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The Dynamics of Youth Radicalization: The Mediating Role of Exposure to Political Violence in Shaping Sympathy for Radicalism

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Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti hubungan antara konsumsi konten radikal, intensitas penggunaan media sosial, paparan kekerasan politik, dan simpati terhadap radikalisme di kalangan pemuda. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi berupa bukti empiris dari siswa sekolah menengah di Indonesia. Dengan mengacu pada teori manajemen teror dan riset sosialisasi media, studi ini berpendapat bahwa paparan daring tidak secara seragam bersifat meradikalisasi, melainkan bergantung pada jenis konten yang ditemui serta penguatannya melalui pengalaman kekerasan kolektif. Data dikumpulkan dari 120 siswa sekolah menengah dan sekolah kejuruan dan dianalisis menggunakan *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa konsumsi konten radikal secara signifikan meningkatkan paparan kekerasan politik, yang pada gilirannya meningkatkan simpati terhadap radikalisme. Sebaliknya, intensitas penggunaan media sosial tidak berpengaruh signifikan baik secara langsung atau tidak langsung. Namun, konsumsi konten radikal memengaruhi simpati terhadap radikalisme secara tidak langsung melalui paparan kekerasan politik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa radikalisasi pemuda lebih baik dipahami sebagai proses yang dimediasi oleh paparan konten dan persepsi ancaman daripada penggunaan media sosial semata. Artikel ini ditutup dengan dengan implikasi temuan untuk strategi pencegahan yang berpusat pada paparan konten, literasi digital, dan ketahanan pemuda.

Kata kunci: Radikalisasi pemuda; Kekerasan politik; Media sosial; Teori Manajemen Teror; PLS-SEM

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between radical content consumption, intensity of social media use, exposure to political violence, and sympathy for radicalism among youth. It contributes empirical evidence from Indonesian secondary-school students. Drawing on Terror Management Theory and media socialization research, the study argues that online exposure is not uniformly radicalizing, but depends on the kind of content encountered and its reinforcement through experiences of collective violence. Data were collected from 120 high school and vocational school students and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that radical content consumption significantly

increases exposure to political violence, which in turn increases sympathy for radicalism. By contrast, social media use intensity has no significant direct or indirect effect. However, radical content consumption affects sympathy for radicalism only indirectly through exposure to political violence. These findings suggest that youth radicalization is better understood as a mediated process shaped by content exposure and threat perception rather than by social media use alone. The article concludes with implications for prevention strategies centered on content exposure, digital literacy, and youth resilience.

Keywords: Youth radicalization; Political violence; Social media; Terror Management Theory; PLS-SEM

Introduction

The number of terrorist attacks worldwide is increasing, with a significant rise in the contribution of youth (Bourne, 2018; Comer & Kendall, 2007; D'Appollonia, 2010; Suyanto et al., 2019). As a result, both practitioners and academics have focused on the research of the various factors that cause radicalization and violent extremism among youth (Mansouri & Harrach, 2021; Neelamalar & Vivakaran, 2019; van de Weert & Eijkman, 2019). In the United States, several cases have shown that individuals aged 12 to 19 were recruited by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) under the guise of friendship and a sense of belonging (Baines et al., 2010). Similarly, in Australia, youth aged 15-18 have been caught up in various cases of planning terrorist actions, stabbings, and even murders (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010).

Academics and practitioners are currently collaborating to limit and prevent terrorism through intellectual rigor and insight-seeking efforts (Baines et al., 2010; Mahood & Rane, 2017; Pressman & Flockton, 2014). This effort aims to comprehensively understand the causes of terror threats, youth participation, and the possible humane solutions needed to address the challenges. In pursuit of this understanding, previous research explored popular tools for measuring radicalization, including *Violent Extremist Risk Assessment* (VERA) (Beardsley & Beech, 2013; Dean & Pettet, 2017), *Violent Extremism Evaluation Model* (VEEM) (Pressman, 2016), *Radical Belief System* (Costanza, 2015; Doosje et al., 2013), and *Sympathy for Violent Radicalisation and Terrorism* (SyfoR) (Frounfelker et al., 2019; Miconi et al., 2019; Rousseau et al., 2020; Rousseau, Hassan, et al., 2019; Rousseau, Oulhote, et al., 2019). Among the tools, SyfoR was selected due to the emphasis on the idea that individuals who are more sympathetic to extremist beliefs are more easily persuaded to commit violence (Miconi et al., 2019). This is in accordance with the characteristics of adolescents, who are often at the stage of searching for their identity (Neumann, 2013; Thomas, 2016).

