



Perceived Grievances and Social Media Influence as predictors of Political Radicalization among Youth

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ABSTRACT

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The current study aims to unfold the multifaceted nature of political radicalization. It strives to develop the quantitative model of political radicalization in realm of sociology. The objectives of the study were; to find out the level of perceived and social media influence among youth, to seek out the role of perceived grievances and social media influence as predictors of political radicalization within the youth. It employed the quantitative research design and collected data from 335 undergraduate students through stratified sampling. The universe of the study were three universities of Punjab Pakistan; University of the Punjab Lahore, Government College University Faisalabad, and the PMAS-Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi. The study concluded that the perceived grievances has substantial impact along with the increased social support among the university youth. Social media influence has a lesser but positive significant association with political radicalization respectively. The study has a novel contribution to bridging the gaps through local knowledge in the sphere of policy and practices by offering nuanced, multidimensional quantitative framework to understand political radicalization. The study suggests policy interventions to eradicate the impact of digital radicalization and foster digital literacy.

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1.0 Introduction

Radicalization is a deeply embedded sociopolitical process driven by ideological contestations, structural inequities, perceived grievances, and the prevalence of discourses in the realm of digital platforms. It spurs from economic disenfranchisement, political repression and failure of trust in the institutions. Eventually, the radicalization does not yield the violence, but fosters conflict, hatred, ideological rigidity, and the polarization fueled by the digital space. The word radical has been derived from the word radix (root), and radicalization literally refers to process of “going back to the roots”. Generally, political radicalization refers to the process through which individuals or groups adopt extreme political ideologies, beliefs, or actions (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020).

There is a varying range of definitional frameworks of radicalization depending time and space. The Prevent Strategy of the UK Government defines radicalization as a process that supports various shapes of extremism that end in the terrorism. Additionally, it takes into account radicalization violation of basic values of Britain, such as democracy, tolerance for diverse beliefs, individual freedom, and rule of law. While, Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) illustrates racialization as a process whereby individuals endorse practices of violent or undemocratic channels, including terrorism to acquire ideological or political goals (Hemmingsen, 2015). Furthermore, The General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) of Netherlands, identifies the radicalization as the support or active pursuit of deep rooted alternations in society that jeopardize its legal structure through undemocratic means (Gruber, 2023). On the contrary, the Norwegian government defines radicalization and violent extremism by referring farmer to a process that aims to achieve religious, ideological, and political goals by employing violence. It is highlighted by unilateral comprehension of reality where individuals do not accept the other perspectives. While, it articulates extremism as a set of activities that are based on violence to achieve the ideological, political, and religious goals by individuals or groups (Ellefsen, 2021). Correspondingly, US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines radicalization as the process of aligning with the extremist belief system encompassing the support, use, or facilitating the violence as a means to impact social change. Additionally, the Swedish Security Service considers radicalization as a process that takes the religious or ideological activism to initiate radical change within society. It further explains the process that aims to achieve political goals through advocating and using violence by the individual or group (Marklund, 2022). Nevertheless, radicalization has not been understood and defined unanimously along with its confusion with the extremism in the existing stream of academia and policy-making.

(Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012) Unfolds the policy and academic texts to comprehend the multifaceted aspects of radicalization that lead to terrorism. It also takes into account the cultural and exclusion perspective that fosters the discourses on radicalization that have emerged in the last two decades. Correspondingly, these two prominent but contesting discourses of radicalization articulate varying opinions; one is that radicalization is the outcome of an identity crisis and cultural differences by emphasizing that Islamic culture has contrary values to the Western world which cultivates the roots of terrorism. It highlights that terrorism is not the

product of injustice rather it emerges as a process of cultural incompatibility. Conversely, the exclusion perspective does not ponder over the culture and it emphasizes the socioeconomic aspects like residential segregation, social marginalization and unemployment that shape the roots of radicalization or terrorism (Pfundmair et al., 2024). Somehow, individuals who dwell in socially alienated environments are more prone to terrorism. Consequently, social exclusion appears as a primary driver of radicalization rather than culture or identity crisis. This perspective aligns with the Durkheimian sociology and the social integration perspective as disintegration in social relationships leads towards deviant acts, including radicalization. These two prevailing perspectives have led to the ambiguity within the academic texts and the policy discussions simultaneously. Meanwhile, this ambiguity is evident in counterterrorism policies as well, exclusion approaches exert stress on improving the poor conditions of marginalized populations. While culturally driven approaches focus on rectifying the behavior of populations as they see them as inherently suspect. On the other hand, from a policy lens and rationale radicalization has become part and parcel of counterterrorism strategies formulated by different governments (Cottee, 2024). However, such strategies are derived from the four-phase model of FBI that elucidates the pre radicalization to violent actions via linear advancement. The author notes that such models have critical problems as they lend themselves to the bureaucratic solutions that place risk over comprehending the root causes of radicalization. These models have a core concentration over interventions and identification, they ignore the more in-depth structural problems like social exclusion as core cause of radicalization or terrorism. Similarly, by the framework of the culturalist perspective, people hailing from the Muslim population come under suspicion and surveillance. It has also reinforced the sentiments of exclusion by alienating them from mainstream fabric of society. Somehow, they are burdened to participate in counterterrorism programs to prove their loyalty to the state and society. It creates the unfair expectations from Muslims that become a source of strain on the state in the long run of their relationship (Cuccu & Bonci, 2024).

