



**Limiting the role of social media
in the radicalization of political
beliefs**



SPC1

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Forum: Special Conference 1

Issue: Limiting the role of social media in the radicalization of political beliefs

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Introduction

Ever since article 19, 'Defending Freedom of Expression and Information', was adapted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, people have been free to disclose their beliefs and culture. These opinions have been shown in forms of art, demonstrations and general dialogues, but in the present mainly on social media platforms. These social media platforms give users access to an extended range of expressions of anything preferred to share. However, this freedom has serious consequences, in reference to the extreme beliefs disseminated on social media coming to the promotion of antisemitism, terrorism, and abuse. The limits on this conflict are not explicitly elaborated anywhere, therefore this radicalization can originate an influence on anyone introduced to this. The process should make somebody more 'extreme' or 'radical' in their opinions on political, social and religious beliefs.

Because of the technological developments throughout the decades, platform users get more creative and more filled with knowledge, through which the chances of limiting the dissemination of radicalised information should definitely be even more minimised. But how do we combat this conflict? And can we use social media as a counter to de-radicalization?

In this research report, this topic will be discussed in multiple segments, such as a general overview, definitions of key terms, possible solutions, and more. It should clarify the issue of the conflict, the involvement of major parties and how and what should be handled. At the end of this report, delegates should be well-informed to create solutions and initiatives to debate this issue, seeing radicalization has global influences and can also have an influence though you might not be aware of it as it is closer than people are conscious of.

Definition of Key Terms

Radicalization

A process of influencing other' political, religious, and social beliefs meaning that it should be more 'extreme' or 'radical'.

Political belief

One's opinion, manifested in speech or association, concerning the social, economic and governmental structure of society and its institutions.

Religious belief

A conviction in the existence of a divine power or powers, often involving rituals, moral principles, and a framework for understanding the purpose and meaning of life.

Social belief

Shared convictions, attitudes, or values held by a group of individuals within a society, shaping their collective understanding of norms, customs, and interpersonal relationships.

Genocide

A crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part.

Terrorism

The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.

Counteraction

An act of retaliation; a counterattack. Any action in opposition to a previous action.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

A, by UN-designated, terrorist group with a particularly violent ideology that calls itself a caliphate and claims religious authority over all Muslims.

General Overview

Social media has become an integral part of modern society, connecting people globally and providing a platform for information dissemination, communication, and expression. However, alongside its positive aspects, social media has also played a pivotal role in the process of

radicalization. This phenomenon is not new, but the advent of digital platforms has amplified its reach and impact. This General Overview explores the historical roots of social media's role in radicalization, examines its present implications, and provides examples to illustrate the complex issue at play.

There are multiple approaches to political beliefs, such as really delving into governments with different ideologies (e.g. liberalism, socialism, conservatism). But there is also an emphasis on exploring gender equality, feminism, environmental issues and globalism. Therefore, radicalization is a major conception that takes part in more than just governmental forms. Because of the diverse and interacting factors that contribute to the process individual, social, political, and economic elements all play a role, stimulating the complication to find a clear explanation or solution.

History

The history of social media's involvement in radicalization can be traced back to the early days of the Internet, where online forums and chat rooms served as virtual meeting spaces to communicate with like-minded individuals. However, the rise of mainstream social media platforms in the mid-2000s significantly altered the landscape. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube became powerful tools for communication and information sharing. During this period, extremist groups began leveraging these platforms to spread their ideologies, recruit new members, and coordinate activities. Al-Qaeda, for example, recognized the potential of the Internet for radicalization and recruitment as early as the late 1990s. The 21st century saw a turnaround in the methods employed by extremist organisations, with social media becoming a primary source for propaganda and radicalization.

In the synchronous era, social media's role in radicalization has become more pronounced due to the accessibility and ubiquity of digital platforms. The algorithms used by these platforms often contribute to the creation of ideological echo chambers, where individuals are exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, fostering an environment conducive to radicalization.