This research aims to explore the determinants of sympathy for violent radicalization, examining the factors that lead youth to develop radical thoughts and engage in violent acts. While the existing body of literature has explored these factors through both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the findings remain mixed and inconclusive (Schmid, 2013; Shree & Gupta, 2019; Von Behr et al., 2013). More recent scholarship has also emphasized that youth radicalization is shaped by interacting online and offline processes, including group dynamics, misinformation environments, and platform-specific forms of exposure, rather than by social media use alone (Barracosa & Cherney, 2025; Booth et al., 2024; Ellenberg & Kruglanski, 2024; Larsson & Willander, 2025). Recent studies likewise caution against treating social media intensity as a stand-alone causal variable, instead emphasizing the importance of content type, network processes, and interpretive context (Barracosa & Cherney, 2025; Booth et al., 2024; Larsson & Willander, 2025). Research from various disciplines suggests that there is no specific path to radicalization (Doosje et al., 2013; Shalihin, 2017). Academic literature identifies multiple contributing factors that contribute to radicalization, categorizing the factors into macro, meso, micro, and individual (Antwi-Boateng, 2017; Doosje et al., 2013; Frounfelker et al., 2019). However, most research only focuses on one factor or several of these factors (Bénézech & Estano, 2016; Detry et al., 2019; Muyingi, 2013; Von Behr et al., 2013).

To address these questions, this study focuses on exposure to political violence, radical content consumption, and intensity of social media use. These variables were intentionally selected because previous research had reported mixed findings on factors such as poverty (Muyingi, 2013; Ruiz Estrada et al., 2019; Umar, 2010) and religious obedience (Hehanussa, 2017; Ratelle, 2015; Ryan, 2014). Given the characteristics of youth as digital natives, this research specifically considers social media as a mediator of exposure to political violence and consumption of radical content (Chatfield et al., 2015; Conway, 2017; D'Appollonia, 2010; Nickerson, 2019). Additionally, other variables were included to ensure relevance to the unique context of Indonesia.

Most previous research has focused on European and American countries, where Muslims are a minority (Braithwaite & Li, 2007; Brouard et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2007; Mishra, 2003; Qin et al., 2007; Sedgwick, 2010; Subbaraj & Sundan, 2014). The Indonesian case is important because radicalization unfolds within a Muslim-majority democratic setting characterized by complex state–Islam relations, a long post-1998 trajectory of

democratization and religious mobilization, and the evolving presence of organizations and networks associated with jihadist activism. In this context, questions of radicalization cannot be reduced to theology alone, but must be situated within changing institutional, social, and digital environments. The spread of violent extremism in Southeast Asia has also made Indonesia a significant site for studying how local grievances, organizational networks, and online narratives intersect (Lee, 2009; Syafiq, 2019; Tan, 2019). Following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, incidents such as Bali Bombing, Marriott Bombing, and Australian Embassy Bombing, described the presence of extremist activities. These events describe Indonesian dual role as a nation facing terrorist threats and as a country that has given birth to several well-known terrorist groups. Radical thinking has flourished in Indonesia, particularly after the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1998 (Shalihin, 2017; Umar, 2010), which has led to an increase in conservative behavior and religious intolerance. Research has shown that religious radicalization has grown in mosques and universities, as well as in high schools (Arifin, 2016).

This research contributes empirically and theoretically to the study of youth radicalization by focusing on Indonesian secondary-school students, a population less frequently examined in survey-based studies. The research was conducted in Palembang City, selected as a representation of a multicultural city where people from various religions, ethnicities, and economic, social, and cultural backgrounds live side by side.