Socioeconomic disparities have been driving forces of radicalization and extremism in Pakistan. (Rathore & Basit, 2010) remark that economic inequality, poverty, and political marginalization are fertile to shape the radical ideologies, especially in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). It has also been endorsed by (Hashmi & Adnan, 2024) who reflect that lack of education and socioeconomic inequalities sow the seeds of intolerance and extremism in less developed areas. However, (Sajjad et al., 2017) contend that education is a double edged sword in either mitigating or propagating the extremist beliefs. The incorporation of peace-centric and civic engagement curriculum in higher education can transform students' attitudes to foster tolerance and resilience (Handajani, 2024).

The intersection of technology and radicalization has posed challenges to the peace and order of contemporary societies, but the mainstream discourses fail to comprehend the complexity of this association (Gani et al., 2024). However, social media platforms are considered as catalysts of radicalization by disseminating radical content, extremist ideologies and giving rise to grievances. likewise, social networking sites (SNS) have epitomized in the past

few years in terms of radicalization, especially concerning terrorism (Lara-cabrera et al., 2020). They also operate as platforms for ideological exchanges, recruitment tools and source of psychological warfare and enable the susceptible individuals to attach with the radicalized groups. The triggering factors that involve individuals with the radicalization process on SNS are emotional attachment, socioeconomic conditions, and psychological inclination towards extremist ideologies (Barhamgi et al., 2024). The radical behavior is witnessed on social media through the It comprises of the frustration that is often experienced and exhibited by radicalized people through aggressive or negative gestures, comments and posts. (Williams & Tzani, 2024) Reported that the radicalization process is facilitated and accelerated through internet owing to communication. The role of language plays a vital role in facilitating the interaction in cyberspaces in the context of extremism. The streams of literature evolve into the five different linguistic behaviors in terms of algorithm, hate, conflict, positive, and recruitment respectively (Kuncoro & Hasanah, 2024). There is a gradual process across social media in which individuals are transformed from passive observers to the active radical beings in these virtual settings. This has changed communication modes by reshaping the dynamics of the dissemination of content and the consumption of extremist ideologies. Interestingly, over the past decade, the internet has been a fertile space for the recruitment process of extremist or radical groups mediated by various socioeconomic, psychological, and political factors. In a meanwhile, the social media has been instrumental for dissemination propaganda in terms of conspiracy language, emotional language and storytelling to appeal the general audience. The emotional language is marked by sympathy that not only incites anger but fosters solidarity in its targeted audience in the shape of battlefield commentary. Consequently, it cultivates moral obligation and sense of urgency by depicting the tales of oppressed and oppressors that accelerate the recruitment process (Kenyon et al., 2024).

On the other contrary, the algorithmic language is a systematic way to promote the extremist content through cyberspaces. The unconscious role of the language-based algorithms is exploited by extremist groups to spread their content via various digital platforms. These groups exploit such algorithms systematically to attain more visibility and attract maximum audience. For instance, keywords and hashtags at different social media platforms has been used by these recruitment groups to amplify the accessibility of their messages among a larger segment of the audience. Additionally, in-group positivity is another significant framework that is utilized by the recruitment groups to build their positive image within the group. It also aims to dehumanize their oppressors and construct them as evils. Correspondingly, it not only glorifies its beliefs, ideology, and actions but demonstrates group as loftier than the opponents. The radical individuals reinforce the positive image by using religious terminologies to portray their actions as part of the spiritual outcomes as well. Furthermore, hate language encompassing offensive and derogatory phrase sentences to brutalize their opponents.

However, different messages are conveyed by the radical networks to cultivate the seeds of extremism by sharing different videos and posts to inspire vulnerable individuals (Birmingham et al., 2009). (Miconi et al., 2024) underscores the radicalization in Canadian

youth and unfolds that there is a vital association between depressions, and digital media usage to predict support for radicalization. Likewise, social media platforms provide access to extremist content to youth that creates radical beliefs. Social media not only facilitates radicalization but it escalates it by connecting users with the people of same ideologies and reinforcing the extremist's intentions.

