitment oriented persuasion (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Mok et al., 2026; Shanks, 2024). Second, more Jordan-focused research is needed to examine how recruitment cues are constructed across modes and how such knowledge can be translated into context-sensitive counter messaging strategies (Al-Qudah, 2022; Bondokji et al., 2025; Chirchi et al., 2025). Addressing these gaps can strengthen both theoretical accounts of multimodal persuasion and practical efforts to reduce harm and build resilience through locally credible communication (Abdullah et al., 2025; Bélanger et al., 2023).

Against this background, the present study aims to examine how recruitment-driven extremist narratives are constructed through the interaction of verbal, visual, and audio elements in Facebook short videos within a Jordanian context. The scope is defined by a qualitative multimodal content analysis of six purposively selected short videos posted between May 1 and July 31, 2025, using transcripts, scene-level descriptions, and coded visual and audio cues to identify recurring frames and recruitment-oriented persuasive patterns while avoiding the reproduction of harmful content (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026; Tahat et al., 2024). The study is organized around three research questions:

- RQ1: What dominant themes and narrative frames recur across the sampled videos?
- RQ2: How do verbal, visual, and audio elements combine to strengthen persuasion and signal recruitment oriented appeals?
- RQ3: What implications do these multimodal patterns have for designing credible, locally appropriate counter-narratives in Jordan?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Digital Media and Extremist Narrative Dissemination

Digital platforms’ technological features can accelerate the circulation of extremist narratives due to algorithmic systems and ranking, shaped by platform design, user engagement practices, and moderation or recommendation mechanisms (Mok & Basha, 2024; Risius, Blasiak, Wibisono, & Louis, 2024). Sharing, commenting, and group-based distribution allow narratives to move quickly across connected networks, while algorithmic promotion can further intensify exposure when content reliably triggers reaction and attention. Algorithms are designed to favor emotionally charged and polarizing material, which increases user engagement (Piazza, 2022; Risius et al., 2024), while supporting radicalization dynamics by shaping perceived threats, norms, and the interpretive frames through which events are understood (Ismail, 2025; Piazza, 2022).

Extremist actors also adapt their messaging to platform-native formats, especially compressing claims into highly digestible short story videos, combining text overlays, symbolic imagery, and audio cues to intensify emotion, urgency, and identity alignment. These multimodal choices help define in-groups and out-groups, justify action, and set moral boundaries in ways that are optimized for rapid viewing and easy recirculation (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Shanks, 2024). Consequently, messaging itself is galvanized by patterned interpretation: repeated exposure and shared symbolic references can stabilize meanings inside online communities, reinforcing particular framings over time (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Risius et al., 2024). This perspective supports analytic approaches that examine dissemination as a platform-shaped process while also attending to how meaning is constructed through integrated verbal, visual, and audio resources (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023).

2.2 Countering Extremism Narratives in Digital Environments

The countering violent extremism (CVE) framework seeks to leverage counter-narratives as strategic communication intended to weaken extremist framing and redirect audiences toward nonviolent identities and interpretations (Carthy & Sarma, 2023; Rees & Montasari, 2023). In digital settings, effectiveness depends less on information *per se*, and more on messaging’s perceived credibility, emotional resonance, and alignment with platform-native attention and sharing features. Commensurately, counter-narratives are more effective when tailored to intended audiences and delivered through trusted sources, with clear relevance to local experience (Carthy & Sarma, 2023; Rees & Montasari, 2023). Digital CVE initiatives commonly underperform by relying on generic messaging, insufficient audience targeting, and limited emotional and identity engagement.

The messenger and distribution are thus of equal import to the actual content (Lakomy, 2023; Valentini, 2024), and CVE focus has shifted from “correcting misinformation” to engaging with grievance, belonging, and platform dynamics

(Valentini, 2024; Zhang & Davis, 2024). Alongside direct rebuttal, prevention-oriented approaches emphasize building resilience through increasing media literacy and critical thinking, to enable audiences to recognize manipulation, evaluate sources, and discuss sensitive issues safely (Rea, 2022; Wijaya & Al Afnan, 2025). Because vulnerability to online extremism is often entangled with offline experiences such as marginalization, identity strain, or perceived injustice, counter-messaging is more persuasive when grounded in local realities and framed in ways communities recognize as legitimate and constructive (Risius et al., 2024; Zhang & Davis, 2024).

CVE is a necessary adjunct to platform governance, which must calibrate recommendation systems and consistent moderation practices to reduce exposure to harmful material, and avoid amplifying polarizing content, raising public concerns about automated detection accuracy, bias, and transparency in human oversight (Meena et al., 2025; Risius et al., 2024). In summary, CVE needs counter-messaging combined with resilience-building education and platform policies, to reduce harmful amplification while maintaining fair and accountable enforcement (Rees & Montasari, 2023; Risius et al., 2024).

