

# Threat Analysis of Social Media Use on the Tendency of College Student Radicalism

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## Abstract

Various complex aspects influence a person's formation of radical ideology. Several factors, such as a low sense of tolerance and national identity, are thought to encourage the entry of radicalism. In addition, the use of social media also increases the potential for radicalism because it is used as a new jihad medium by radical terror groups. On the other hand, college students, as part of the youth often exposed to social media, become potential targets. This study employs a mixed-method approach to explore the relationship between tolerance, national identity, and social media usage with radicalism and to identify emerging threats. Data was collected through questionnaires distributed to 150 Science students at the University of Indonesia and interviews with informants, including academics, policymakers, and practitioners. The results of hypothesis testing showed a low negative effect on tolerance and national identity. In contrast, using social media positively and moderately affects student radicalism. Social media's freedom to share information and facilitate interaction makes it highly effective for spreading radical propaganda. This is coupled with the ability of radical terror groups to create narratives based on negative issues against the government. Other opportunities arise from students' insufficient deterrence power and loopholes in violating the law. A comprehensive prevention strategy is required to minimize potential threats through commitment and synergy from all elements of society.

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia, which is expected to receive a demographic bonus in 2045, is still facing various threats and challenges. These threats come from all fields, including the problem of radical ideology. Zamzamy (2019), in his journal, explains radicalism as an ideology that opposes existing norms and policies but does not necessarily lead to acts of violence. Hadingrat et al. (2023) stated that the escalation of the threat of radicalism occurs when the understanding formed is transformed into acts of violence to achieve fundamental goals, especially if the ideology is sourced from religious fanaticism, which can give birth to terror in a more extreme manner.

Various complex factors influence radicalism. Supriadi, Ajib, and Sugiarto (2020) stated that the main cause of radicalism is intolerance with a shallow understanding of religion. Symptoms of intolerance and radicalism have many causes (multicausal), ranging from cultural aspects to structural factors such as policies and the role of the state (Firdaus, 2023). In addition to intolerance, national identity is also thought to influence radicalism. The national identity of the Indonesian nation is based on the internalization of Pancasila values as the philosophy of life of society, contrary to radical understanding (Arief, Prakoso, & Risman, 2021). The weakness of national identity in a person can lead to a high attachment to religious ideology, thus opening the gap for the entry of radicalism (Iswati, 2022).

The massive use of social media also exacerbates radicalism. Social media, which comes with various advantages, such as two-way interaction where users can express opinions on the information received, gives people a high level of dependence. Dependence on social media can affect its users' understanding, attitudes, and behavior, according to media dependence theory (Sarwesti, 2023). Latipah and Nawawi (2023) explain that using social media to spread ideas and opinions can create disagreement and intolerance due to cultural differences, religion, etc. On the other hand, Wulan and Soni (2023) said that social media plays an important role in creating unity among various background groups. This means that the use of social media is thought to affect tolerance and national identity, either positively or negatively.

The use of social media can even be a shortcut for someone to develop radicalism without being connected to a particular terror group or often referred to as a lone wolf perpetrator (Riyanta, 2022). This can happen because of the exposure to radical content commonly found on social media. Based on the results of BNPT's cyber patrol in 2024, there are around 11,748 propaganda content on various platforms that are freely accessible to all users. College students, as teenagers who actively use social media, are one of the potential targets for radical terror groups.

College students are idealistic, critical, innovative, have a high fighting spirit, and are easily influenced by new things (Nuryadi & Widiatmaka, 2022). Khatira's research (2021) reinforces that students in the late adolescent stage must face biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. Based on the results of other studies, it is known that students not only consume radical content on social media but also produce similar information and disseminate it to others (Sugihartati, Suyanto, & Sirry, 2020). The various data and information above are the background for this research, which aims to find out the factors that influence the tendency of student radicalism and identify potential new threats, such as the use of social media.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Threat**

Unlike vulnerability, which can be measured through material aspects, threats are often intangible, making them difficult to identify. Prunckun measures threats based on actors' intentions and capabilities. Intentions are translated into desires and expectations, while capabilities come from knowledge and resources. All these factors are summed up to produce the value of the threat (Prunckun, 2019). Riehle also formulated a threat measurement consisting of three factors: intention, capability, and opportunity. The intention is the desire to carry out an attack, the capability is the material and physical ability, and opportunity is the spatial-temporal relationship to the element or environment to be acted upon. Intention can further be determined from the overall strategy favored by the opponent in monitoring its target. Capability can be measured based on the quantity and quality of assets owned by the opponent. At the same time, opportunity can be known from the opponent's proximity to the target or the target's vulnerability to attack (Riehle, 2013). This research uses Riehle's theory to determine the potential new threats that can lead to student radicalism.