Theoretical Framework

Youth Participation in Radicalization to Violence

Terrorism is one of the impacts of violent extremism as well as a cognitive and behavioral component (Brocker & Künkler, 2013; Doosje et al., 2013; Suyanto et al., 2019; van de Weert & Eijkman, 2019). In academic literature, radicalization is distinguished from violent extremism. Typically, radicalization is a belief, while violent extremism is the behavioral manifestation of those beliefs. The current paper focuses on beliefs and actions which is different from previous research (Morrison, 2017; Pressman & Flockton, 2014; Torok, 2016). This section develops the argument in three steps: first, it reviews why youth may be especially susceptible to radicalization; second, it discusses how digital environments shape exposure to extremist narratives; and third, it explains why exposure to violence may mediate the relationship between online content and sympathy for radicalism.

For the past two decades, research has explored the vulnerability of youth to becoming both subjects and objects of radicalization. One of the earliest studies conducted by Sageman (Sageman, 2004) showed that the lack of opportunities and prospects in certain social environments increased susceptibility to terrorist messages. In other words, marginalization and social discrimination are positively associated with radicalization. Furthermore, individuals alienated from their social environment – whether due to income disparities, religion, ideology, or ethnicity – are also at increased risk of radicalization.

Various academics have proposed several explanations for youth radicalization, identifying a range of individual, environmental, and social risk factors that make youth vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism (Ratelle, 2015; Rousseau, Hassan, et al., 2019; Sawalha, 2017; Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). Naturally, youth are at a psychologically vulnerable stage of life and have personal uncertainty regarding identity formation. From an environmental perspective, family dynamics and relationships with peer groups can play a significant role in promoting extremist thoughts and actions (Mansouri & Harrach, 2021). On a social level, factors such as group polarization and social exclusion have been found to influence youth radicalization and violent extremism (D'Appollonia, 2010; Rousseau, Oulhote, et al., 2019). For instance, research on Muslim youth in the UK (United Kingdom) found that radicalization was caused by identity conflict, cultural integration, and intergenerational conflict (Rushchenko, 2019; Von Behr et al., 2013). Meanwhile, research conducted in the Netherlands identified poverty and social disadvantages including unemployment, unstable family environments, and low educational levels as contributing factors to radicalization, offering a different perspective from previous research (Doosje et al., 2013).

Another view on youth radicalization is born from the “bunch of guys” theory, which produces the understanding that radicalization comes from close relationships in a group (Cottee, 2011). Empirically, the theory suggests that family relationships, shared environments, and common activities – such as attending the same school, praying at the same mosque, or even exercising together – can explain why youth radicalization occurs. Friendship networks also play a crucial role, as these social circles can expose individuals to radical ideology. In these groups, youth share personal concerns, which can evolve into collective complaints. Additionally, youth may face influential adults they admire and respect, who can act as entry points for radical ideas to enter the youth.

Another model relevant to this question, “Why do youth deradicalize?” is the trajectory model (Pressman, 2016). According to this model, youth become radicalized due to a sense of collective injustice and a feeling of togetherness that they experience, which are then intensified and strengthened, providing the motivation and means to shape their actions. These grievances and feelings of injustice are technically triggered by personal losses, such as the death of family members, and by consuming content on social media about individuals who experience discrimination.

Social media has been suggested as a contributing factor to youth susceptibility to radicalization (Diaz et al., 2016; Mellen, 2012; Torok, 2011). Reports show that extremist movements carried out by youth often occur on social media and other virtual platforms. For example, ISIS recruits through Skype and other social media platforms. However, some criticisms of these results are that the presence of youth on social media is not the cause of radicalization. Instead, social media and other virtual platforms are considered substitutes for traditional forms of communication (Conway, 2017; Correa & Sureka, 2013). In other words, radicalization is not dependent on social media but is carried out through these platforms. Despite this argument, the contribution of social media cannot be separated because it facilitates the development of relationships and social ties between users, which can then influence attitudes and behavior.