2.3 Theoretical Lenses

2.3.1 Framing Theory and Narrative Construction

Framing Theory provides the principal theoretical lens for this study because it directly corresponds to the way recruitment-oriented extremist narratives organize meaning and guide interpretation. Frames influence how issues are defined, which causes or responsibilities are emphasized, which identities are constructed, and which responses are presented as morally appropriate. In recruitment-oriented narratives, framing can therefore connect an interpretation of grievance or injustice to identities, moral evaluations, and implied courses of action (Entman, 1993).

The analysis draws particularly on the three core framing tasks identified by Snow and Benford (1988): diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing refers to the identification and interpretation of a problem, grievance, or perceived threat, including the attribution of responsibility for its causes. Prognostic framing concerns the proposed responses or solutions to the problem identified through diagnostic framing, including the courses of action presented as appropriate or necessary. Motivational framing refers to the construction of rationales and appeals that encourage audiences to regard collective action as necessary, urgent, or justified. Taken together, these framing tasks provide a useful analytical structure for examining how ideological claims, narratives of grievance, identity boundaries, emotional appeals, and action-oriented cues are constructed and interconnected within the sampled videos (Snow & Benford, 1988; Benford & Snow, 2000).

Framing theory also explains how media guide interpretation by selecting and emphasizing aspects of reality—defining what the problem is, who is responsible, what values matter, and what actions appear appropriate (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Juntunen & Ruohomäki, 2024). This is especially relevant for terrorism-related social media content, where short narratives often compress complex events into simplified moral judgments that travel easily across networks (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Shanks, 2024). In extremist discourse, recurrent frames commonly include grievance (harm/injustice), legitimation (moral authorization), in-group/out-group division (us vs. them), and dehumanization, which together stabilize moral boundaries and reduce empathy (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025). The diagnostic–prognostic–motivational model helps operationalize these dynamics by distinguishing how content identifies a problem and blame (diagnostic), proposes a solution (prognostic), and supplies moral/emotional reasons for action (motivational), making it useful both for analysis and for informing counter- or alternative-narrative design (Juntunen & Ruohomäki, 2024; Bélanger et al., 2023).

Because the study does not collect audience-level data, it does not attempt to determine viewers' motivations, preferences, gratifications, interpretations, or actual behavioral responses. Instead, it identifies framing and persuasive mechanisms that are observable within the sampled content itself. This distinction is important because the presence of a persuasive appeal in a message does not by itself establish its effect on viewers or demonstrate that it resulted in recruitment or behavioral change (Neuendorf, 2017).

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive–analytical qualitative design, with qualitative content analysis informed by a multimodal discourse perspective. A multimodal approach is appropriate because short-form extremist messaging typically coordinates verbal content (spoken and on-screen text), visual cues (symbols, composition, overlays), and audio features (tone, pacing, music/effects) to produce moral certainty, emotional escalation, and identity-based alignment (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023). The study empirically analyzes six purposively selected Facebook short videos posted between May and July 2025. Each video was transcribed and coded across verbal, visual, and audio modes to identify recurring narrative frames and recruitment-oriented indicators, including legitimation and justification, grievance and victimhood themes, in-group/outgroup division and othering, dehumanizing cues, emotional triggers, and action-oriented appeals (Ismail, 2025; Mehran, Winkler, & Lemieux, 2025).

3.2 Study Context and Unit of Analysis

This study focuses on Jordan, where both community conditions and media use play key roles in shaping how people may become involved in or turn away from violent extremism (Bondokji et al., 2025; Chirchi et al., 2025), and where country's digital communication is influenced by shifting laws and policy debates that affect how people and institutions handle online speech and responsibility (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2025). Facebook is chosen as the primary platform of interest because of its rapid, widespread multimedia content sharing characteristics (Risius et al., 2024; Shanks, 2024), salient in extremist content research (especially short videos) (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

Facebook video post analytical units with recruitment-oriented extremist narratives (using religio-ideological framing to moralize conflict and strengthen in-group/out-group boundaries) (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023) are analyzed as full multimodal texts, including (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Risius et al., 2024):

- Visual elements like imagery, layout, and editing;
- Spoken language heard in the audio;
- Written text displayed on screen;
- Background audio like music, tone, and pacing; and
- Limited context such as posting date and general location (e.g., public page or group), without identifying any names.

Interaction data, such as likes, shares, and comments, are not included in the analysis; for ethical reasons, no identifiable pages, groups, accounts, or direct links are reported. The focus stays on understanding how the content itself communicates meaning across different modes (Risius et al., 2024).

