

MUSLIM UNIVERSITY STUDENTS INTERACTION IN AN ONLINE RADICAL SPACE : A SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: Some studies argue that radical organizations have targeted young individuals to be recruited as new members using social media platforms. The recruitment of young individuals is a stage by stage process by inspiring and depicting radical ideology on various social media sites. However, limited studies have been conducted to understand how young Muslim individuals begin to interact with the radical organization on social media sites and then being recruited and end up with radical ideology and actions. Therefore, this study uses the social movement theory to understand Muslim university students' interaction in radical online space in two universities in a former ethnic deadly conflict regency in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. This study employed a qualitative method in which the data were gathered through focus groups and in-depth interviews. However, the identification of radical students was made prior to the interview through a quick survey. From the survey, we identified 23 students had made interaction in radical online space using social media platform. After that, we carried out twice a focus group session with the identified students. From the focus group discussion, we found ten students have deeply involved in online radicalism activities and then continued with an in-depth interview to understand their involvement from social movement theory. Our findings show that the ten students have moved from first to the fourth social stage of social movement during their interaction in radical online space before they withdraw from further involvement with radical activities. We also found that radical organizations use social media to incite and indoctrinated before the students decline or success to be recruited. Our study is different from previous studies, which argue that individuals can be recruited without involving in an ideological interaction. We suspect that Muslim individuals who can be recruited without prior indoctrination are individuals with high social and political dissatisfaction.

KEYWORDS: Online radical space, Social media sites, Radicalism, social movement theory

I. INTRODUCTION

The availability of online space has increased the opportunity to access information and make interaction in a broader context across a geographic area. The number of online sites, such as social media and websites, has increased significantly since the emergence of web 2.0 technology. People can communicate and interact through social media sites, and they also can create more profiles on social media sites to broaden their interaction (Lenhart et al., 2010). Similarly, radical individuals and organizations also use social media sites to present and distribute their ideology. Radical organizations use social media to attract the young generation into violent actions against civilization. The radical organizations that deliver radical information on social media sites have become a common phenomenon, and some of them are published openly (Weimann, 2010). The visibility of radical organizations causes significant consequences for young Muslim individuals, mostly social media users.

Studies (e.g. Thompson, 2011) found that the number of young Muslim individuals access radical social media sites is increasing. Muslim individuals make extensive interaction with radical social media sites before they decided to join with radical organizations or being coopted by the organizations. For example, young individuals join radical social media sites after radical organizations make them feel important (Amedie, 2015), experiencing injustice (Nesser, 2006), feeling discontent with a political or social situation (Rogan, 2006), and indoctrination (Weimann, 2010, 2012). Another study conducted by Busher (2015) shows that the young generation is willing to be a member of radical groups in online space in a short interaction and without indoctrination process. The finding implies that some young generation is able to be recruited straightaway without a long indoctrination process in a social media interaction.

Even though previous studies highlighted that young Muslim generation had to make interaction with radical individuals or organizations in online social media space prior or after indoctrination, limited is known how young Muslim generation end up with a final decision to join with radical organizations in online space. Lack

of studies on how young Muslim generation engage with radical organizations in the online social media sphere might hinder our understanding and ability to prevent the young generation from deep involvement with radical and extremist organizations in the online space. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine how the Muslim generation interacts with radical and extremist organizations in the social media sphere using the social movement theory. The theory argues that communities move from one social situation to another stage of social status to pursue their objectives (Christiansen, 2009).

This study aims to provide an understanding for academia and practitioners to hinder young Muslim generation from online radical groups and organizations. Our study is also might become preemptive strategies to protect young Muslim generation from radical indoctrination delivered by radical agencies in online space. Government and security institutions may use this study to build intelligence in monitoring online radicalize activities and securing country security.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Movement Concept

The social movement concept is better described in the social movement theory proposed by Christiansen (Christiansen, 2009). The theory posits that society, which involves social movement activities, tends to work collectively to achieve its common objectives. The objectives can be motivated by an intention to make changes or against current social and political conditions (Little, 2013). Social movements usually occur in a situation where the relationship between social systems in society is dysfunctional. For example, there is a chaotic social and economic situation. As such, communities are encouraged to change in social and political by mobilizing resources and effort to pursue their common objectives (Shultziner, 2014). In this context, a community with diverse individuals interacts in an informal network to make a social and political movement based on their shared collective identities and values (Diani, 1992).

