A Comparative Analysis of Online Radicalization Among Youth in India

Tanmayi S.Vaste[1], Aditya Arya[2]
[1]Forensic Psychologist, [2]Forensic Psychologist.

Abstract—**Radicalization of college students, specifically young boys and girls, is a matter of concern for many societies and nations today. The present research was taken up to explore the sources of radicalization among college students and identify the factors that are responsible for religious radicalization among College students.**

A questionnaire was developed to collect data from the college students. The questionnaire contained questions on three domains 1. Social media 2. Behaviour-based 3. Attitude based. The questionnaire was circulated through Google Forms. Forty participants responded to the Google form and data was collected. Data was analyzed using descriptive, non-parametric statistics, and content analysis. Results revealed no gender difference in the propensity of the College students to engage in violent acts in the name of religion, nor did the education qualification of the participants, but there can be a chance that individuals who are well educated can engage in the violent act. Belief in the superiority of one's religion was also found to increase the chances of an individual participating in religious violence.

Furthermore, participants from lower socioeconomic status (SES) had a higher chance of participating in violent acts in the name of religion and a higher chance to participate if their peers were doing so. The scope of the study suggests that there can be further studies done in terms of the changing factors of the radicalizations, like the barter system in the radicalization.

Keywords: **Online Radicalization, Radicalization, Polarization, Extremism, Ideology, Social Media.**

I. INTRODUCTION

India, i.e. Bharat, is a secular country that believes in unity in diversity. In this diversified country and throughout modernization, we are all extremely engaged in the internet and social media consumption. We are increasingly into social media and cannot function without it. Social media is an idea generator, but we don't know whether it's good or bad. Misleading information can sometimes lead to negative outcomes such as fighting, protests, riots, and all it requires is only a single click to propagate this hatred among people. All of this can lead to extreme thoughts or polarization, and lone actors, spiritual leaders, and social equivalents use this opportunity to implement their propaganda.

1.1 Radicalization:

The word "radical" refers to a change in the basic traits of something, thus radicalism of beliefs or actions of people who pioneer thorough or complete political or social reform.

According to the Oxford Dictionary definition of radicalization, it is a process in which people come to support or participate in extremist ideologies.

Radicalization is the process by which a person supports or participates in extremist ideologies. Extremist ideologies are born when there is a split in society and the people's thinking patterns. Polarized thoughts occur when the groups are in nature different from one another in terms of religious belief, cultural diversity, and also in terms of community.

People get affected by economic, social deprivation, and inequality, discrimination they face in their lives, because of which they have stereotypes and prejudices in their minds, which push them to become polarized, radicalized, and extremist ideologies; these all are the causes of the formation of radical groups.

Radicalization can be defined in many ways, and studies have already been done on radicalization by different authors, who have defined radicalization.

Radicalization is the process in which people come to support terrorism and Extremism and, in some cases, to then participate in terrorist groups. Another definition can be Radicalization refers to the process of an individual's transformation from a moderate, law-abiding citizen into an active, anti-state, violent extremist.

1.2 Online Radicalization:

Bermingham et al. define online radicalization as a process whereby individuals through online interactions and exposure start to view violence as a legitimate method to achieve political goals and solve conflict. Hence, online radicalization can be defined as the radicalization through the medium of the internet.

1.3 Causes of the Radicalization

In the Indian context, the causes of radicalization can differ from each part of the world and the factors start from the base of vulnerability like low Socioeconomic status, Psychological unstable, perceived injustice, politically influencing factors, communal and caste-related issues, societal issues, social media influence, personal experiences, cultural differences, etc. Radicalization in India has different factors which influence the individual to become radicalized.

1.3.1 Individual factors:

- Socio-psychological Factors- The alienation, rage, frustration, and a great feeling of injustice may lead an individual to start sympathizing with extreme ideas and get involved in radicalization.
- Lack of Identity-Teens, poorly positioned with their own identity, or that of belonging, may find the extremist groups appealing since they provide a sense of purpose and community.

1.3.2 Socio-economic Factors:

- Low socioeconomic status- low socioeconomic status due to unemployment, due to low education, and social exclusion may help create a resentment breeding ground, making extremist messages cogent in the minds of this young population.
- Discrimination – Discrimination based on race, caste, religion, ethnicity, can give rise to feelings of marginalization and lead to radicalization.

Online social media- social media can spread wrong information, which reinforces the existing beliefs, leading to radicalization. Extremist groups spread propaganda, recruit new members, and execute violent acts. Hence, the basis of radicalization can be vulnerabilities, feelings of injustice towards one's religious communities, thought processes of people, and personal experiences, which also influence an individual whether or not to join the radical groups.

Consequences of Radicalization

Radicalization is one of the outcomes of social divisions that exist in Indian society, which can lead to a worsening of relationships among people who belong to different religions, ethnic groups, or economic levels. Hence, there is an opportunity that could culminate in intensifying polarization and conflicts.