3.3 Sampling Strategy and Sample Description

Purposive sampling was used to identify information-rich Facebook short videos suitable for in-depth qualitative multimodal analysis (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Mok, Ismail, & Basha, 2026). The purpose of the sampling was not to achieve statistical representation of extremist content on Facebook, but to select analytically relevant cases that could illuminate how recruitment-oriented persuasion is constructed through the interaction of verbal, visual, and audio modes.

The sampling process was guided by four predefined inclusion criteria. First, the video had to contain identifiable recruitment-oriented signals, such as moral obligation, urgency, identity-based pressure, or an implied or explicit movement beyond ideological positioning toward engagement or action. Second, the video had to demonstrate strong ideological framing through religious or political meaning used to justify claims, define identities, or establish moral boundaries. Third, the video had to contain sufficient multimodal material, including spoken language and/or on-screen text combined with meaningful visual and audio features, to support cross-modal analysis. Fourth, the content had to be sufficiently connected to the Jordanian context to permit interpretation within the relevant Jordanian social and online setting.

The selection process proceeded in three stages. First, potentially relevant short-form Facebook videos posted between May 1 and July 31, 2025 were identified and screened for relevance to the research questions. Second, candidate videos were assessed against all inclusion and exclusion criteria. Third, videos that satisfied the criteria were retained as analytically distinct cases and assigned anonymized identifiers (V1–V6). Each selected video was subsequently transcribed, documented through a brief contextual memo, and prepared for systematic coding using the study's multimodal coding framework.

Videos were excluded when they were non-video materials, lacked sufficient audiovisual material for multimodal analysis, contained a weak or unclear narrative structure that prevented meaningful interpretation, or represented duplicate or reposted material without a distinct analytical contribution. To minimize the risk of amplifying harmful material, the study does not reproduce identifiable account names, direct links, or operationally useful extremist content (Rea, 2022; Risius et al., 2024).

The final sample of six videos was therefore determined through criterion-based purposive selection rather than through a predetermined numerical requirement. The six cases were retained because they satisfied all inclusion criteria and collectively provided analytically useful variation across the seven functional categories examined in the study: religious legitimization, grievance/victimhood and revenge, sacrifice idealization, us–them polarization, dehumanization and moral exclusion, emotional escalation, and action orientation.

The sample should consequently be understood as a bounded qualitative case set rather than a statistically representative sample. Its analytical value lies in the depth and multimodal richness of the selected cases and in the possibility of comparing recurring narrative and persuasive patterns across them. Given the small and time-bounded sample, the findings are interpreted as patterns identified within the analyzed cases and are not generalized statistically to extremist content on Facebook as a whole.

- Importantly, the study focuses on the construction of messages rather than on audience reception or behavioral outcomes.

The analysis therefore does not establish whether exposure to the videos caused radicalization, recruitment, or other forms of behavioral change.

3.4 Data Collection and Preparation

To minimize harm, the study does not reproduce the six videos' extremist content or provide links, and anonymizes all sources; any illustrative material is paraphrased (Rea, 2022; Risius et al., 2024). For each video, spoken language was transcribed, and on-screen text (captions/overlays) was logged separately. Approximate time markers were recorded to connect verbal claims with salient visual cues and audio features. A brief contextual memo was created for each case, to summarize the narrative thrust and record key multimodal elements, including prominent symbols and composition cues (visual) and music/effects, vocal tone, and pacing (audio). Each video was assigned an anonymized identifier (V1–V6) and treated as the analytic unit consisting of (1) a transcript, (2) a context memo, and (3) a coding sheet aligned with the study's framework.

3.5 Coding Scheme and Categories

The analysis used a combined deductive–inductive coding strategy to balance theory-guided structure with sensitivity to patterns emerging from the data. Deductively, an initial code set was derived from research on terrorism-related social media discourse and digital extremism, which identifies recurring narrative functions such as moral legitimization, identity boundary construction, and affective persuasion in platformed communication (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Risius et al., 2024). Inductively, the scheme was refined through iterative coding cycles to capture context-specific multimodal configurations that cannot always be anticipated in advance, particularly in short video formats where persuasion is produced through the alignment of wording, imagery, and sound (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025; Mehran et al., 2025). Seven functional categories were finalized, consistent with recent studies (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Mok et al., 2026):

- 1) Religious legitimization (moral authorization and sanctification of harm).
- 2) Grievance/victimhood/revenge (construction of collective harm and injustice).
- 3) Sacrifice idealization (valorization of sacrifice as an identity obligation).
- 4) Us–them polarization (rigid in-group/out-group boundary making).
- 5) Dehumanization/moral exclusion (reducing empathy and justifying hostility).
- 6) Emotional escalation (fear, anger, pride, shame, urgency).
- 7) Action orientation (shifts from ideological positioning toward encouragement of engagement or action).