Criminology theory offers valuable perspectives for understanding youth radicalization, particularly through dimensions, such as social control and social learning (Silke, 2014). Social control theory explains how the weakening of social ties can serve as an entry point for extremist ideologies, while social learning theory describes the process of radicalization into violent extremism due to the influence of social ties (Pels & de Ruyter, 2012). Youth are specifically vulnerable to radicalization because the age group navigates the formation of social identity, cognitive function, and social ties. During this developmental phase, they are both shaping personal identities and also susceptible to external influences that can steer the youth toward extremist beliefs and actions. In this study, exposure to political violence refers to exposure to violence that is interpreted by respondents through collective religious or state-related conflict frames, particularly inter-religious violence and violence involving Muslims and the government. The term is used analytically to capture exposure to violence perceived as connected to collective power, intergroup conflict, or state-society contestation, rather than to ordinary interpersonal violence.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that youth radicalization is unlikely to result from a single factor. Rather, it is better understood as a process in which developmental vulnerability, mediated communication, and exposure to threat interact. This study therefore does not treat social media use as inherently radicalizing, but asks whether specific forms of content exposure become consequential when combined with exposure to violence.

Research Hypothesis Development

Building on media socialization theory and Terror Management Theory (TMT), this study proposes that radical content consumption and patterns of social media use may shape sympathy for radicalism directly and indirectly through exposure to political violence. TMT argues that reminders of mortality can intensify attachment to worldviews that provide certainty, meaning, and symbolic protection. In radicalization research, this perspective is relevant because exposure to threatening or violent events may heighten anxiety, strengthen in-group identification, and increase receptiveness to narratives that justify hostility toward out-groups or the state (Brouard et al., 2018; Franks & Franks, 2006; Tishchenkova et al., 2018). Another empirical evidence supporting this theory includes a research in Kenya, where people, including youth, witnessed various types of violence in the name of religion (Rink & Sharma, 2018). Exposure to this type of violence can spur radicalization by increasing hatred toward groups outside their religion. Social media further worsens this issue by facilitating the dissemination of politically violent content, making it easily searchable and shareable (Baines et al., 2010; Shortland, 2016; Von Behr et al., 2013).

Given that youth are the age group most commonly found to adopt and use social media, this research considers exposure to extremist content as a key variable. To explain this phenomenon, media socialization theory (Ludot et al., 2016; Shortland, 2016) provides a useful framework. Evidence from various research on jihadist content demonstrates the concept of moral disengagement, with individuals who actively consume extremist content gradually disengaging from their morals and tend to become radicalized (Conway, 2017). Social media further amplifies this process by facilitating easier access to and consumption of extremist content. Although qualitative research suggests that social media does not directly cause radicalization, it serves as a powerful tool for spreading radical material. Building on these results, the following hypotheses were proposed.

H1: Consumption of radical content affects exposure to political violence

H2: Intensity of social media use affects exposure to political violence

H3: Consumption of radical content affects sympathy for radicalism

H4: Intensity of social media use affects sympathy for radicalism

H5: Exposure to political violence affects sympathy for radicalization

H6: Exposure to political violence mediates the relationship between consumption of radical content and sympathy for radicalism.

H7: Exposure to political violence mediates the relationship between intensity of social media use and sympathy for radicalism.

Research Method

This current research used an associative quantitative approach to test a series of hypotheses formulated from various and relevant theories. In this context, the phenomenon being studied could be classified, observed, and measured (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The primary objective was to identify the determinants of sympathy for radicalism, operationalized here as attitudinal support for violent or extremist action justified in religious terms. In this article, the focus is not religiosity in general, religious conservatism, or ordinary piety, but rather sympathy for violence-accepting extremist positions framed through religious narratives. To achieve this, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used. This approach was in line with the objectives, which was to predict the theory/concept development model (Hair et al., 2014). Following this discussion, PLS-SEM was applied to determine factors influencing sympathy for violent radicalization.

Palembang City was selected as a theoretically useful urban field site rather than as a claim to represent Indonesia as a whole. As a provincial capital with ethnic and religious diversity, Palembang provides an appropriate setting for examining how online exposure and perceived violence relate to sympathy for radicalism among students. Senior High School and vocational students were selected as part of youth in a transition period to find various personal identities and join certain groups. To further reflect the plurality, State Senior High Schools or Vocational Schools were selected. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021), the study population comprised students enrolled in 29 public senior high schools and vocational schools in Palembang. Using the Slovin formula with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the minimum target sample was calculated at 172 respondents from the population.

Questionnaires were distributed to eligible students in the selected schools, and 120 usable responses were returned. The analysis therefore reports findings from the achieved sample of 120 respondents.