Violent Extremism: Radicalization often leads to the emergence of violent extremist groups that may engage in acts of terrorism or insurgency. This poses a serious threat to public safety and national security.

Economic Disruption: Terrorist or insurgency activities by any sub-group or fanatic member or group lead to affect the economy, which shows the effects of terrorism, and hampers economic growth, investment, and development.

Human Rights Violations: Yes, there are issues because, in an attempt to counter radicalization, governments end up suppressing the rights of citizens. This may result in abuse of power, use of force, arbitrary arrests, detentions, and infringement of civil liberties.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Radicalization traces back to the 20th century, the impact of radicalization was not as severe as in today's 21st century. The Indians in that context were not that much radicalized as such, but before independence, two groups were present with right-wing and left-wing ideologies. They fought for the independence of India. The Fighters were radicalized by the ideology of freedom from British colonialism after the independence of India; the trauma of partition, violence, unfulfilled expectations, identity politics, etc., led to factors that contributed to the radicalization of the masses.

Behr et al. (2013) take 15 cases of terrorism and extremism from the evidence from the primary research conducted, confirming that the internet played a role in the radicalization process of the violent extremists and terrorists whose cases we studied. The evidence enabled the research team to explore the extent to which the five main hypotheses that emerged from the literature concerning the

alleged role of the internet in radicalization were held in these case examinations. Different case studies identify how an individual got radicalized and joined terrorist groups over the period, and in what online and offline activities they indulge in.

Rasheed (2018) discusses three types of radicalization, home-grown radicalization, cross-border radicalization, and global jihadist radicalization. India's and the region's sociocultural ethos, according to which nations ought to emerge as organic, composite entities rather than only as political unions, has to be revitalized. The threat of extremism and terrorism can never be properly thwarted by security measures in the absence of a robust social fabric and shared cultural ethos.

Batra (2022) talks about how Kashmir, at this point in history, has been widely shifting from the epitome of 'Paradise on Earth' to a slightly pessimistic connotation of 'Trouble in Paradise'. Thus, terrorism, and countering radicalization are the preventive measures for the same.

Mughal et al. (2023) identified six publications that identify the theoretical and conceptual relationship between online extremism, psychological outcomes, and intervention strategy. Radicalization depends on complex interactions among different risk factors. Some of the negative psychological consequences of a disturbance, in one or more of these, include an excessive dissatisfaction with authority, an unfulfilled need to belong, support regressive populist policy, or even joining an extremist group. The author discusses the general violent content of the extremists found online. This research includes the study of 132 publications, which were duplicated by using Rayyan.ai, a systematic review screening platform. A review was done using PRISMA guidelines. The publication was divided into three criteria: first online extremist content, Second mental health and psychological process, and thirdly an intervention based on evidence.

Omotoyinbo (2014) discusses the definitions and theories of radicalization and involvement in violent extremism. It introduces the concept of Gradual Online De-Radicalization (G.O.D) as a strategy to reduce online radicalization globally. The study delves into the processes of radicalization and the use of social media. It also provides an insight on the use of the internet, especially the Netizen, in the process

of radicalization and suggests measures to prevent this from happening. That is why the need to counteract the processes of radicalization in social networks is highlighted, and the study's goal is to consider the main factors behind this phenomenon to reverse them. Further, it adds information about what it means to be "online" as well as about the history of the Internet connection.

Torok (2013) further introduces the qualitative hypothesis testing methodology that can be applied to explore terrorist cases when conducting group interviews. It also analyses commonly shared characteristics of exceptional groups on Facebook and underscores the importance of understanding these aspects when defining the nature of the power relations of Islamic terrorism. Also, the document speaks about employing the strategy of grounded theories to consider qualitative data about online radicalization and terrorism.

Tanoli et al. (2021) this study intended to cover language-dependent versus language-independent in the context of Natural language processing (NLP) tasks to develop an efficient and effective system. Hopefully, this study will also guide students and researchers with essential resources to learn foundational knowledge of the field and further integrate unsupervised and language-independent. The focus of the research is extremism and radicalization; Online Social Media Platform(s); Language-Dependent versus Language-Independent Approaches for Extremism and Radicalization (or Collective Radicalization) Detection; Multimodal approaches for Extremism Etc.

Awareness Brief article (2014) discusses radicalization to violence in the context of social media entails the process whereby a person becomes radicalized online through the use of sites such as Facebook and shares on YouTube, periodically over time, depending on several factors, personal and situational. The extremists embrace the openness of the internet to launch tendentious public incitements for violence, establish cyber groups, and ensure mass production of hate educative films, postures, and interpersonal communications. Anders Breivik was another operator of the 2011 Norway attacks after being socially isolated and fixated on the Internet, while Zachary Chesser is another case of an Internet-based radical who sought to join Al Shabab. That is why such a threat has to be fought with an effective

practice of community policing that implies increasing public awareness, using social networks actively, and gaining the confidence of communities to be able to identify the individuals who might be radicalized.