### **2.2. Radicalism**

Nurish (2020) defines radicalism into three things: fundamental or deep thinking and positive connotations, meaning revolution and extremism, and actions that lead to violence to achieve fundamental political change. Imran and Irwan (2020) summarised that in its development, radicalism is synonymous with politics that wants a change in power. Still, when it comes to terrorism, radicalism has a negative meaning because it supports violent thoughts and actions. This is in line with Gatot's statement that radicalism is the forerunner of terrorism through attitudes and actions that support the use of violence and originate from intolerance, which cannot accept differences (Farida, 2023).

Based on the explanation of various theories and concepts above, in this study, radicalism is defined as an attitude and action that wants fundamental socio-political changes through revolutionary, extreme steps and leads to acts of terrorism based on deviations from correct religious understanding. This definition is in the same context as the term radical terrorism used in Law Number 5/2018. The measurement of the construct of religious radicalism uses a modified dimension created by Sukabdi (2022), namely: (1) purification efforts; (2) partisanship; (3) totalitarian; (4) literal approach to sacred texts; (5)

dichotomous thinking; and (6) imposing revolutionary changes although not necessarily in the form of physical violence.

### **2.3. Tolerance**

Ismail (2014) explains tolerance as an attitude of fairness, honesty, objectivity, and respect for differences in opinion, habits, religion, nationality, and ethnicity owned by others. Indonesia, as a country with a high level of heterogeneity, both in terms of religion, language, culture, ethnicity, and various other things, requires tolerance among fellow communities to create harmony and peace (Amar, 2023). Based on the awareness of the impact of conflict in various fields, the concept of tolerance is present to reduce the potential negative impacts that will arise when any individual and any group behaves intolerant of diversity. Thus, tolerance has a positive assessment and belief in appropriate behavior, empathy, and respect for others based on equality despite many differences. This concept results in the measurement of tolerance levels by Wittenberg resulting from cognitive aspects or reasonableness, affective aspects or empathy, and behavior or fairness (Al Fariz & Saloom, 2021).

### **2.4. National Identity**

Rivaldo et al. (2022) explained that national identity is formed from a set of cultural values that grow and develop in various aspects of life. Erwin (2013), in his book, also explains that the national identity of the Indonesian nation consists of three aspects, which include basic, instrumental, and natural identity. Phinney and Devich-Navarro measure national identity into three aspects, namely affirmation and sense of belonging, exploration, and behavior. Affirmation and sense of belonging means an individual's feeling of belonging and being part of their group or nation. The exploration aspect reflects a person's curiosity to learn about the group and ends in the desire to participate in activities. The behavior aspect is a pattern of behavior that has its characteristics in each country. This aspect is reflected in people's daily lives, including customs, culture, and habits (Iswati, 2022; Yuan & Li, 2019). This construct will be used to measure national identity in this study, as it has been tested for validity in capturing the phenomenon of diversity in Indonesia.

### **2.5. Social Media**

Indrawan, Efriza, and dan Ilmar (2020), in their journal, explained social media in terms of new media theory, where social media is able to create a digital public space that is still free from state domination and market intervention. As a result, social media is considered the most appropriate means of disseminating information and propaganda to influence society. Based on one of the mass communication theories, namely media dependency theory, modern society relies on the media to fulfill its needs, causing the media to have a significant role in all social activities and ultimately being able to influence cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Rafiq, 2012). The formation of measurement constructs is based on dependency theory, which consists of user needs or motivation, social media capabilities, and the influence provided.

## **3. Research Methods**

### **3.1. Research Design**

This research design is an explanatory sequential mixed method, where quantitative research is conducted first to determine the relationship between variables, and qualitative research is continued with qualitative research to strengthen the analysis. This means that the influence of tolerance variables, national identity, and the use of social media on radicalism is measured first. The measurement results are then strengthened with qualitative analysis to identify the most potential forms of threats. In general, this research procedure consists of collecting survey data on student perceptions of each variable, statistical analysis in the form of hypothesis testing, conducting informant interviews, and ending with qualitative analysis. In each data collection result, validity testing will be carried out so that the analysis results given are credible to be applied.