For this study, we define a social movement as groups or organizations consisting of heterogeneous individuals with shared collective identities and values to resist political and cultural conflicts. In our definition, we would like to distinguish between the social movement concept from other closely related concepts such as groups with similar interests, political parties, protesting groups, and organizations coalition. Our social movement concept can be used to identify a specific area of research and to build theory in a social movement study (Diani, 1992).

A unique characteristic of a social movement concept is that the movement does not involve a riot and politics segmentation, rather the movement reflects a heterogeneous actor within society to act collectively to resist elite opponents in achieving their common objectives (Tarrow, 1994). The collective individuals who make the social movements can identify their "enemies", and the collective individuals are connected with a strong informal network and a collective distinctive (Porta & Diani, 2006). The social movements concept consist of long-duration community efforts and campaigns to collective complaints to their authorities, and a set of strategies to be implemented in the social movement actions (Carty, 2009; Tilly, 2004).

The social movement is intentionally practiced by collective and organized individuals to achieve their goals through a hard work commitment. The individuals might attempt to make changes in a dysfunctional social and political environment, such as to resist a corrupted government and injustice within society (Little, 2013). In a particular case, the social movements might also be caused by a discontention towards social and political injustice. However, society might involve in social movements for many reasons. For example, the society might want to show they are important actors, or they might wish to support certain figures, or they merely want to contribute to the social and political changes (Little, 2013).

Radicalism On Social Media Sites

The term of Radicalism has been viewed differently by scholars across disciplines. Within Islamic contexts, radical is understood as an excessive interpretation of Islam teachings and values (Graham, 1993). The concept of Radicalism is also understood differently among radical individuals and groups in which the variety interpretation of radical is caused by different religious doctrines (Mauro, 2014). Radical religious interpretation can be derived from traditional spaces such as traditional Islamic institutions and mosques. Ridwan (2014), for instance, argues that some mosques in Patani Southern Thailand has been used as a haven to spread radical ideology.

Radical ideology dissemination become more rampant when various social media sites have emerged. Radical individuals and organizations find new spaces to spread their radical ideology without limited by time and geography. Currently, radical social media users have intensively exploited online social networks to disseminate their radical vision through images, videos, and texts across the globe (Chang & Dave, 2014;

Nuridin, 2016). Radical organizations also use social media to recruit, inspire, and guide their global strategies. Radical ideology is distributed using an organized, well-planned radical ideology campaign through social media sites, such as blogs, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Kunkle, 2012). As such, social media sites have been used as new tools to attract and impress new generation across the world.

Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson (1980) have found that radicalist recruitment through social media platforms is a common phenomenon within radical organization contexts. It is also argued that within online social networks context, individuals might be recruited according to certain organization ideology and movement. Certain radical ideology and movement is emerged by radical and extremist institutions according to particular radical vision and mission to impress young generation to be a radicalist. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube, have abilities to portray live images and videos to radicalize young generations who have little or no apparent prior interest in violent jihadist” (Bermingham et al., 2009).

A number of radical persons and institutions have found intensively used social media platform to induce radicalization and to arrange deadly attack planning. For instance, Hussain Osman the London bombers, had been inspired by Iraq conflict videos on Internet and learn about jihad online (Awan, 2007). Similarly, the 2005 Khan al-Khalili bomber in Cairo also used bomb-making instruction from terrorist online sources to make a deadly bomb (Sageman, 2008). A common consensual and proofs have been found by scholars and government agencies that the social media platforms has become new spaces to create radical and extremist ideology. For example, a study found that half of the top ten images on social media platforms are showing young generation as martyrs, while another one-third of the images showing footage of suicide bombings and they are used to exploit public emotion to depict political cruelty amongst the online community (Conway & McInerney, 2008).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach in which the data was gathered through focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. However, prior to the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews, we conduct a short survey to identify students who have made interaction with radical social media sites or radical figures in online spaces. This study also used data from written material obtained from local security institutions. Multiple data gathering technique is common practiced in qualitative research (Morgan, 1997). In early identification, we found 23 students have interacted with radical and extremist individuals and organizations in online social media sites. Following the identification, we carried out twice focus group discussions with the 23 students. We found ten students have intensively interacted with radical social media sites and extremist organizations from the focus group discussions. Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted with the ten students, which duration between 45 minutes to one hour.

The interviews, then, were transcribed and sent back to the participants for confirmation. For confidentiality, the participant names were replaced with an initial when a quote is transferred into the paper. The interview results were analyzed using the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We used three iterations coding processes; open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. We also considered the conceptualization process as outlined by Urquhart, et al., (2010) to build a more in-depth insight and understanding of the data analyses. From the in-depth conceptualization, we built themes based on the theoretical constructs, but we are open to new themes that may emerge during the analysis started when a basic concept found in the early coding stage (Nuridin, 2017a, 2017b). However, the conceptualization process is ended when there is no new themes emerged from the data (Kendall, 1999).