The existing stream of literature on radicalization has put forward qualitative inquiries that are based on observations, historical evidence and case studies. There is a lack of quantitative research ventures to empirically validate the radicalization. Likewise, political radicalization has been ignored by mainstream terrorism and radicalization studies due to their focus on the criminological aspects of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the current research digs out the quantitative model to underscore the political radicalization and extend its findings. The study focused on seeking how the perceived grievances and the social media influence contribute to political radicalization. The current study bridges the literature gap and potential implications. It underlines the factors that have changed the dimensions of political radicalization.

2.0 Literature Review

(Madriaza et al., 2023) States that academic and policy discourse has focused on the prevention of violent radicalization since the dawn of the 21st century. Notably, the West-centric framework has been criticized due to its inability to maintain cultural sensitivity. Similarly, the flow of knowledge is unidirectional from the Global North to the Global South. (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018) Argues that VR prevention mechanisms not only ignore indigenous perspectives and needs but depict the cultural and geopolitical interests of the Western nations. Western epistemologies have shaped the idea of radicalization as (Coolsaet, 2016) remarks that Western security concerns against the Muslims have produced it. Similarly, (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018) argued that these frameworks ignore community based psychological mechanisms of extremism prevention by prioritizing their security concerns which yield stigmatization and social isolation in the Muslim dwellers of Western countries. (Madriaza et al., 2023) elaborated inequalities in the geographic distribution of the radicalization assessment programs by indicating that 42.5% of the assessment strategies belong to Western Europe irrespective of experiencing 2.65% of terrorism across the world. On the contrary, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) along with South Asia have encountered substantial terrorism attacks but they are ignored in frameworks development and knowledge production, their implementation and evaluation. While, this overrepresentation decreases the effectiveness of radicalization reduction strategies across the Global South.

(Brown, 2022) Underlined the radicalization and de-radicalization processes by using the mixed method approach. Qualitative methodology has been integrated to understand radicalization at the societal, institutional, relational, and individual levels. While, the socioecological framework operates as a conceptual basis for comprehending multiple influences that deter or cultivate extremist behavior. This framework assists multilevel lenses to explore how individual susceptibilities have been interacting with environmental and social factors to formulate the phenomenon of radicalization. Additionally, the study adopted a psychological autopsy approach that is influential to understand factors that result in suicide, but it analyses individuals in the context of the radicalization process. However, the study quantified recruitment pathways and explained that 18 cases reflected bottom-up racialization, in which

individuals become prey to radical ideologies before encountering organizational leadership. On the contrary, the seven cases were in the direct recruitment of the extremist group. (Spalek, 2016) Analyzes complex association between families and radicalization process with both violent and non-violent radicalization. This complex process is fostered at both collective and individual levels, which compels individuals to participate in direct action as a moral obligation. Ultimately, it thrives towards violence or terrorism. Interestingly, this research unfolds that violent extremism is not only a ramification of radicalization but it challenges existing social structures through non-violent actions. The study draws on the previous research and infers that political, psychological, ideological, behavioral, and socialization factors are responsible for shaping radicalization. Although, psychological factors emphasize identity crisis or trauma, while socialization, and ideological factors strive to unveil community and family influence (Lara-cabrera et al., 2020) unfolded that Social networks (SNS) have epitomized in the past few years in exacerbating radicalization, especially jihadism. They operate as platforms for ideology exchanges, recruitment tools, fuel psychological warfare and enable fragile individuals to attach with radicalized groups. The triggering factors that involve people with this process on SNS are emotional attachment, socioeconomic conditions, and psychological inclination towards extremist ideologies. (Fernandez et al., 2014) Elaborated role of social media as a conduit of radicalization. It contributes to the current literature on radicalization by integrating computational methods with the social science theory to explain and predict this complex phenomenon. By taking inspiration from the “roots of radicalization” model, it elucidates the influence of radicalization on social media with reference to the Pro-ISIS users and general Twitter users. For mapping out radicalization it employed the keywords based portrayals and merged them with a lexicon of radical terminology. Resultantly, an algorithm was designed to detect and understand this complex phenomena of radicalization.