To reflect the dataset's multimodal character, each category was coded across three channels, enabling systematic cross-case comparison, while preserving the central analytic assumption that persuasive meaning in short videos is produced through cross-modal alignment rather than through language alone (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025; Mehran et al., 2025):

- Verbal indicators (spoken language and on-screen text).
- Visual indicators (symbols, composition, gestures, overlays).
- Audio indicators (tone, pacing, music/effects).

3.6 Multimodal Analysis Procedure

This study used a structured five-step process to examine how short Facebook videos construct persuasive meaning through the combined use of language, visuals, and sound, consistent with general research on multimodal discourse (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025), and findings on extremist content emotivity (Mehran et al., 2025; Rasoulkolamaki, Kaur, Zhdanava, & Mat Isa, 2025):

- 1) Verbal layer: Spoken language and any on-screen written text were analyzed together, with attention to central claims, evaluative wording, moral and group positioning, and signals of urgency or calls to act (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).
- 2) Visual layer: examining symbols, gestures, scene layout, repeated imagery, visual metaphors, editing choices, and on-screen text (Hakoköngäs & Halmesvaara, 2025; Samaras, 2025).
- 3) Audio: vocal tone, speed, rhythm, emphasis, and the use of music or sound effects (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025; Mehran et al., 2025).
- 4) Inter-modal functionality: how verbal, visual, and audio elements mutually reinforce a message (Mehran et al., 2025; Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025).
- 5) Comparison of V1–V6 using a cross-case matrix, to map categories and indicators by video. Summary notes were created to highlight common patterns, differences, and the co-occurrence of various techniques (Risius et al., 2024).

4. Results

4.1 Cross-Case Overview of Dominant Frames

Analysis of the six short Facebook videos (V1–V6) reveals a strong presence of ideologically driven framing, centered on three main patterns: religious legitimization, grievance or victimhood, and identity polarization through us/them divisions. These frames often appear together in a repeated structure. Typically, moral authority is invoked to guide interpretation, grievance is used to trigger emotional reactions, and identity labeling narrows the range of acceptable views or actions. This sequencing reflects a consistent narrative flow that leads viewers from understanding an issue (“what is happening”) to judging it morally (“what is right”) and finally to forming a response (“what must be done”), without encouraging open debate or alternative viewpoints.

Another recurring pattern is the combination of grievance discourse with emotional appeals and in-group/out-group framing. Grievance stories often serve as emotional triggers, evoking anger, sadness, or a sense of injustice. At the same time, they simplify identity positions, directing blame and shaping who is seen as morally worthy or unworthy. In this framing, out-groups are often portrayed as lacking legitimacy or moral standing, thereby reducing empathy and making harsher judgments more acceptable. In several cases, these frames are supported by dehumanizing or othering cues, indicating a move from presenting differences to full moral exclusion, further normalizing hostility.

A third finding is the strong alignment across different media forms. The persuasive effect of these frames is enhanced by the way speech, visuals, and sound work together. Across the sample, common visual elements—such as ideological symbols, militarized scenes, or emblematic images—are paired with on-screen text that simplifies the message. Audio elements, including chant-like music, emotionally charged tracks, and shifts in intensity or pacing, reinforce urgency and commitment. Together, these elements create a unified emotional experience that leaves little space for doubt or interpretation, making the message feel obvious rather than arguable.

Ultimately, many videos exhibit a clear shift from ideological framing to calls for action. This progression often begins by establishing moral legitimacy, then moves through grievance and polarization, eventually building urgency and encouraging action. This pattern (i.e., legitimization → grievance → polarization → urgency → action) appears regularly across the sample. The next sections present the findings in the order of the codebook categories: religious legitimization, grievance/victimhood, glorification of sacrifice, identity division, dehumanization, emotional persuasion and urgency, and the move toward action-oriented content.

Table 1 displays the strength of each category (on a 0–3 scale) across the six videos, offering a clear visual summary of how frames are distributed and where certain types of messaging appear most prominently.

Table 1 provides an overall summary of the qualitative coding. To facilitate systematic comparison across the six videos, the presence and strength of each functional category were summarized using an ordinal 0–3 scale. The scale does not represent a statistical measurement, frequency estimate, prevalence rate, or effect size. Rather, it provides a transparent summary of the qualitative judgment recorded during coding.