IV. RESULTS

We found that the young generation from the two universities has used social media to interact with radical individuals and organizations. In this study, we found that the process of individuals’ engagement with radical individuals and organizations were begun from early-stage to the final stage of social movement theory where young individuals have taken radical actions. Then, we presented and analyzed the university students radical interaction on social media sites based on the social movement theoretical construct. The following subsection presents the results of our study based on four stages of social movement theory.

Emergence stage

The discontent of the current situation regarding post-conflict handling in Poso is widespread. Social dissatisfaction is mostly shown by Muslim community in particular those who directly involved in the conflict. They share the discontent feeling through social media and demanding attention from Muslim community and government. The university students experienced their dissatisfaction towards social and political injustice practiced by the government within their community. A participant described their experiences as follows :

You know why few Muslim in Poso still fighting? The government claimed that there was intimidation from the list of fugitives (DPO)¹ to the community. However, is it true that only 24 DPOs have such great power to the terror community? I think it is hard to accept. There must be something very basic that causes the conflict. The fact shows that the root of unfinished conflict is injustice. Look, all the DPO as the party accused of being the culprit of Poso unrest is only the Muslims. In contrast, 16 Christian names called Tibo prisoners long before he was executed were not put in the DPO list. Thus, the Poso conflict is only blamed on Muslims. Infact, the DPO persons are viewed by Muslim in Poso as a party that defended them when they were attacked during the conflict that took place (Participant ZA).

The participant perception towards injustice in a post-conflict situation is similar to that of other community experiences in a country with high political conflict. For example, Iraqis and Syrians experience towards the US invasion in their countries (Magdy et al., 2016). In Poso regency context, community experience of injustice is mostly determined by Indonesia security agencies strategy in law enforcement in which they experience as unfair as said by the following participant:

Law enforcement is only applied to the Muslim fugitives (Muslim DPO). During dialogues between the fugitives and the police, the fugitives are willing to surrender as long as the police also investigate thoroughly 16 people who are indicated as the key of unrest among non-Muslims. They also should be included in the fugitive lists (DPO). However, there was discrimination. All 16 key of unrest Christians were not touched. Hence, what happened next was considered a form of resistance to the injustices experienced by Muslims (Participant NW).

The participant experience regarding social and political injustice caused him to find another institution that can accommodate his discontent towards social and political injustice. They are trying to find actors that might have similar experiences or at least someone who can hear their situation in the regency. The effort to find actors that can help them with the social and political conditions caused the individuals to move to a more serious action in the online social movement, which is discussed in the following stage.

Coalescence stage

After feeling discontent is widespread, the situation is escalated to the next stage, where the community begins to realize that there are technological tools that can accommodate their feelings. In the coalescence stage, dissatisfied young Muslim communities in Poso start using social media sites, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, to share their feelings towards social and political handling during the post-conflict era. They began to admire radical ideology disseminated on various social media sites. The ideology mostly related to Islamic jihadist campaign showing alternative ways to enforce the law, which is regarded as an Islamic was of law enforcement. A participant gave his opinion as follows:

When I first read a post on Facebook, I became interested in radical teachings, at that time, I was still a workforce in Singapore. I've started dressing like a cleric, but not yet become a devout Muslim. Through Facebook, I study Radicalism by reading jihadist-like status. Approximately for one year I was active on Facebook. But I was not in any group. I was just listening and getting curious. At that time I felt free to ask someone I knew on Facebook.

The participant comment reflects that he is not only beginning to admire and learn radical social media content, but he is also initiating to interact with the radical content actively. The participant also tries to find individuals who have similar experiences and feeling toward the social and political situation. When the awareness is raised, the individuals organize themselves and may appoint a leader to lead them (Christiansen, 2009). For example, after a certain period of interaction with radical social media contents a participant begin to admire a well-known terrorist combatant in the regency. He said as follows:

I got to know BS² from Facebook about few years ago, I think he's a good guide to us because he's been fighting for justice for quite a long time. My friends also agree that he is a fighter for Muslims. His advices and teaching have inspired us to do jihad (Participant HD).

The participants' interesting in the social media contents regarding radical heroic figures and influencing contents leads to the emergence of an understanding that new opportunities has emerged. They may use the social media sphere to coordinate and cooperate to form an organized group. The online group may be used as an instrument to plan further actions related to terrorism. At the same time, young individuals who have been in the coalescence stage may also be recruited to become terrorism members because the level of discontent

¹ The term DPO refers to wanted list. The list contains a number of Muslim radical and terrorists who committed violence during horizontal conflict in Poso.