### 3.2. Data Source

The source of quantitative data is students of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Indonesia, with the aim of obtaining a diverse background and updating the results of measuring the tendency of radicalism at its university. In addition, students in the exact sciences are more prone to radicalism because of the logic of right and wrong thinking (Saifullah, Afrizal, & Utariningsih, 2021). Based on a margin of error of 8%, a sample size of 150 students was obtained. Data collection was carried out through distributing questionnaires with a Likert scale of 1-4. Furthermore, qualitative data sources involved credible informants in their fields, such as academics in the field of radical terror, policymakers, practitioners, and students, through semi-structured interviews. Secondary data is also used in the form of literature studies from books and relevant research, regulations, field findings, and other sources that can support the research results.

### 3.3. Data Analysis Technique

The quantitative analysis technique uses the Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) method with the help of Smart-PLS 4.0 software. SEM-PLS is a statistical method that serves to test causal relationships between variables, measure conceptual constructs, and model relationships between variables based on a theory or hypothesis (Hair et al., 2022). The relationship between variables to be tested in this study is described in the hypothesis below.

- H1: Tolerance affects radicalism
- H2: National identity affects radicalism
- H3: Social media usage moderates the relationship between tolerance and radicalism
- H4: Social media usage moderates the relationship between national identity and radicalism
- H5: Social media usage has a direct effect on radicalism

Before hypothesis testing, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability were tested with the following criteria (Supriyadi, 2014).

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Qualifications

Descriptions	Testing	Qualification
Convergent Validity	Loading Factor	Valid if the loading is greater than 0,70
	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Valid if the AVE value is greater than 0,50
Discriminant Validity	Cross Loading	Valid if the cross-loading value is greater than 0,70 for each variable and indicator
	Root AVE and Correlation between Constructs	Valid if the AVE Square Root is greater than the Correlation between constructs
Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value is greater than 0,70
	Composite Reliability	Reliable if the Composite Reliability values are greater than 0,70

The decision to test the hypothesis is based on the predetermined one-tail test t-table value of 1,645 for the significance level  $\alpha = 0,05$  with the following conditions (Supriyadi, 2014).

- If the t-statistic value on the relationship between latent variables exceeds the t-table value of 1,645, the null hypothesis is rejected. That is, there is a significant relationship between variables.
- If the p-value on the relationship between latent variables is less than the significance level  $\alpha = 0,05$ , then there is a relationship between the variables, or the null hypothesis is rejected.

Furthermore, the qualitative analysis technique uses the Creswell and Creswell model, which consists of five stages: the preparation process, theme setting, coding, analysis, and interpretation. Data validity testing uses triangulation of data sources and triangulation of data collection techniques (Sugiyono, 2011).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Descriptive Analysis

The questionnaire results showed that 59% of the respondents were female. The age range of all respondents is 17 to 25, and the majority are Muslims. The social media platforms used are shown in the chart below.

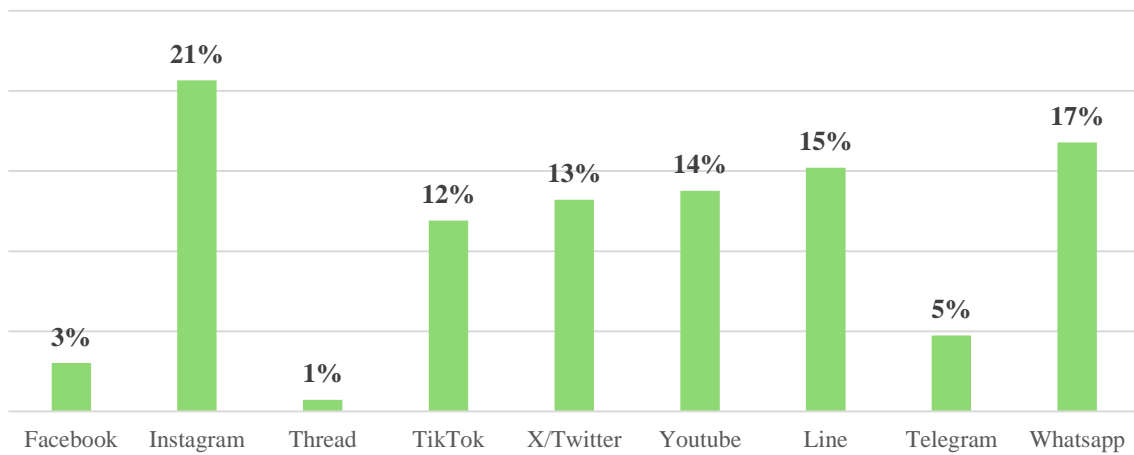


Figure 1. Social Media Platform Used by Respondents

As many as 88% of respondents access social media for 2 to 8 hours a day, and the remaining 12% access social media for more than 8 hours. In addition to the characteristics of the respondents, the following are the respondents' perceptions of each variable.