Table 1. Cross-Case Theme Presence Matrix (0–3 Scale). 0 = Absent, 1 = Weak, 2 = Moderate, 3 = Strong

Video category	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6
Religious legitimization of violence	3	2	3	2	2	3
Grievance/victimhood and revenge	2	3	2	2	2	3
Glorification of sacrifice framing	1	1	2	1	3	2
Us/Them ideological binaries	2	2	2	3	2	3
Dehumanization/othering	2	1	2	3	1	2
Emotional appeals (fear/anger/pride/shame)	2	3	2	2	3	3
Shift to practical incitement/call to action	1	1	2	2	1	3

Note. 0 = absent; 1 = weak; 2 = moderate; 3 = strong. Scores summarize the qualitative coding of verbal, visual, and audio indicators, including their cross-modal reinforcement. They should not be interpreted as statistical measures or frequency counts.

4.2 Religious Legitimation Frame (Verbal + Visual + Audio)

Throughout the six videos, religious legitimization plays a central role in reframing harmful acts as moral necessities rather than political decisions. Verbally, justification is often grounded in religious authority, utilizing sacred language to lend the message weight and present the speaker as a source of unquestionable truth. These messages feature strong moral claims, absolute language, and expressions of duty that prompt viewers to shift from understanding to moral commitment. In some videos, religious texts are selectively used and applied out of context to modern issues, giving the appearance of settled truths and limiting room for disagreement. This pattern aligns with earlier findings that extremist speech utilizes religion to reinforce its message and justify hostility (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

Visually, authority is conveyed through religious symbols, ideological imagery, and concise on-screen text that simplifies

and reinforces the message. These text overlays serve as concise interpretations, guiding the viewer without requiring detailed explanation. This aligns with existing research on visual propaganda, which demonstrates that meaning is often constructed through brief symbolic elements paired with concise messages (Mehran et al., 2025; Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025).

The audio also strengthens the message. Speech is often delivered in a calm but firm tone, with changes in rhythm or volume at key moments. In some cases, background sounds, such as chants or motivational music, support the emotional tone as the speaker delivers moral closure. Prior studies have shown that sound can increase feelings of urgency, certainty, and emotional involvement in such messages (Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

Together, these modes (i.e., speech, visuals, and sound) collectively work as a unified system that presents moral authority as final and unchallengeable. This alignment limits interpretation, discourages questioning, and positions opposing views as invalid. As a result, it strengthens the groundwork for the other frames, including grievance, division, and calls to action (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Risius et al., 2024).

4.3 Grievance/Victimhood and Revenge Frame

A common theme across the videos is the use of grievance narratives that follow a typical sequence: framing injustice, evoking moral outrage, and prompting a response based on duty. This structure helps the audience move from identifying harm to feeling strong emotion and then to accepting limited options for action. Such patterns are also observed in research on online radicalization, where grievances increase openness to violent or exclusive messages (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026; Shanks, 2024).

In speech, grievance is built through blaming a demonized group, presenting the in-group as under attack, and making moral comparisons between the suffering of the in-group and the actions of the out-group. These verbal elements make the issue feel morally obvious and eliminate doubt. These strategies align with past research, which shows that extremist narratives often rely on strong moral labels and identity contrasts to support their messages (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

Visually, the grievance frame uses images that suggest harm or injustice without needing detailed proof. Symbols and sequencing act as emotional evidence, giving the sense that the claim is clear, even when it relies more on feeling than fact. Previous work on multimodal messaging has shown that such visuals can reduce complexity and lead the viewer toward emotional and polarized conclusions (Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025; Shanks, 2024).

In sound, grievance is supported by emotional buildup (e.g., changes in tone, pace, or intensity) that lead from sadness or anger toward a sense of urgency. Studies on extremist media highlight that this type of sound design helps create emotional pressure and encourages viewers to adopt stronger views, especially when paired with stories of harm (Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

Across the sample, grievance often appears alongside strong in-group/out-group framing and emotional cues (Table 2), showing that stories of victimhood are closely tied to identity division and heightened emotional appeal. These combinations work together to make harsh moral claims feel more acceptable (Ismail, 2025; KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023).

4.4 Glorification of Sacrifice Framing

A recurring pattern across several videos is the glorification of self-sacrifice, which is framed as a symbol of honor, virtue, and true belonging. Rather than using rational arguments, this frame builds a moral identity ideal that draws admiration and encourages loyalty, portraying those who commit fully as transcending ordinary limits. Similar observations are found in studies of extremist media, in which sacrifice is used to give meaning and support escalation (Mok et al., 2026; Shanks, 2024).