² The BS is an initials to keep confidentiality of the terrorist

awareness is high. As such, we found that young individuals moved to further stage where their involvement increase to a more formal radicalism process. We call the stage as “bureaucratization stage” where the young individuals have been tied with strong radical rules and values and they might not be able to return to where they were.

Bureaucratization

We found that the young individuals who have moved to bureaucratization stage, they become more entangled and involved with radical values and rules. The entanglement was caused by number of formalization process that they have followed. For example, a participant admitted that he routinely follow online *pengajian* (preaching) which was hosted by a radical figure. In fact, the online preaching had led him into an online radical ideology doctrinization process which was concealed with online prayers. The online radical figure told the participant that joining online prayer can make him closer to God. The participant was not realized that online praying is a process to make him deeply involve in radical groups and also to make the participant become a formal membership of the radical groups. The online praying group also tighten the participants' psychological emotion with radical ideology.

Another popular mechanism of radicalism formalization were carried out through online loyalty oath known as *baiat*. The loyalty oath used to conduct offline within a radical group, but when Islamic radical groups moved their activities to online space, they begin to conduct the loyalty oath online. A participant told his experience of taking the loyalty oath as follows:

If we want to inaugurate (baiat), we just do it through chat only. We do not have to come to the inauguration ceremony. Now almost everything can be done through information technology. Social media is rampant used as a communication channel, it facilitates communication to perform various actions or recruitment of new members. I did an online *baiat* when I formally joined them (Participant OW)

The loyalty oath is intended to increase the emotional bond and absolute loyalty of young Muslim individuals to radical organizations and actions they may be taken in the future. Such loyalty oaths may also have significantly contributed to various deadly attack conducted by terrorisms. When the young individuals are already in the bureaucratization stage, they are strongly tied by radicalism rules and values which no turning ways as a participant said as follows:

When I had been baiat (took loyalty oath), I have to commit to all organization (radical group) rules. I can not get rid of the rules. I have to behave and act as they told me. My feeling was everything they told me was true, and all outside there were wrong. I think that was the way to make people keep stay with them in a virtual world that we don't know each other (Participant AW).

Given the participant's strong bond with the radical organizations, the radical online actors have effectively built a bureaucratic organization rules and values that tied young Muslim individuals to remain in the radical organizations' operation. The rules and values introduced to new recruits seem able to infiltrate their perspectives with radical ideology and hinder the participant to stay away from radical organization. The term new recruits in this stage is limited to have been formalized with radical ideology but yet to plan to conduct any deadly actions. However, radical organizations or individuals did not find difficulties in bringing the new recruits to take any actions demanded by the radical organizations. Such deadly plans or actions are taken when they move to the decline stage of the online social movement.

Decline

In the decline stage, young individuals who have been formalized with radical ideology may fail or success to take the following actions, such as planning deadly actions. However, actions we mean in this study is not limited to violent actions but also to involve themselves into planning to do some deadly actions. For example, a participant describes how he has been successfully taken holy sworn (*biaat*) through the Facebook but then he withdraw from taking further radical actions as follows:

I have never met anyone I chat with on facebook directly, but I've been in oath (baiat) through facebook chat. Then I was introduced to other friends who also have been oathed (baiat). We planned to leave for ISIS in Syria, but I finally realized that it could ruin my future after I heard some religious speech from da'i and it is also a big sin to attack our Muslim brother (Participant ZA).

The participant was yet to conduct any deadly actions such as suicide bombings or guns attack but the participant has successfully been recruited and involved in making further planning that might caused deadly attack to civilians. In this study, we found that the young individuals retreat from further involvement during interaction in online space due self-awareness. For example, another informant said that a radical individual he

met in a social media sites told him to involve in a planned deadly action but he refused to involve after he aware that such action can cause severe damage to our society. The participant said:

I was told to attack police because the police have arrested Muslim combatants, but they did not arrest non-Muslim. They said they will provide me with ammunition and strategy on how to do that, but I realize that if I do that, I will go to jail, and I will destroy my family. I did unfriend them on my Facebook page. I was very scared, and I thank to Allah that I did not involve too far with them. I think we cannot solve problem with violent.

Regarding self-retreat from further radical action, we suspect that their families and religious leaders have taken part in de-radicalization their young generation. There are a number of young Muslim who involved in deadly actions, such as bombing and civilians shooting, and have been arrested and punished for the long term. However, we did not include them in this study due to difficulties of access to interview them.