Table 2. Respondents' Perceptions of Each Variable

Variables	Average Values	Categories
Tolerance	3.66	Strongly Agree
National Identity	3.24	Agree
Social Media Usage	2.91	Agree
Radicalism	2.13	Disagree

Table 3 shows that respondents, namely FMIPA UI students, have good tolerance and national identity and low radicalism tendencies. However, dependence on social media is still quite high, so the potential for exposure to radicalism is also still vulnerable.

### 4.2. Hypothesis Testing

Before hypothesis testing, the data obtained must be tested for validity and reliability with the following results.

Table 3. Indicator and Variable Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variables	Indicators	Loading Factor	AVE	Fornel Lacker	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Tolerance	TL1	0,786	0,641	0,800	0,920	0,934
	TL2	0,809				

Variables	Indicators	Loading Factor	AVE	Fornel Lacker	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
National Identity	TL3	0,883	0,614	0,784	0,700	0,826
	TL4	0,720				
	TL6	0,749				
	TL8	0,791				
	TL11	0,845				
	TL12	0,809				
Social Media Usage	IN2	0,877	0,676	0,822	0,845	0,893
	IN4	0,715				
	IN10	0,749				
Radicalism	PMS3	0,770	0,545	0,739	0,833	0,878
	PMS10	0,831				
	PMS11	0,835				
	PMS12	0,851				
	RAD3	0,718				
	RAD13	0,775				
	RAD19	0,713				
RAD23	0,705					
RAD24	0,792					
RAD25	0,724					

Next, after all indicators and variables are declared valid and reliable, hypothesis testing can be continued. The results of hypothesis testing are shown in Table 4 and Figure 2 below.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Variable Relationship / Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	T-Table	P Values	Significance Level	Decision
Tolerance -> Radicalism	-0,212	2,538		0,011		Reject H0
National Identity -> Radicalism	-0,201	2,092		0,037		Reject H0
Social Media Usage x Tolerance -> Radicalism	-0,058	0,432	1,645	0,666	0,05	Accept H0
Social Media Usage x National Identity -> Radicalism	-0,117	1,020		0,308		Accept H0
Social Media Usage -> Radicalism	0,387	4,991		0,000		Reject H0

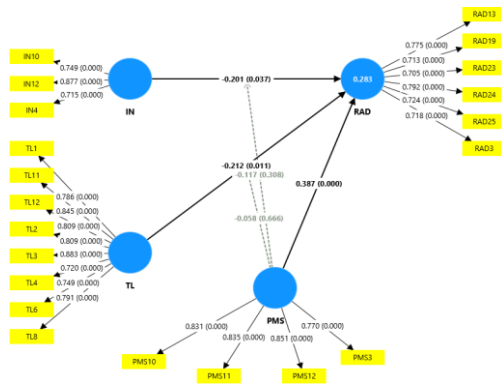


Figure 2. Research Structural Model

The results of hypothesis testing show that the variables of tolerance and national identity have a significant and negative effect on the tendency of student radicalism. This means that when students have a strong attitude of tolerance and national identity, their radicalism tendency will decrease. This is in contrast to the positive influence exerted by the variable of social media use, where students with high dependence on social media will have a high tendency toward radicalism as well. Based on the above results, it is also known that the use of social media does not act as a moderating variable in the relationship between tolerance and national identity towards radicalism. The SEM method can also determine the magnitude of the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable, based on the  $f^2$  value, called the composite validity test. The  $f^2$  value of each independent variable is shown in the table below.

Table 5.  $f^2$  Values of Independent Variable

Variable Relationships	Value of $f^2$	Explanations
Tolerance -> Radicalism	0,04	Has a small effect (in the range of 0,02-0,15)
National Identity -> Radicalism	0,036	Has a medium effect (in the range of 0,02-0,15)
Social Media Usage -> Radicalism	0,195	Has a high effect (in the range of 0,15-0,35)

Social media usage has the medium and largest influence compared to other independent variables. These results are quite interesting findings that should be followed up in qualitative research, namely, the potential threats that can be posed by the use of social media on the tendency of student radicalism.