Verbally, sacrifice is described through praise and honor-based evaluations, portraying high-risk acts as signs of deep moral commitment. These expressions shift moral value from legal or civic standards to identity-based devotion. Research on extremist speech reveals that such language can transform controversial actions into symbols of moral excellence (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

Visually, the message is supported through heroic or commemorative imagery, symbols of honor, and edited sequences that promote admiration over critical thinking. Studies in multimodal discourse suggest that such visuals create persuasive role models, encouraging viewers to align with the identity being promoted (Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025; Shanks, 2024).

Audibly, the sacrifice frame is strengthened by uplifting anthems, rising intensity, and rhythms that build emotion and suggest triumph or fate, which is highly emotive to reinforce strong verbal and visual messages (Mehran et al., 2025).

Together, these modes turn sacrifice into a marker of identity and moral value, evoking deeper commitment by making extreme loyalty appear admirable, emotionally fulfilling, and socially meaningful within the message's narrative (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Mok et al., 2026).

4.5 Us/Them Binaries and Polarization

A key feature across the sample is the use of binary identities that divide people into two opposing moral sides. In speech,

this is built through repeated group labels and collective pronouns that define the in-group as morally right and the out-group as hostile or illegitimate. This type of language employs exclusion to narrow who belongs, and frames disagreement as betrayal, rather than healthy debate. Such patterns align with earlier findings that extremist messages rely on stark moral boundaries to establish meaning and define identity (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

Visually, polarization is represented through contrast and separation symbols that present differences as a moral hierarchy. Common techniques include side-by-side visuals that compare group values and overlays that turn complex issues into simple moral contrasts. Multimodal research indicates that this type of identity framing is often accomplished by pairing words with images that make group differences emotionally clear and easy to comprehend (Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025; Samaras, 2025).

In sound, polarization is often reinforced by an intense, confrontational tone with strong emphasis. Changes in delivery and pacing act as cues that shut down doubt and present the division as obvious. Research indicates that tone and rhythm are employed to foster emotional engagement and facilitate robust group judgments (Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

This framing has three main effects: it simplifies complex issues into a straightforward moral narrative, fosters confidence in group identity by presenting it as fixed, and promotes hostility by erasing empathy for the out-group (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Shanks, 2024).

4.6 Dehumanization/Othering

Beyond creating “us versus them” divisions, several videos include signs of dehumanization that go further by denying the moral worth of the targeted group. This type of messaging removes the need for empathy or rights-based thinking, framing exclusion as justified or necessary rather than open to debate (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025).

In speech, this appears through dismissive labels and harsh moral judgments castigating the out-group as undeserving of full human status, and thus of rights and protections. At times, people are ranked into categories of moral worth, making harm seem justifiable rather than wrong. These speech patterns align with studies showing that extremist content often relies on judgmental labels and strict group boundaries to maintain hostility and support escalation (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

Visually, dehumanization is conveyed through broad signals of threat or impurity, often employing symbols and contrastive images rather than detailed explanations. Research into visual persuasion suggests that such quick, simplified images enable audiences to make rapid moral decisions without reflection (Hakoköngäs & Halmesvaara, 2025; Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025).

Sound also supports this process. A sharp tone, fast delivery, and emotionally charged sounds can increase anger or fear, reducing the likelihood of calm thinking. Studies on extremist sound design reveal that these techniques influence the emotional context in which people make moral judgments (Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

In effect, this frame adds to polarization by making it easier to accept harm against the outgroup. Dehumanization serves as a link between identity-based division and the push toward action, even when the message does not openly instruct violence (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Shanks, 2024).

4.7 Emotional Persuasion and Urgency

Emotional persuasion is evident across all videos, enhancing other message types by influencing how viewers feel before they decide what to believe. The most common emotions employed are anger (through blame and outrage), fear (through warnings and threats), pride (through honor and identity boosts), and shame (through moral judgment of those who disagree). These emotions are presented as shared feelings tied to group identity and survival, not just individual reactions (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026). These emotional effects are created by aligning speech, visuals, and sound. In language, urgency is shown through strong evaluation and time pressure, often warning that delay is dangerous or disloyal. Emotional triggers are often tied to identity: pride comes from supporting the cause, while shame targets those who are passive or disloyal. This aligns with previous findings demonstrating that extremist messages employ emotional language and identity roles to expedite moral judgment (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025).

Visually, emotion is enhanced by fast edits, dramatic symbols, and layout choices that steer viewers toward specific reactions. Quick scenes, strong symbols, and concise on-screen slogans convey emotion quickly, with little need for deeper thought. Research on online visuals confirms that condensed images increase emotional intensity and reduce room for questioning (Hakoköngäs & Halmesvaara, 2025; Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025).