The dependent variable was sympathy for radicalism (Oruc & Obradovic, 2020). This operationalization was used because directly measuring participation in violent extremist behavior would be ethically and practically difficult. In more detail, sympathy for violent protest was measured by assessing respondent's level of agreement with using violence as a means to achieve religious goals. Meanwhile, sympathy for extremist ideology captured respondents' agreement with views considered extreme by the majority group and acceptance of the right to share their ideology. Finally, support for Islamic fighters described whether the respondent agreed to support Islamic fighters (Miconi et al., 2019; Rousseau, Hassan, et al., 2019). A 1-7 Likert scale was applied for these measurements, with higher scores indicating greater support for radicalization.

Exposure to political violence was assessed by whether respondents had witnessed forms of violence framed as collective religious or state-related conflict, namely inter-religious violence and violence between Muslims and the government (Frounfelker et al., 2019). Both were binary questions with yes and no answer choices. For this variable, binary answer choices were also used to determine whether respondents had read/seen content related to (1) an Islamic state, (2) beheading videos, (3) jihadist videos, (4) ISIS, or (5) instructions on how to make bombs (Weimann, 2016). The intensity of social media use was measured through several questions regarding the frequency and duration of social media activity (Shree & Gupta, 2019). Following this discussion, a scale of 1-5 was applied to quantify this variable.

Validity and reliability were assessed through outer-model evaluation. These tests included both convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2012). Convergent validity test was designed to ensure that the size of a construct was highly correlated. A construct was considered to have passed the convergent validity test if its outer loading was > 0.70 (Hair et al., 2014). Meanwhile, discriminant validity tests aimed to confirm that indicators of different constructs had no high correlations (Hair et al., 2012). A construct passed the discriminant validity test if the outer loading value of the indicator was greater than cross-loading. A reliability test was also conducted to verify the consistency of measurements. These tests confirmed that the reliability of the composite reliability was $>$

0.70 and Cronbach's alpha value was > 0.60. In general, the rules of thumb were summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Parameters

Test	Parameter	Rule of Thumb	Reference
Convergent Validity	Outerloadings	>07.0	(Hair et al., 2014)
Discriminant Validity	Crossloading	Outer loadings> cross-loading	(Hair et al., 2012)
Reliability	Composite reliability	>0.70	(Hair et al., 2014)
	Cronbach's alpha	>0.60	(Hair et al., 2012)

Source: Author's processing (2025)

The two stages used for PLS-SEM were the outer and inner model evaluation. In the previous section, the outer model was explained to evaluate the construct and indicators through validity and reliability tests. Meanwhile, the inner model evaluation was conducted to test the research hypothesis. The inner model evaluation was carried out to determine two aspects, namely (1) the value of the coefficient of determination (R²), which represented the square of the multi-correlation between endogenous and exogenous construct. (2) The path coefficient, which indicated the strength and direction of the relationship between construct. The R² value explained the strength of a construct in the research model. The rules of thumb for interpreting the result were as follows:

1. Based on the R² value, a model was categorized as strong, moderate, and or weak if R² value exceeded 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 respectively (Jogiyanto & Abdillah, 2011).
2. The path coefficient (b) was interpreted such that values closer to +1 indicated a strong positive relationship, while values closer to -1 represented a strong negative (Hair et al., 2014).
3. The p-value was used to assess significance, with a threshold of <0.05 indicating a significant relationship, while a p-value >0.05 denoted a non-significant relationship (Hair et al., 2014).

Results and Discussion

Respondents' Demographics

Respondents' demographic data were collected and analyzed, as shown in Table 3. In total, there were 120 respondents, consisting of 66 females (55%) and 54 males (45%). This distribution showed a relatively balanced representation between females and males in the research sample. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the 15-17 years age group, comprising 111 people or 92.5% of the total sample. The 12-14 years age group was represented by 5 respondents, or around 4.17%. Meanwhile, the 18-19 years age group had 4 respondents, making up 3.33% of the sample. These results showed that the research sample was predominantly composed of respondents in the late teenage age group (15-17 years), as displayed in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Respondents' Demographics

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	66	55%
Male	54	45%
Age		
12-14	5	4.17%
15-17	111	92.5%
18-19	4	3.33%

Source: Author's processing (2025)

Convergent validity in this research was tested to ensure that the indicators measuring a particular construct had a high correlation and were in line with respective constructs. Based on the analysis in Table 2, the indicators for each construct showed varying outcomes, with several indicators exhibiting high correlation values with the construct being measured. The results of this convergent validity test supported the idea that most indicators had a strong correlation with the construct, although some variations in correlation values were observed between indicators. Additionally, the results provided confidence that the measurement of the constructs could be relied upon for further analysis.