III. METHODOLOGY

AIM

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors that are responsible for religious radicalization among Young Men and Women in College Populations in India, to understand social media's role in polarization and radicalization.

OBJECTIVES

Thus, the present study has the following objectives.

- To explore the sources of Radicalization among young boys and girls in the College Populations.
- To identify the factors responsible for Religious Radicalization among College students.

SAMPLE

The purposive sampling method was used via sharing the survey on various platforms by the researcher as well as participants themselves. All the 40 Responses were recorded from students belonging to various government and private universities in India. All 40 responses were analyzed. The inclusion criteria were age between 18 and 30 and ability to read and comprehend English.

DESIGN

This cross-sectional study was conducted in India via an online survey. The data were collected through self-administered questionnaires from students at colleges and universities in India. Survey was created with a 5-point Likert scale and multiple-choice options shared with the population aged between 18 and 30 years of age. Survey was shared via the medium of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. The survey included 3 sections at the start, the participants were asked to give consent, then the demographic details were asked. Second section content of the social media usage questionnaire, and at last, the questions about religion and attitude-based questionnaire were asked. The survey had 51 questions in total.

PARTICIPANTS

The study includes participants who are College students. A total of 40 People were contacted for the study. Out of which 40 responses were taken for the study. All the participants were from different states in India.

RESEARCH TOOL

The data was collected through a survey method. The details about the survey are as follows. The survey was taken through an online Google form in 3 Sections.

Demographic Information

This would include informed consent and the demographics of the individuals which consist of Name / initials , Age , Gender, Education, Occupation, home state / city, marital status , mother tongue, languages spoken, In my family some people follow different religions, I have converted into another religion, whole family socioeconomic status, converted into another religion.

Questions about social media usage

This section was a basic social media usage and social media-related questionnaire. In this, participants will provide the basic usage of their social media apps, which apps they use in their daily lives, how much they are influenced by their opinions on political and religious matters, and what posts influence them to act violently or to take part in violent actions and crowds.

IV. RESULTS

The analysis of the collected data provides insight into the patterns of social media usage, the influence of online content, and the susceptibility of college students to radical ideologies.

The first-hand data was collected through the survey method by providing Google Forms and the sampling method was purposive sampling and snowball sampling. A total of 40 participants are involved in the study from different states and cities of India, consisting of 21 males and 19 females. The demographics include their educational qualification ranging from higher secondary to post graduate level along with their occupation status as employed and unemployed. Among the participants, 39 individuals are unmarried and 1 is married. Some participants speak different languages like Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, and Tulu. The participants are classified under religion which includes Hinduism (n=37), Buddhism (n=1), Christianity (n=1), and Jainism (n=1). Also, 4

participants have family members who follow different religions. The distribution of participants are also based on their socioeconomic status in which 4 participants belong to the upper class, 5 participants belong to the upper middle class, 8 participants to middle class, 13 participants to lower middle class similarly, 10 participants belong to lower class.

Social Media Engagement: The study found that 35% of participants were highly active on social media platforms, frequently engaging with political and religious content. Platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Telegram were the most commonly used.

Exposure to Extremist Content: Around 50% of respondents reported encountering violent or extremist content online. While some engaged in fact-checking, a significant proportion admitted to being influenced by such content.

Psychological and Behavioural Impact: Approximately 5% of participants expressed a willingness to engage in violence in the name of religion, indicating susceptibility to radical ideologies. Peer influence played a critical role in shaping attitudes, with individuals more likely to accept extremist narratives when reinforced by their social circles.

Statistical Associations: Chi-square analysis revealed a significant correlation between socio-economic status and susceptibility to radicalization (p=0.032). Participants from lower-income backgrounds exhibited a higher likelihood of engaging with radical content and demonstrating extreme ideological views. However, gender and education level did not show statistically significant correlations with radical behaviours.

Perceived Religious Superiority: The study also identified that individuals who believed their religion was superior were more inclined toward extremist views. The association between religious superiority and willingness to engage in radical acts was found to be statistically significant (p=0.000).

Influence of Peer Groups: Participants indicated that peers, social media influencers, and online discussions shaped their opinions on political and religious topics. Some respondents acknowledged that group dynamics often led to reinforcement of extreme ideologies, making them more susceptible to radicalization.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the growing role of social media in shaping ideologies among college students. While access to diverse viewpoints can encourage healthy discourse, the presence of echo chambers amplifies extremist narratives, making it easier for radical ideologies to spread. The significant correlation between socio-economic status and susceptibility to radicalization suggests that individuals facing economic hardships may be more vulnerable to extremist recruitment efforts. The study also underscores the need for digital literacy programs to equip students with critical thinking skills necessary for identifying and rejecting misinformation.