Sound also plays a key role. Rising tempo, dramatic effects, and loud emphasis add urgency and emotion. Voice delivery becomes sharper at emotional points. Studies of extremist content reveal that the use of sound helps trigger emotional engagement and encourages viewers to align with the content (Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

4.8 Shift From Ideology to Practical Incitement/Action Prompts

Across the sample, the narratives frequently move beyond broad ideological framing toward direct or implied prompts

for participation. This progression is typically built on earlier moral frames (especially religious legitimation and grievance), such that the target action (of the propagandist) appears as a logical and urgent next step, consistent with patterns identified in prior research on digital extremist messaging (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026). Verbally, the shift is reflected in more directive wording that frames involvement as an obligation rather than debate, using certainty and moral pressure to position “true” in-group members as expected to respond (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025). For ethical reasons, the analysis describes these prompts only at a general level and avoids operational detail.

Visually and aurally, cues of readiness and coordination galvanize the transition from interpretation to urgency, often mediated by rapid sequencing, symbols of loyalty/purpose, intensified delivery, and heightened tempo, engendering urgency. This aligns with how audiovisual design amplifies commitment when paired with directive speech (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025; Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026). Table 2 summarizes variation in the strength of action cues: V1, V2, and V5 show mild/indirect signals (1), V3 and V4 show moderate signals (2), and V6 shows the strongest movement toward mobilization (3).

Table 2. Representative multimodal excerpts

Category	Paraphrased verbal line	Visual cue (general)	Audio cue (general)	Interpretation
V1 Religious legitimation	Frames harmful action as morally obligatory through authority, coded religious reasoning	Authority/ sacralizing symbolism + reinforcing text overlay	Firm, sermon-like tone; emphasized cadence	Closes debate by presenting a “settled” moral conclusion
V2 Grievance/ victimhood	Presents collective harm as intentional and demands a restorative response	Harm/ injustice indexing imagery (general)	Escalating intensity; urgent pacing	Converts grievance into moral outrage and readiness
V3 Emotional appeals	Uses urgency markers to heighten fear/ anger and push commitment	Fast edits + dramatic overlay text	Tempo rise; impact-like emphasis	Accelerates judgment and reduces interpretive openness
V4 Us/Them + othering	Rigidly divides identities and morally excludes the out-group	Contrast framing and boundary cues	Confrontational tone; sharp emphasis	Normalizes hostility by narrowing moral community
V5 Sacrifice framing	Elevates sacrifice as proof of virtue and authentic belonging	Commemorative/ heroic composition (general)	Anthem-like uplift; crescendo	Makes extreme commitment appear admirable/ identity-confirming
V6 Action orientation	Shifts from ideology to directive mobilization (reported at the abstract level)	Mobilizing montage logic; action-coded symbolism	Command-like delivery; climactic build	Positions engagement as an expected next step after moral closure

5. Discussion

This study of recruitment-oriented extremist messaging construction in short Facebook videos targeting Jordan found that religious justification establishes moral certainty; grievance and victimhood intensify perceived injustice; “us vs. them” polarization narrows interpretation; emotional urgency accelerates judgment; and some videos culminate in implied or direct action cues (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026; Shanks, 2024). This pattern supports accounts of digital extremism as narrative-driven persuasion optimized for rapid attention and circulation (Shanks, 2024; Mok et al., 2026).

From a framing standpoint, the videos prioritize interpretive closure over deliberation. They define the problem, assign blame, and impose moral evaluation in ways that limit ambiguity or alternative viewpoints (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023). The dominant frame positions the in-group as victimized and the out-group as culpable, reinforcing rigid moral boundaries typical of polarizing discourse (KhosraviNik & Amer, 2023; Naveed & Anwar, 2025). “Solutions” are usually implied rather than argued, appearing after injustice is established and often steering toward confrontation through moral obligation and urgency cues (Ismail, 2025; Mok et al., 2026; Shanks, 2024).

Crucially, these frames are produced multimodally rather than solely through text. Spoken claims are anchored by on-screen text, while visuals communicate identity and power through symbols and curated scenes; audio (tone, tempo, rhythm) intensifies affect and directs attention (Mehran et al., 2025; Rasoulkolamaki et al., 2025). The findings reinforce the need to treat short videos as integrated packages of meaning in which persuasion emerges from cross-modal coherence (Chovanec & Vásquez, 2025; Shanks, 2024).

Emotion functions as the mechanism linking grievance, polarization, and mobilization. Anger and fear are heightened through threat and blame, while pride and shame regulate belonging and in-group status, aligning with research on identity-based emotional narratives in extremist persuasion (Hakoköngäs & Halmesvaara, 2025; Ismail, 2025). Rapid editing, salient symbols, and intensified sound design support quick, affective judgments, helping explain why short-form content can sustain attention and accelerate moral positioning (Mehran et al., 2025; Mok et al., 2026).