The speed at which information spreads on social media further exacerbates the problem. Extremist content can go viral within minutes, reaching a vast audience before it can be adequately addressed. The use of encrypted messaging apps also allows radical groups to communicate securely, making it challenging for authorities to monitor and intervene. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) serves as a strong example of how social media can be exploited for radicalization. Between 2014 and 2017, ISIS effectively utilised platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to

disseminate propaganda, recruit foreign fighters, and inspire acts of violence. The group's adept use of social media played a crucial role in its ability to attract a global following and carry out attacks worldwide.

Similarly, far-right extremist groups have leveraged social media to spread their ideologies and recruit adherents. The Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019, carried out by a white supremacist who live-streamed the attack on Facebook, highlighted the dark intersection between online radicalization and real-world violence.

Still to this day radicalization is implemented on social media to support war crimes through propaganda and incitement by dehumanising specific ethnic groups. Also, in cases of genocide, social media can be used to share graphic images and videos, amplifying the impact of atrocities and exacerbating the psychological trauma experienced by affected communities and global audiences.

Counteraction

Recognizing the severity of the issue, social media platforms have implemented measures to counteract the spread of extremist content. Automated content moderation, user reporting mechanisms, and collaboration with law enforcement agencies have been key components of these efforts. Multiple countries, the EU, the UN and NGOs have created initiatives and collaborated together in it.

However, the effectiveness of such measures remains a subject of ongoing debate, as the volume of content uploaded daily poses a significant challenge for timely identification and removal. Governments and international organizations have also taken steps to address the issue, calling for increased regulation and oversight of social media platforms. However, striking the right balance between preserving freedom of expression and curbing the dissemination of extremist content remains a complex challenge.

Therefore, is it a primary point that when creating solutions, be aware of the target group and their expected responses. Because not every type of radicalization can be tackled the same way.

Timeline of Key Events

The below-mentioned events are some key events that are very practical occurrences that were mentioned regarding the radicalization of political beliefs on social media. It is obvious that the increase of such radicalization on social media is rapidly growing.

Date	Event
2010-2012	Arab Spring: A series of pro-democracy uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa that caused autocrats to resign
2014	GamerGate: This was a controversial online movement that involved harassment and abuse towards women in the gaming industry.
2014	ISIS Propagation: The spread of terrorist groups and their extremist Islamic ideologies causing attacks.
2016	Brexit Referendum: touched on multiple topics, including immigration, identity and national sovereignty.
2016	U.S. Presidential Election: Increased contribution to certain ideologies by radicalization.
2017	Myanmar Rohingya Crisis: This was the displacement of Muslim minorities in Myanmar, because of historical and political roots.
28th October 2017	Pittsburgh Synagogue shooting: This shooting was motivated by anti-Semitic beliefs (considered one of the deadliest attacks on a Jewish community in US)
2019	Christchurch Mosque Shootings New Zealand: Shooting towards a religious group, the Muslim community. It was live-streamed by the attacker.
2017-2020	QAnon Spread: This is a conspiracy that claims a plot against President Trump by a group elite involved in child trafficking and other nefarious activities.
2020	COVID-19 Pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic caused multiple opinions to contrast each other with different beliefs, also resulting in radicalised statements.
2021	Facebook Whistle-blower: This user raised concerns about how Facebook's algorithms prioritise engagement and divisive content, which contribute to the spread of extremist ideologies.
Present	Continuation of online recruitment for far-right groups that stimulate the spread of radicalization.

Major Parties Involved

The major parties that are mentioned below are specified because of their influence on this issue, how they combat this issue and whether the actions taken are showing progress.

