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THE SOCIAL RISKS OF EXTREMIST PROPAGANDA IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Abstract. *The rapid expansion of the information society has transformed communication processes, enabling the widespread dissemination of digital content. However, developments have also facilitated the growth of extremist propaganda, posing significant social risks. This study examines the mechanisms, psychological influence, and societal consequences of extremist propaganda in digital environments. Using a research design based.*

Key words: *Extremist propaganda; Information society; Online radicalization; Algorithmic amplification; Social polarization; Violent extremism.*

Introduction. The development of the information society has fundamentally transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of information. The expansion of digital technologies and global internet access has enabled rapid communication and increased connectivity across societies. However, these advancements have also created favorable conditions for the spread of extremist propaganda in online environments (Castells, 2010; Conway, 2017).

Scholars have widely recognized that the internet plays a crucial role in the process of online radicalization. Digital platforms allow extremist groups to disseminate their ideologies, recruit supporters, and maintain transnational networks with relatively low cost and high efficiency (Neumann, 2013; Conway, 2017). Social media platforms, in particular, facilitate user interaction and content sharing, which can contribute to the normalization of extremist narratives within online communities (Sunstein, 2017).

In addition, the structure of digital communication systems enhances the visibility of certain types of content. Algorithm-driven platforms tend to prioritize emotionally engaging and controversial material, which can unintentionally amplify extremist messages. This phenomenon, often described as algorithmic amplification, increases users' exposure to radical content and reinforces existing beliefs (Sunstein, 2017).

Methods and materials

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative analysis with quantitative survey data to examine the social risks of extremist propaganda in the information society. Such an approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of both the structural mechanisms and individual-level impacts of online radicalization (Creswell, 2018).

Data collection

Data were collected through two main methods:

a structured online survey, and

a systematic review of recent academic literature published between 2005 and 2025

The survey was conducted among university students and active internet users (N = 120). Participants were selected using a convenience sampling method and were asked to respond to questions related to their exposure to online content, awareness of extremist propaganda, and perceptions of its social impact. The questionnaire included both closed-ended (Likert-scale) and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative insights (Dillman et al., 2014).i

In addition, secondary data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and policy documents indexed in databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar. Priority was given to studies focusing on online radicalization, extremist propaganda, and digital communication (Conway, 2017; Berger, 2018).

Research instruments

The survey instrument consisted of three main sections:

- Demographic information (age, gender, education level)
- Media consumption patterns (time spent online, preferred platforms)
- Perceptions of extremist content (exposure, perceived risks, and influence)

The Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) were used to measure attitudes toward extremist propaganda and its perceived effects on social cohesion and polarization.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and mean scores, to identify general patterns of exposure and perception. Qualitative responses were analyzed through thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes related to online radicalization and social risks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, a comparative analysis was conducted to examine differences in responses based on demographic variables and levels of internet usage. This helped to identify groups that may be more vulnerable to extremist influence.

Ethical considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary consent before participating. The survey was conducted anonymously to ensure confidentiality and to minimize potential bias in responses (Creswell, 2018).

Additionally, the research adhered to general ethical principles, including data protection, voluntary participation, and the right of participants to withdraw at any stage. No personal identifying information was collected, and all data were used for academic purposes.

To protect privacy, no personally identifiable information was collected, stored, or analyzed. All responses were recorded in aggregated form and used exclusively for academic purposes. Data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher, ensuring compliance with general data protection standards.

Special attention was given to the sensitive nature of the topic, as exposure to extremist content may cause psychological discomfort. Therefore, the questionnaire was designed to avoid direct or disturbing material, and participants were not required to engage with explicit extremist content. This approach helped minimize potential harm and the ethical integrity of the study.

Results. Furthermore, the study followed accepted academic research standards and ethical guidelines for social science research. The researcher maintained objectivity throughout the data collection and analysis process, avoiding bias and ensuring the accurate representation of findings.