Platform dynamics help explain why these structures are effective and scalable. Algorithmic ranking and affordances shape exposure, and short videos compress high-intensity meaning into formats suited to engagement and sharing (Mok & Basha, 2024; Risius et al., 2024; Shanks, 2024). The later removal of some content highlights the governance challenge of timing; harmful material often circulates widely before moderation acts (Risius et al., 2024; Tahat et al., 2024). In Jordan, these platform processes intersect with national legal and regulatory contexts that shape accountability and institutional response (Al-Mashaqbeh, 2025).

For counter-narratives and CVE practice, the results indicate that effectiveness depends on credibility, local relevance, and messenger trust (Bélanger et al., 2023; Carthy & Sarma, 2023). Strategies that ignore identity needs, emotional drivers, or local grievances risk weak resonance and legitimacy (Lakomy, 2023; Rees & Montasari, 2023). In practice, interventions in Jordan should work to reopen moral complexity by using religious authority to foreclose debate, decouple grievance from violence, and soften dehumanizing boundaries, employing emotionally and identity-aware communication rather than fact-only rebuttals (Carthy & Sarma, 2023; Juntunen & Ruohomäki, 2024; Valentini, 2024).

Complementary resilience-building by promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and trusted community education remains essential, especially for youth-facing digital ecosystems (Abdullah et al., 2025; Rea, 2022; Yuldashov, 2025). Limitations include the small, time-bounded sample, possible bias from platform removals, and the focus on message construction rather than audience effects (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Tahat et al., 2024; Risius et al., 2024). Future work should expand the dataset over longer periods, compare platforms, and ethically test counter-message designs suited to religious-justification and grievance-based framing in the region, while also examining spread-versus-removal timing (Bélanger et al., 2023; Meena et al., 2025; Tahat et al., 2024; Zhang & Davis, 2024).

6. Conclusion

This study examined how extremist content designed for recruitment is constructed and made persuasive in short Facebook videos within a Jordanian context. By analyzing the interplay of speech, text, visuals, and sound, each video was examined as a cohesive message, demonstrating that its persuasive character emerges from the interaction of these elements rather than from spoken words alone.

Across all six videos, a clear pattern emerged. Religious reasoning was used to establish moral certainty and present violent ideas as religiously or morally justified. Narratives of harm and perceived injustice foregrounded grievances, evoked anger, and framed hostile responses as justified. Dividing people into “us” and “them” established polarized identity boundaries and limited recognition of alternative perspectives. Strong emotional appeals—especially anger, fear, pride, and shame—intensified the emotional force of the messages and reinforced a sense of group identity and urgency. In some cases, this combination moved the content beyond shaping ideological positions toward suggesting or justifying action.

The study reveals that extremist messaging in short videos relies on “multimodal coherence”: on-screen text sharpens the message, visuals communicate symbolic, emotional, and identity-related meanings, and sound enhances the sense of urgency and commitment. This demonstrates how such videos can construct persuasive meanings through the coordinated use of multiple communicative modes, even when factual content is limited.

From a Framing Theory perspective, diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational elements were interconnected, linking perceived grievances to identity boundaries, moral evaluations, emotional appeals, and suggested courses of action. These findings concern the construction of persuasive messages within the sampled content and do not establish their effects on viewers, recruitment, or behavioral change.

In practice, the findings suggest that counter-messages should consider the same persuasive structure. They should create space for discussion where moral certainty is not imposed, distinguish legitimate grievances from calls for revenge, reduce exclusionary divisions, and address the emotions through which urgency is constructed. Since persuasive communication is also shaped by its social context, countermeasures may benefit from trusted local communication alongside education and community programs. It is also important to recognize that delays in platform moderation may allow harmful content to remain accessible and circulate before removal. Overall, the extremist narratives examined in these Facebook short videos followed a structured progression from moral certainty, through emotional intensification, and in some cases toward action-oriented cues. Understanding this structure can support thoughtful, emotionally aware, and locally relevant responses without reproducing or amplifying the harmful narratives themselves.

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Author contributions

Dr. Alserhan contributed to the study’s conceptualization and manuscript writing, including the introduction, methodology, and discussion, and proofread the manuscript. Dr. Alzyoud contributed to data collection, data analysis, manuscript preparation and formatting, and journal correspondence. Both authors contributed to the development of the study, reviewed and approved the final manuscript, and agreed to its submission for publication. The authors contributed in different capacities, and no equal-contribution arrangement was established.

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