The indicators in Radical Content Consumption (RCC) construct showed strong outer loading values, such as RCC1 (0.889), RCC2 (0.902), and RCC3 (0.898). This implied that the indicators consistently reflected RCC construct. Similarly, the Intensity of Social Media Use

(IoSMU) construct demonstrated high correlations, with IoSMU1 (0.965) and IoSMU2 (0.958), indicating good convergent validity. Meanwhile, the indicators in Exposure to Political Violence (ETPV) construct, including ETPV1 (0.955) and ETPV2 (0.946), showed very strong convergent validity. For the Sympathy for Radicalism (SfR), the outer loading value also showed a high correlation, specifically in SfR1 (0.837) and SfR2 (0.870). However, a few indicators in other constructs, such as RCC4 (0.841) and RCC5 (0.849), indicated slightly lower correlations but still maintained good convergent validity.

Table 3. Convergent Validity

Indicator	Exposure to Political Violence	Intensity of Social Media Use	Radical Content Consumption	Sympathy for Radicalism
RCC1	0.680	0.596	0.889	0.579
RCC2	0.699	0.624	0.902	0.588
RCC3	0.583	0.718	0.898	0.521
RCC4	0.601	0.870	0.841	0.547
RCC5	0.694	0.834	0.849	0.597
IoSMU1	0.724	0.965	0.825	0.606
IoSMU2	0.659	0.958	0.767	0.555
ETPV1	0.955	0.734	0.775	0.630
ETPV2	0.946	0.632	0.640	0.645
SfR1	0.661	0.690	0.643	0.837
SfR2	0.505	0.362	0.469	0.870
SfR3	0.462	0.378	0.462	0.782

Source: Author's processing (2025)

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity aimed to ensure that the constructs being measured were different from each other. This implied that indicators for a particular construct did not show a high correlation with other constructs. Based on the results in Table 3, discriminant validity was evaluated using Fornell-Larcker Criterion value. In this context, the diagonal value (in bold) represented the root of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct, and the values outside the diagonal indicated a correlation between constructs. These results generally supported the idea that each construct had good discriminant validity, with its indicators showing stronger correlations. Typically, the strong discriminant validity confirmed that each construct had unique measurements and did not overlap conceptually.

In ETPV construct, AVE root value of 0.950 was higher than its correlation with other

constructs, such as IoSMU (0.721), RCC (0.748), and SfR (0.670). This showed that ETPV had good discriminant validity. Similarly, IoSMU had AVE root value of 0.962, which was greater than the correlation with ETPV (0.721), RCC (0.829), and SfR (0.605). It was concluded that IoSMU could be effectively distinguished from other constructs. In the case of RCC, AVE root value was 0.876, which exceeded the correlation with ETPV (0.748), IoSMU (0.829), and SfR (0.649). This outcome confirmed that RCC had adequate discriminant validity. Lastly, SfR showed AVE root value of 0.831, which was greater than the correlation with ETPV (0.670), IoSMU (0.605), and RCC (0.649). This signified that SfR could be distinguished from other constructs.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	Exposure to Political Violence	to Intensity of Social Media Use	of Radical Content Consumption	Sympathy for Radicalism
Exposure to Political Violence	0.950			
Intensity of Social Media Use	0.721	0.962		
Radical Content Consumption	0.748	0.829	0.876	
Sympathy for Radicalism	0.670	0.605	0.649	0.831

Source: Author’s processing (2025)

Reliability

Reliability was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability (CR), and AVE. The results in Table 4 showed that all constructs in the model had a good level of reliability, meeting the standard criteria for reliable measurement. In ETPV construct, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.893 and CR was 0.949, both exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70. Furthermore, AVE value of 0.903 indicated that more than 90% of the variance explained by the indicator was related to its construct, ensuring very high internal consistency. IoSMU also showed excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.919, rho_A of 0.924, and CR of 0.961. AVE value of 0.925 further confirmed that this construct had very high consistency in reflecting the indicators.