(Saif et al., 2024) Carved out complex interplay of religious, social, economic, and political factors. It reflects how weak educational curriculum fails to develop critical thinking skills among students and lacks ability to counter diverse narratives. Although, the influence of madarsa is considered the foundation of radicalization, but its critical assessment reveals that bases of extremism exist beyond such educational models or institutions. The phenomenon of radicalization is understood through the underlined association of sociopolitical and economic inequalities, especially in the context of KPK and Balochistan where the masses encounter perceived injustices and limited resources. Meanwhile, this is aligned with the theory of relative deprivation by establishing a relationship between socioeconomic disparities and sentiment of disenfranchisement. Socioeconomic disparities have been the driving force of extremism in Pakistan. (Rathore & Basit, 2010) remark that economic inequality, poverty, and political marginalization are fertile to shape radical ideologies, especially in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). It has also been endorsed by (Hashmi & Adnan, 2024) who reflect that lack of education and socioeconomic inequalities sow seeds of intolerance and extremism in less developed areas. However, (Sajjad et al., 2017) contend that education is double-edged sword in either mitigating or propagating extremist beliefs. The incorporation of

peace centric and civic engagement in higher education can transform student’s attitudes to foster tolerance. Somehow, a few madarsa have been involved in spreading hatred, intensifying sectarian conflicts, and promoting intolerance against minorities (Imran, 2024).

3.0 Methodology

The current research venture used the cross-sectional research survey by employing the quantitative research design. The data was collected from the undergraduate students who hail from the three universities of the Punjab, Pakistan i.e. University of Punjab, Lahore, Government College University Faisalabad and the PMAS-Arid Agriculture University, Rawalpindi. This study employed the self-administered survey to dig out the association between the predictors of perceived grievances and the social media influence to determine political radicalization. The data was collected using the stratified sampling technique from the 336 undergraduate students of the respective universities. The data was analyzed using the SPSS 29.

4.0 Findings and Results

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Table 1: Reliability Analysis of the Tool

Chronbach’s Alpha	No of Items
0.812	3

The reliability analysis has been performed over the mapped-out items to check the consistency of the instruments’ precise results over different points in time. The above drawn table illustrates that Cronbach’s Alpha ($\alpha=0.812$) value meets the threshold of 0.7 across all three items indicating the tool of study posits validity to conduct further research.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of the variables

	Scale Mean if Item Delegated	Scale Variance if Item Delegated	Corrected Total Correlation	Item- Chronbach Alpha if Item Deleted
PG	7.47	2.893	0.651	0.759
SMI	7.70	2.337	0.685	0.724
PR	7.64	2.577	0.738	0.716

The above drawn table depicts that the (0.651, 0.685, and 0.721) demonstrate the strong association between the items and scale of the study. While, “Chronbach Alpha if Item Deleted” posits the closeness between 0.7 to 0.8 reflecting that all of the item contribute to the reliability of the scale. Additionally, the values of perceived grievances (0.759), social media influence (0.724), and political radicalization (0.716) surpasses the set criterion of 0.7 suggesting the reliability of the current research.

4.2 Correlation Matrix

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

	PR	SMI	PG
PR	0	.399**	.454**
SMI	.399**	0	.598**
PG	.454**	.598**	0

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The current table shows the Pearson correlation analysis was employed to seek the association between PR, SMI, and PG. The results demonstrated that there is a significant association between PR and SMI $r=.399^{**}, p<.001$, PR and PG $r=.454^{**}, p<.001$, while PG and SMI $r=.598^{**}, p<.001$ depicting the strong correlation among all the variables. However, PG has a stronger association with the PR.

4.3 Regression Model Summary

Table 4: Regression Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.481 ^a	.231	.227	.58220

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI, PG

Multiple regression was performed to investigate the association between the independent variables of social media influence and the perceived grievances the coefficient of determination ($R^2= .231$) portrays that the 23.1% of variance in the independent variables of perceived grievances and social media influence by the political radicalization. In addition to this, adjusted $R^2= .227$ shows the number of predictors in the sample because R^2 decreases in case the new predictor does not improve the model accordingly. Similarly, it prevents overfitting in the model, and the Standard error of the estimate ($SE=.58220$) reflects that the model is significant.

Table 5: ANOVA

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33.945	2	16.972	50.071	.000 ^b
	Residual	112.875	333	.339		
	Total	146.819	335			

a. Dependent Variable: Political Radicalization

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Media Influence, Perceived Grievances

The above drawn ANOVA represents the effect of social media influence and the perceived grievances over political radicalization among youth. The overall model is statistically significant, $F(2,333) = 50.071$, $p < .000$ ($F(3, 96)$) reflecting that both predictors of social media influence and perceived grievances significantly illustrate variance in the political radicalization. Henceforth, there is a positive association between social media influence and perceived grievances.