Germany - Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG)

In 2018 on the 1st of January, Germany launched a “hate speech law” to hold social media platforms responsible for combating online speech deemed illegal under the domestic law. It was probably the most determined Western country to take such a counteraction on this conflict. From February 28th to March 3rd 2019, NetzDG was analysed by the Transatlantic Working Group (TWG). They discussed NetzDG’s content and political context and the inferences to the expression of freedom. Therefore, they closed it with recommendations for more research and suggestions on how they can reduce the blocking parts to the freedom of expression.

United Kingdom - Online Safety Bill

On October 26th 2023, the UK implemented the Online Safety Bill to control hate speech and extremism radicalization on social media. This plan has stated five main policy objectives:

- Increase user safety online
- To preserve and enhance freedom of speech online
- To improve law enforcement’s ability to tackle illegal content online
- To improve user’s ability to keep themselves safe online
- To improve society’s understanding of the harm landscape

To utterly achieve such goals, particular amendments were made by the government to extra secure safety online. Meaning they set an age verification or age estimation to prevent children from pornographic content. Additionally, they also put labels as ‘primary priority’ and ‘priority’ to content that appears harmful to children. And lastly, they have implemented multiple other amendments before mental health and safety.

European Union - Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online

In May 2016, the European Commission agreed with Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube on a “Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online”. Instagram and Snapchat following in 2018 and TikTok in 2020. These major platforms perform rounds of reviewing a majority of flagged content within 24 hours by removing or disabling access to hate speech content. When comparing the monitoring rounds of 2021 and 2022, Microsoft has partnered with expert think tanks

such as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue on counter-speech issues to help NGOs discover and deliver powerful counter content through advertisements on Bing. Therefore, even more firms take part in the Code of Conduct.

Possible Solutions

These possible solutions are examples of how to combat the issue. This is just a guide to form other solutions.

Warning Programs:

By encouraging the development and implementation of comprehensive digital warning programs, individuals will be taught how to critically evaluate information online. This is important, because warning people that not everything on social media is reliable, should prevent chaos and panic. And by enhancing users' skills in distinguishing between reliable and misleading content, they can better navigate social media and resist the influence of radicalising narratives. Therefore, they should implement this in every country and do checkups to see if it is effective and how they can improve and therefore, combat further if needed.

Combat Regulations:

When establishing and fostering collaborative efforts between governments, tech companies, and civil society organisations, these will enforce responsible industry regulations. By creating clear guidelines for content moderation, transparency, and accountability, these regulations can help mitigate the spread of extremist content on social media platforms without compromising freedom of expression. This could also create an intimidation amongst the culprits as their information will be unravelled rapidly and people will be more resisted.

Community Narratives:

Support community-driven initiatives that promote positive and inclusive narratives. Encourage the creation of online spaces where diverse voices can share stories and perspectives, countering extremist ideologies. By empowering communities to shape their online discourse, social media platforms can become spaces for dialogue and understanding rather than breeding grounds for radicalization. Hereby people can feel more comfortable on social platforms and should be more

pleasant with sharing their opinions. To further strengthen the impact of community-driven initiatives and the creation of positive online spaces, consider incorporating the following aspects:

Moderation Training:

Provide community members with moderation training to foster healthy and constructive discussions. Empowering individuals to moderate online spaces effectively can help maintain a positive atmosphere and swiftly address any potential issues.

Incentivize Engagement:

Implement rewards or recognition for positive contributions within online communities. Recognizing and incentivizing constructive behaviour can motivate users to actively participate in positive discussions and discourage harmful interactions.

Further reading

The presidency believes that these appendices are very practical and convenient as an example to create your own amendments or resolutions. They delve very deep into the underlying sources of radicalization and different ways of combating this conflict on social media. So we encourage you to take a look at the below-mentioned links:

- I. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9579/>
- II. https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/2215/2607_Volledige_Tekst_tc_m28-286136.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

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These links can be very helpful for further researching, but also to get an insight on how different organisations take their actions.

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Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum (WODC) ("Developing a Social Media Response to Radicalization," n.d., 11)

https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/2215/2607_Volledige_Tekst_tcm28-286136.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y