In RCC, Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.924 and CR was 0.943, both denoting high reliability. AVE value of 0.768 also met the minimum criteria of 0.50, indicating that most of the indicator variance was explained by the construct being measured. The last construct, SfR, had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.780, signifying adequate reliability. Following this discussion, CR value of 0.870 and AVE of 0.690 also indicated that the construct had good internal consistency to support further analysis. The reliability results ensured that the constructs in the model had an adequate level of reliability, allowing for consistent and reliable measurement to answer the research objectives. This outcome provided a strong basis for supporting further interpretation of the results.

Table 5. Reliability

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Extracted (AVE)	Variance
Exposure to Political Violence	0.893	0.898	0.949	0.903	
Intensity of Social Media Use	0.919	0.924	0.961	0.925	
Radical Content Consumption	0.924	0.926	0.943	0.768	
Sympathy for Radicalism	0.780	0.806	0.870	0.690	

Source: Author's processing (2025)

The results of hypothesis test showed the dynamics of the relationship between consumption of radical content, intensity of social media use, exposure to political violence, and sympathy for radicalism. It was found that the consumption of radical content significantly influenced exposure to political violence. This suggested that access to extremist content increased exposure to political violent narratives. Meanwhile, the intensity of social media use did not have a significant effect on exposure to political violence, indicating that this digital medium functioned more as a technical distribution tool than a direct causal factor in facilitating radicalization.

The direct relationship between consumption of radical content and sympathy for radicalism was found to be insignificant. This suggested that consumption of radical content might require intermediary factors, such as exposure to political violence, to effectively influence an individual's sympathy for radical ideologies. On the other hand, exposure to

political violence showed a significant direct relationship with sympathy for radicalism. These results showed that experiences with violence could strengthen the sense of threat to other groups, eventually increasing support for radical narratives.

The indirect effect between the consumption of radical content and sympathy for radicalism through exposure to political violence also showed significance. This supported the hypothesis that the process of radicalization was complex and comprised of strengthening the relationship between content consumption and radical attitudes. However, the intensity of social media use did not show a significant indirect effect on sympathy for radicalism through exposure to political violence. This result showed that the role of social media in radicalization was highly dependent on the quality and type of content accessed, rather than just the intensity of use.

This research described the importance of mediation pathways, particularly through exposure to political violence, in explaining the relationship between radical content consumption and sympathy for radicalism. Despite being a factor supporting radicalization, the intensity of social media use did not have a significant direct or indirect effect. These findings imply that radicalization prevention efforts should focus on reducing access to radical content and managing exposure to political violence, while still considering the individual's social and cognitive context.

Table 6. Research Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	T Score	P Values	Conclusion
RCC → ETPV	0.480	-	2.137	0.033	Significant
IoSMU → ETPV	0.323	-	1.236	0.217	Not Significant
RCC → Sfr	0.279	-	1.733	0.084	Not Significant
IoSMU → Sfr	0.084	-	0.432	0.666	Not Significant
ETPV → Sfr	0.401	-	3.135	0.002	Significant
RCC → ETPV → Sfr	-	0.193	2.064	0.040	Significant
IoSMU → ETPV → Sfr	-	0.129	0.799	0.425	Not Significant

Source: Author's processing (2025)

Explanation:

- RCC: Radical Content Consumption
- IoSMU: Intensity of Social Media Use
- ETPV: Exposure to Political Violence
- SfR: Sympathy for Radicalism