4.4 Coefficients^a

Table 6: Coefficients^a

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	1.729	.204		8.498	.000
	SMI	.164	.050	.198	3.310	.001
	PG	.357	.064	.335	5.593	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Political Radicalization

This table digs out that constant (intercept) is 1.729 ($p < .000$) demonstrating that the value of political radicalization when all predictors are zero. The Social Media Influence (SMI) posits the significantly positive on Political Radicalization ($B=0.164, t=3.310, p=.001$). Similarly, ($\beta=.198$) suggesting entails relatively modest effect. Meanwhile, Perceived Grievances has been

a stronger predictor of Political Radicalization ($B=0.357$, $t=5.593$, $p<.000$), encompassing the ($\beta=.335$) portraying a stronger effect than the SMI.

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The current study affirms the association between perceived grievances and political radicalization. The high level of the perceived grievances posits a robust impact on political radicalization accordingly. Interestingly, the current study endorses the existing literature (Cherney et al., 2022) which postulates that expressed grievances shape radical behavior among the youth in Australia. It further takes into account radicalization through quantitative design and explains that these expressed grievances appear in the forms of identifiable strain, whereby individuals feel an attachment to a particular group that was victimized or remained under the threat of injustice. However, (Minear & Dowling, 2015) identified the grievances have been developed by the individuals due to the war on terror and public ignorance regarding conflicts between ruling governments and Muslims in the West. While, (McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2017) in their seminal work remarked that political radicalization is the outcome of grievances either at the individual or the group level but it bifurcates the types of radicalization by a pyramid, one at the opinion level and the other at the action level radicalization. It is necessary to develop personal grievances or sentiments of injustice to blend the radicalization of opinion into the action. However, (Rink & Sharma, 2018) articulated that there is no association between economic grievances and radicalization, which is contrary to the current study. On the contrary, (Süß & Weipert-Fenner, 2024) postulated that socioeconomic grievances play a key role in shaping radicalization or using violent strategies to achieve their goals, this is aligned with our study in which economic disparity motivates people to question the existing political system, ultimately indicates perceived grievances.

In addition to this, the other predictor of the current study was the social media influence which demonstrates a slightly lower but positive association with political radicalization. In the existing spectrum of academic literature social media operates as the vehicle to connect, reinforce, promote, perpetuate radical ideologies, and cultivate environment of chaos and terror. Conversely, (Leiner, 2019) reflected that the frequency of “likes” has been positively associated with the respondents who hail from the radical landscapes of the right wing. Surprisingly, this finding is countered by (Wolfowicz et al., 2021) compared the Facebook handles of the nonviolent and terrorist’s accounts, and reflected that the no difference existed between members of respective group.

5.1 Conclusion

This study has put forward the quantitative model of political radicalization by necessitating that it is an intricate evolving phenomenon, which is the result of the sociopolitical landscape, perceived grievances and social media influence. These factors emerge from the intersection of social injustice and structural inequalities across the realm of digital spaces.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

- Only those students were interviewed who were studying in their undergraduate classes. The M.Phil. PhDs and diploma holder students were excluded from the study.

- This is cross-sectional study that have collected the data at one point of time, the complex phenomenon of radicalization needs to be addressed through the time series and the longitudinal analysis.

5.3 Implications of the study:

The phenomenon of radicalization has been studied through multidisciplinary lenses across the a varying range of disciplines like political science, psychology, terrorism studies, sociology, international relations and criminology. Correspondingly, the research venture in the domain of radicalization has been qualitative predominantly, which draws on historical narratives, specific case studies on the prisoners and different rehabilitation programs in Europe. These models oversimplify the radicalization and neglect the entrance and exist factors of the individual from this process as well, often ignoring the empirical validation. This study has developed and validated the model empirically setting forth the new horizons of theoretical implications.

The current study also entails the practical implications that enrich the policy practices in Pakistan. The Pakistani youth shares 64% of the total population which has been studied to understand the political radicalization, so this study confers the predictors of radicalization that can assist the policymakers in formulating counter radicalization strategies. As the perceived grievances with social media have emerged major contributing factor of radicalization, social justice, equality, youth wellbeing and welfare programs can be counter effective instead of enhanced and strict programs of surveillance.

5.4 Recommendations

- The government should devise a systematic mechanism to address the socio-political grievances through democratic means and legal frameworks.
- The counter-narratives and the de-radicalization should be incorporated into curriculum to promote the peace- building mechanism.

Digital literacy programs should be implemented to educate individuals on recognizing and rejecting radicalizing influences online.

Siraj Hussain: Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

Farhan Ahmad Faiz : Methodology and Revision

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