### 4.3. Qualitative Analysis

Today, the pattern of spreading radical propaganda is no longer done by conventional means. The COVID-19 phenomenon in the past few years has driven a massive digital transformation, especially in relation to means of communication, which has caused almost all people in the world to use social media to connect and obtain the latest information. Internet technology that underlies the use of social media has eliminated the boundaries of space and time so that various information can reach any region and at any time very quickly. Social media is also a platform for freedom of expression and interaction. Radical terror groups utilize these advantages to carry out various activities, especially in spreading propaganda.

Data from We Are Social and Meltwater (2024) shows that there are 139 million social media users in Indonesia. Furthermore, data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) shows that the majority of internet users are Generation Z, which is 34.4% of total users (APJII, 2024). The large number of social media users is directly proportional to the findings of radicalised propaganda content on social media. BNPT's cyber findings on social media experienced a fivefold increase in 2024 when compared to the previous year.

Social media, which is students' primary means of obtaining information, can be a medium for spreading radical ideologies through manipulative or provocative content. Algorithms designed to increase engagement often push users into echo chambers, where they are only exposed to certain views that reinforce their beliefs without opening up space for critical discussion. This condition is further exacerbated by the low digital literacy of some students, which makes them vulnerable to misinformation or propaganda masquerading as valid information.

The potential threat of social media use to students' radicalism tendencies was analyzed using Riehle's theory. Riehle explains that something can be said to be a threat when it has fulfilled three elements, namely: (1) intention, (2) capability, and (3) opportunity. Intention can be known from the intention of radical terror groups in using social media. Capability explains the use of all the capabilities of radical terrorist groups in carrying out their actions in cyberspace. At the same time, opportunity can be obtained from the opportunity or vulnerability of the target, in this case, students as part of the youth. Based on the results of interviews with informants, a summary of the threat analysis is obtained as follows.

Table 6. Threat Analysis of Social Media Usage on Student Radicalism

Element / Indicator	Code	Research Results
Intention	A1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Radical terror groups use social media to spread propaganda and recruit members.</li> <li>2. Raising donations in the form of humanitarian aid and education is used as a front to fund their group activities.</li> <li>3. The main targets of radical terror groups on social media are teenagers, children, and women.</li> </ol>
Capability	A2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can indoctrinate its members very well so that the understanding formed is entrenched and difficult to remove.</li> <li>2. Very good at crafting propaganda narratives based on various government issues so as to convince readers and influence their understanding in a radical direction.</li> <li>3. Utilising technology optimally, especially in spreading narratives with various themes quickly and massively, while avoiding prosecution from law enforcement officials.</li> <li>4. Have a coordinated pattern of constructing key narrative and their dissemination.</li> <li>5. Carry out systematic training for all members and sympathizers.</li> <li>6. Identify targets well and map members according to their expertise appropriately.</li> </ol>
Opportunity	A3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The phase of students as adolescents who are still unstable and are in the process of finding their identity causes the emergence of vulnerability in themselves.</li> <li>2. Lack of religious understanding, ideology of Pancasila, and digital literacy in students.</li> <li>3. Students' weak resistance to radicalism</li> <li>4. Social media's freedom to disseminate various kinds of information and interact allows the emergence of invitations in negative directions, especially in fuelling hatred.</li> <li>5. Wide-reaching social media capabilities and anonymity features.</li> <li>6. Regulations on radical activities on social media are not strong enough.</li> <li>7. Lack of counter-narrative efforts from the government.</li> </ol>

All the results of quantitative and qualitative data processing and analysis provide a conclusion that the influence of social media use on student radicalism can develop into a threat that should be watched out for. One informant explained that radical terror groups often use value-free social media to carry out their activities, especially in spreading radical propaganda, recruitment, and fundraising. Social media is fast, easy, and cheap, so it is considered effective and efficient for radical terror groups to reach a massive audience.

Through social media, radical propaganda is exposed naturally by sympathizers or even ordinary people who feel in agreement with the content. This information is reinforced by the filter bubble and echo chamber effects that make it easy for users to continue to find similar content. If someone opens and reads one of the radical content on social media, the same content recommendations will keep popping up. Not to mention the anonymity feature on social media, which is very beneficial for the movement of radical terror groups, informants also reinforced that regulations in cyberspace are still not strong, leaving many loopholes for violations.

All these advantages of social media are coupled with various issues that radical terror groups can use to create hate narratives. Informants from policymakers mentioned that the movement pattern of radical terror groups on social media starts with a narrative of dislike towards the government by riding on political issues or policies that are considered not ideal for the community. Furthermore, at the end of the narrative, they will convey that the solution to the existing problems is to replace the democratic government system with a form of Islamic caliphate. The posts are then interspersed with raw translated verses of the Qur'an and hadith to support their narrative and gain the trust of readers.