Discussion

Based on the results of this research, there was an influence between consumption of radical content, intensity of social media use, exposure to political violence, and sympathy for violent radicalization among youth. The first finding showed that consumption of radical content significantly influenced exposure to political violence ($\beta = 0.480$, $p = 0.033$). This result supported previous research, indicating that exposure to radical content catalyzes an individual's engagement with violent narratives, thereby increasing emotional connection to radical ideology (Akram & Nasar, 2023; Kadivar, 2017; Shree & Gupta, 2019). Theoretically, this finding supports the argument that content exposure matters less as a direct attitudinal trigger than as a mechanism that normalizes violent frames and makes political violence cognitively available to respondents. In the context of youth, consumption of radical content both fulfilled cognitive needs and also built a sense of collective identity, which played an important role in radicalization process (Karpova et al., 2020). However, the intensity of social media use did not show a significant effect on exposure to political violence ($\beta = 0.323$, $p = 0.217$). Although social media provided broad access to a variety of content, these results showed that its use did not directly increase exposure to violent narratives. This supported the view that social media functions more as a technical distribution platform than as a direct causal factor in radicalization (Oruc & Obradovic, 2020; Reeves & Crowther, 2019). Therefore, interventions focusing only on the duration or intensity of social media use, without considering the content consumed, could be less effective.

Direct relationship between the consumption of radical content and sympathy for radicalism was also not significant ($\beta = 0.279$, $p = 0.084$). This suggested that sympathy for radicalism required a mediating process through exposure to political violence in order to influence the outcome. Read through Terror Management Theory, this pattern suggests that exposure to violence may strengthen the salience of threat and thereby increase receptiveness to exclusionary or violence-accepting narratives. In line with terror

management theory, experiences with political violence tended to strengthen perceptions of existential threat and encouraged individuals to pursue refuge in certain ideological groups. This phenomenon would increase sympathy for radical narratives (Ahmad, 2016; van de Weert & Eijkman, 2019), as evident from the significant relationship between exposure to political violence and sympathy for radicalism ($\beta = 0.401$, $p = 0.002$).

The consumption of radical content had a significant indirect effect on sympathy for radicalism with the exposure to political violence as a mediating factor (Indirect Effect $\beta = 0.193$, $p = 0.040$). This result confirmed that the effect of consuming radical content on sympathy for radicalism was not linear, and required an intermediary mechanism to strengthen the effect. In that sense, the results are more consistent with a mediated process model than with a simple media-effects model. Meanwhile, the intensity of social media use did not show a significant indirect effect on sympathy for radicalism (Indirect Effect $\beta = 0.129$, $p = 0.425$). This was in line with previous literature that the role of social media in the radicalization process was more facilitative than determinative (Shree & Gupta, 2019).

The results described the complexity of radicalization process, which included a dynamic interaction between cognitive, social, and technological factors. Therefore, a policy approach focusing on the technical regulation of social media, without considering the content and experiences of political violence, would not necessarily have a significant impact. Additional comprehensive intervention strategies would be required to reduce exposure to political violence, improve digital literacy, and strengthen social resilience to radical narratives. This outcome further contributed theoretically by stating the importance of mediation pathways in understanding the determinants of sympathy for radicalism and opened opportunities for further research in a broader context.

Conclusion

This study has argued that youth radicalization is better understood as a mediated process than as a direct effect of social media use alone. The findings show that radical content consumption is associated with exposure to political violence, and that exposure to political violence is in turn significantly associated with greater sympathy for radicalism. By contrast, the intensity of social media use does not have a significant direct or indirect relationship with sympathy for radicalism. These results suggest that what matters is not

simply how often young people use social media, but the kind of content they encounter and how that content is interpreted through experiences of threat and violence.

This study has also shown that exposure to political violence plays an important mediating role in linking radical content consumption to sympathy for radicalism. In this sense, the findings support a more context-sensitive understanding of radicalization, in which online exposure becomes consequential when it is connected to violent narratives, collective insecurity, and threat perception. Rather than supporting a simple media-effects explanation, the results point to a more complex process shaped by the interaction between mediated content and social experience. The study therefore contributes empirical evidence from Indonesian secondary-school students while also reinforcing the importance of mediation pathways in radicalization research.

These findings carry practical implications for prevention strategies. Efforts to reduce youth vulnerability to radicalization should focus less on the sheer intensity of social media use and more on limiting exposure to radical content, strengthening media literacy, and addressing how young people interpret violence and collective conflict. Prevention strategies should therefore combine content awareness with broader efforts to build social resilience against exclusionary and violence-accepting narratives.

At the same time, this study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a relatively small sample drawn from one urban setting, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design also does not allow strong causal claims or the observation of change over time. Future research should therefore use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and closer examination of family, peer, school, and community influences in order to deepen understanding of how mediated exposure and threat perception shape sympathy for radicalism among youth.

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