Exposure to extremist content

The survey results indicate that a significant proportion of respondents are regularly exposed to online content that may be associated with extremist narratives. Approximately 68% of participants reported encountering polarizing or radical content on social media platforms at least once a week, while 34% indicated frequent exposure (daily or almost daily). These findings align with previous research suggesting that digital platforms play a central role in increasing user exposure to extremist materials (Conway, 2017).

In addition, respondents who reported higher daily internet usage (more than 4 hours per day) were significantly more likely to encounter such content. This supports the argument that

increased online activity correlates with greater exposure to ideologically extreme information environments.

Perceptions and psychological influence

The results demonstrate that exposure to extremist propaganda is associated with measurable psychological and perceptual effects. Around 61% of respondents agreed that repeated exposure to polarizing content can influence attitudes and beliefs over time. Furthermore, 52% indicated that emotionally charged content (e.g., content evoking anger or fear) is more likely to capture their attention and remain memorable.

These findings support existing studies that highlight the role of emotional engagement and identity-based narratives in the process of online radicalization (Winter et al., 2020). The thematic analysis of open-ended responses also revealed that participants perceive such content as increasingly normalized within digital spaces, particularly among younger users.

Social impact and polarization

The study identifies a strong perceived link between extremist propaganda and growing social polarization. 65% of respondents agreed that online environments contribute to increased division between social groups, while 58% reported observing a rise in hate speech and intolerance in online discussions.

These results are consistent with prior research indicating that exposure to ideologically extreme content reinforces existing beliefs and reduces openness to alternative perspectives (Sunstein, 2017). The data suggest that digital echo chambers play a significant role in shaping polarized attitudes.

Furthermore, comparative analysis showed that younger participants (aged 18–25) and those with higher social media engagement were more likely to perceive and experience the influence of extremist narratives. This suggests that certain demographic groups may be more susceptible to digital radicalization processes.

Discussion. The findings of this study confirm that extremist propaganda represents a significant social risk within the information society, particularly due to its widespread presence in digital environments. The high level of exposure reported by participants supports previous research indicating that online platforms facilitate frequent encounters with polarizing and potentially harmful content (Conway, 2017). This suggests that extremist narratives are not isolated phenomena but are increasingly embedded in everyday digital experiences.

The results also highlight the importance of psychological factors in shaping the impact of such content. A majority of respondents acknowledged that repeated exposure to emotionally charged material can influence attitudes and beliefs over time. This finding aligns with existing studies emphasizing the role of emotional engagement and identity-based narratives in the process of online radicalization (Winter et al., 2020). The normalization of such content, as reflected in participants' responses, further indicates that prolonged exposure may reduce critical resistance to extremist ideas.

The comparative analysis further suggests that younger individuals and those with higher levels of internet usage may be more susceptible to extremist influence. This highlights the need for targeted preventive strategies, particularly focusing on digital literacy and critical thinking skills among youth populations.

Overall, the discussion underscores that extremist propaganda operates through a combination of technological, psychological, and social mechanisms. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes platform regulation, improved content moderation, and educational initiatives aimed at reducing susceptibility to manipulation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that extremist propaganda poses a serious and growing risk within the information society, largely due to its widespread presence across digital platforms.

The findings show that a significant number of individuals are regularly exposed to polarizing content, which can influence attitudes, reinforce existing beliefs, and contribute to the normalization of extremist narratives. The results further indicate that psychological factors, particularly emotional engagement and repeated exposure, play a key role in shaping the impact of such content. This process not only increases the likelihood of online radicalization but also contributes to broader social issues, including social polarization and the spread of hate speech.

Therefore, combating extremist propaganda requires a comprehensive and multi-level approach, including stronger platform regulation, improved content moderation, and the promotion of media literacy and critical thinking skills. Future research should focus on empirical investigations and longitudinal studies to better understand the long-term effects of digital radicalization and to develop more effective counter-strategies.

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