As long as there are still issues about the government's mistakes, radical terror groups will always have a supply of narratives that are difficult to counter. Their chances are quite high given Indonesia's recent unstable socio-political conditions. Students are, again, a vulnerable party due to their idealistic nature, which is easily ignited by disappointment with the rulers. Some informants mentioned that radical terror groups have been targeting three groups: children, teenagers, and women. A survey from the Setara Institute also showed an increase in adolescents with the category of passive intolerance to active intolerance by 2.6% in 2023 (Wardah, 2023). The informant also mentioned that radicalism spreads where many teenagers gather. Educational institutions, as one of the places where teenagers gather, will naturally be prone to being infiltrated by radical terror groups, including in universities.

According to the informant, teenagers, especially high school and university students in their early years, are more prone to being targeted by radical groups because their religious understanding tends to be weak. Likewise, their knowledge and practice of the Pancasila ideology is still not optimal. This condition is reinforced by the phase of self-discovery experienced by adolescents in accordance with Erik Erikson's personality theory. Hence, the vulnerable and unstable condition of adolescents opens wide opportunities for the entry of radical understanding.

However, social media is not entirely negative; it can also turn into an opportunity through wise utilization. For example, student informants stated that criticism of the government should be conveyed according to applicable rules, not in the form of hate speech and incitement on social media. They have good deterrence through filtering information on social media and a willingness to fortify themselves from negative content. They also feel that social media has more positive impacts on them, especially when obtaining information related to positive lecture activities.

An in-depth understanding of the threat of radicalism on social media is a must for intelligence personnel. Social media has become one of the main means of spreading radical ideology, which is often difficult to detect due to its dynamic and anonymous nature. Intelligence personnel must be able to identify patterns of spreading radicalism, understand the characteristics of the platforms used, and analyze content that has the potential to trigger more extreme actions. This understanding is an important foundation in formulating and implementing prevention strategies that are not only responsive but also proactive and based on the principles of effective handling in suppressing the threat of radicalism early on.

## **5. Conclusion**

Hypothesis testing in quantitative research results in the conclusion that the variables of tolerance and national identity have a negative influence on the tendency of student radicalism. Students with high tolerance and strong national identity will find it difficult to penetrate their understanding of radical ideology. Furthermore, the use of social media is known not to act as a moderator variable but has a direct positive influence on the tendency of student radicalism. The magnitude of this influence falls into the moderate category and is the highest when compared to the other two variables.

Primary data obtained from informants also corroborate these measurements, where it is explained that intolerance and waning national identity signify the entry of radical understanding in a person. However, the informants also mentioned that many other complex factors, such as family environment, community environment, socialization, education, and religious knowledge, influence radicalism. On the other hand, social media is considered an effective new tool for radical terror groups to spread propaganda in a massive and targeted manner. The ease of access, anonymity, and wide reach of social media make it a strategic tool to influence understanding, form opinions, and slowly cause changes in the mindset and behavior of students as one of their main targets.

The use of social media as a threat to student radicalism is analyzed using Riehle's theory, which is assessed in terms of intention, capability, and opportunity. Data from informants showed the intensity of radical terrorist groups to spread propaganda, recruitment, and funding using social media. Radical terror groups are considered to have the ability to utilize various issues to develop propaganda narratives that convince social media users. In addition, they also understand the pattern of social media algorithms that help spread radical propaganda massively. On the other hand, the opportunity for radical terror groups is seen from the vulnerability of their targets. These namely students are in a crucial phase of self-discovery

and full of idealism. The fulfillment of all these elements indicates the threat of radicalism influenced by students' use of social media.

The problem of radical threats on social media has a solution that requires the involvement of all parties as a whole. Several existing prevention measures must be optimised such as: (1) educating the public on radical content detection and campaigning for social media awareness and the importance of reporting radical content; (2) improving coordination with social media platforms so that content blocking efforts can be carried out optimally; (3) conducting intensive monitoring on social media and following up according to findings in the field, either by blocking or deepening the target until action is taken; (4) strengthen regulations by providing stricter sanctions or drafting derivatives of existing regulations in more detail; (5) actively involve all elements of society, especially community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders, youth, non-governmental organisations, communities, and influencers to help monitor and disseminate positive narratives; and (6) provide counselling services to individuals who are vulnerable to exposure to radicalism from social media and provide the necessary support.

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