The phenomenon of radicalization is a multidimensional issue that requires a comprehensive response to mitigate its effects on society. The findings of this study indicate that social media plays a crucial role in exposing college students to radical ideologies. While some individuals critically assess content, many are influenced by extremist narratives, leading to ideological polarization and, in extreme cases, a willingness to engage in violence.

Key factors such as socio-economic status, peer influence, and perceived religious superiority were found to be significant contributors to radicalization. The study highlights the need for intervention programs focusing on digital literacy, fact-checking, and psychological counseling to equip students with critical thinking skills.

Future research should explore long-term trends in online radicalization and assess the effectiveness of intervention programs in different socio-cultural contexts. Addressing radicalization requires continuous monitoring, proactive policymaking, and a holistic approach to safeguarding young minds from extremist ideologies.

Association between the Variables
The Chi-square was computed to explore the association between the variables.

Table 1.
The factor of gender and how will they behave if someone asks them to participate in a violent act in the name of religion.

Factors					
Gender	Non-violent	Violent when risk is less	Violent	X^2	P
Male	45.0%	5.0%	2.5 %	0.263	0.877
Female	42.5%	2.5%	2.5 %		

The Chi-square test result exhibited that the difference between gender and the use of violence was statistically not significant (P = 0.877), which means gender doesn't have any association with the use of violence. Those individuals who tend to engage in violent acts may or may not be involved in it irrespective of their gender.

People are influenced by their peers on topics like Religious Propaganda, Current Political Situations, Neglected Political Topics, Climate change and surrounding politics, Politics-Religion, Spirituality, Hindu Muslim, Racism castes, Political, Religion, Political, Religion, Like Congress and BJP, Modi, Spiritual influencers, Emergence of Abrahamic Religions Emergence of Hinduism, creation of political parties in India, Violence, terrifying things, radicalization., about their religion, culture, etc. Individuals who said that they would do violence in the name of religion and if the risk is low probing was done to them to see the frequencies and factors on which they will choose to be violent. Individuals also at some point try to confirm with the peer group and they try to keep the relations good and try to be socially accepted so they might get influenced by their friends and can take part in violent behaviors without knowing the actual cause of the violence. Some of them also feel that there can be a chance of trying to communicate and find the solution to the issue that is present, violence is not an option for everything. Also, the individual has an opinion that injustice can cause violent behavior.

The past works and the literature suggest that there have been many studies about the radicalization available on the terrorist but the fact is that there is a difference between radicalization and terrorism. Radicalism is about the ideology following and terrorism is the next step of radicalization but the individual is radicalized not necessarily to convert into a terrorist. Several authors used the term radicalization interchangeably with terrorism but not all radicals are terrorists. While there are very few who differ from radicalization.

VI. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of radicalization is a multidimensional issue that requires a comprehensive response to mitigate its effects on society. The findings of this study indicate that social media plays a crucial role in exposing college students to radical ideologies. While some individuals critically assess content, many are influenced by extremist narratives, leading to ideological polarization and, in extreme cases, a willingness to engage in violence.

Government agencies, educational institutions, and social media platforms should collaborate to regulate extremist content and promote counter-narratives. Implementing AI-driven content moderation, fostering community engagement, and designing awareness campaigns can help curb radical influences among youth.

REFERENCES

[1] Batra, K. (2022). Jihadist Radicalization in Kashmir: An Analysis of Causal Factors. *Center for Land Warfare Studies.*

[2] Von Behr, I. (2013). Radicalization in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism. *RAND Corporation,* RR-453-RE.

[3] Mughal, R., Demarinis, V., Nordendahl, M., Lone, H., Phillips, V., & MacMillan, E. (2023). Public mental health approaches to online radicalization: An empty systematic review. International *Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(16), 6586.

[4] Omotoyinbo, F. (2014). Online radicalization: The net or the netizen? *Socialinės Technologists Social Technologies*, 4(1), 51–61.

[5] Rasheed, A. (2018). Jihadist Radicalization in India: Internal Challenges, External Threats. *Journal of Defense Studies,* 12(2), 77-103.

[6] Tanoli, I., Pais, S., Cordeiro, J., & Jamil, M. L. (2021). Detection of Radicalization and Extremism Online: A Survey.

[7] Woodring, D. W. (2014). 21st Century Radicalization: The Role of the Internet User and Nonuser in Terrorist Outcomes. Graduate Theses and Dissertations Retrieved from https://scholarworks.uark.edu/ etd/2338

[8] Awareness Brief. (2014). Radicalization to violence and social media: Online radicalization processes and the impact of social networks on terrorism.