V. DISCUSSION

We found that young Muslim individuals who involved in online radicals through social media sites have gone through the five stages of social movement. Our study confirms earlier research, such as Bakas (2015) and Chang (2014), who found that several young radical generation have interacted with radicals and extremist figures or generation in online social media sphere to disseminate best practices, such as propaganda, jihadist images, attract civilian to join their groups, radical ideology promotion, and soliciting financial resources. However, our study does not concern with those best practice, our study focuses on how young individual who involved in online radicalism move from less radical to strong Radicalism from social movement theory.

Our study found that early involvement of individuals in radicalism situation is determined by the widespread social and political discontents toward post-conflict handling by the government. Most of the informants argue that the way of government and security agencies did not enforce law fairly. The discontent situation is shared on social media sites. The findings confirm the social movement theory which posits that during the emergence stage community experience the widespread of social discontent (Hopper, 1950; Macionis, 2001). The discontent might be caused by injustice or dissatisfaction of government policy or actions. In this study, we found that young individuals who experience political and social injustice find other individuals with similar condition in online space to share emotional burden related social and political situation. Social media platform have become a favorite space for the young generation to make interaction with individuals or organizations which are considered able to solve their problem. Online radical individuals and organizations exploited the phenomena for their radical ideology dissemination purposes. They inspire the dissatisfaction community to make more followers.

When the young people move their interaction into online space to observe and find other individuals with similar discontent political and social situation, they begin to move to the coalescence stage where they begin to aware that online social media space can fulfill their radical ideology. The young individuals become easy to be recruited by radical online organizations when they begin to admire radical religious values and teachings in social media sites. Prior studies have found that young individuals are prone to be influenced and recruited by radical figures or organizations that inspire them with radical ideology. For example, Thompson (2011) found that ninety-six percent of young Muslim generation in the Middle East and Northern Africa have been recruited and radicalized through online interpersonal connections. The connections might be through religious institutions, family members, and friends/neighborhood. In this study, online praying was used to inspire and recruit young Muslim individual in the area of conflict.

In other words, the possibility to interact further with radical individuals and organizations is increased when the individuals begin to observe and admire the presence of radical ideology distributed on social media sites. In later stage, the young individuals might become deeply involve in violent radical activities. For example, they may become the member of a radical or extremist group through a formalization process such as a loyalty oath or *baiat*³. When an individuals have involved in the radicalism formalization process, that is meant they have moved to bureaucratization stage, which bond them with radical ideology and belief.

Young individuals have moved to the bureaucratization stage when they formally begin to involve themselves in institutionalized radical environment. They are restricted by online radical bureaucratic regulation and they can not get rid of it. This situation cause them to involve deeply in radical organizations and they have to adhere and follow the radical groups and ideology. Gary R Bunt (2003) argues that the situation as a strong online

³ (a loyalty oath) is applied to anyone who wish to enter into covenant of allegiance to a radical group should swear from the core of his/her heart.

Islamic authority that change the individuals' religious understanding and expression. The online fatwa can damage offline religious authority which has been built by proper religious institutions.

Finally, young individuals may fail or success to be recruited by online radical institutions when they are in the decline stage. Young individuals who have been institutionalized (Christiansen, 2009) with radical ideologies might not practice it in further life. In this study, we found that university students failed to achieve common radical goals. Their actions are limited to the believe that redicalism ideology is better for them when they have been inaugurated (baiat) but they did not continue to take further actions, but they retreat from further radical activities.

Regarding self-retreat from futher involvement in radical actions, some of young individuals have been influenced family and religious leaders. The phenomena highlight that families and religious scholars play important roles in the de-radicalism process. Religious leaders play roles through delivering moderate Islamic education and teachings to counter the radical ideologies (Muthuswamy, 2016). Meanwhile, Muslim families can teach tolerance values to their children in early stage in particular teaching proper Islamic teaching and norms.

Providing an education system that focuses on universal meaningful values rather than merely on the cognitive aspect is a good strategy to de-radicalize our Muslim generation (Arifin, 2016). Early de-radicalization process could prevent young generation from further radical interaction in online space. In this study context, former radical combatants could also play important roles in protecting new generation involve in deadly radical actions. The role of former terrorist combatants in de-radicalization process has been found in previous studies (Clubb, 2016). Former terrorist combatants can provide testimonies and clarification regarding the bad consequences of being radical.

The social movement stages of young generation radical involvement in online space is concluded in the following figure 1.

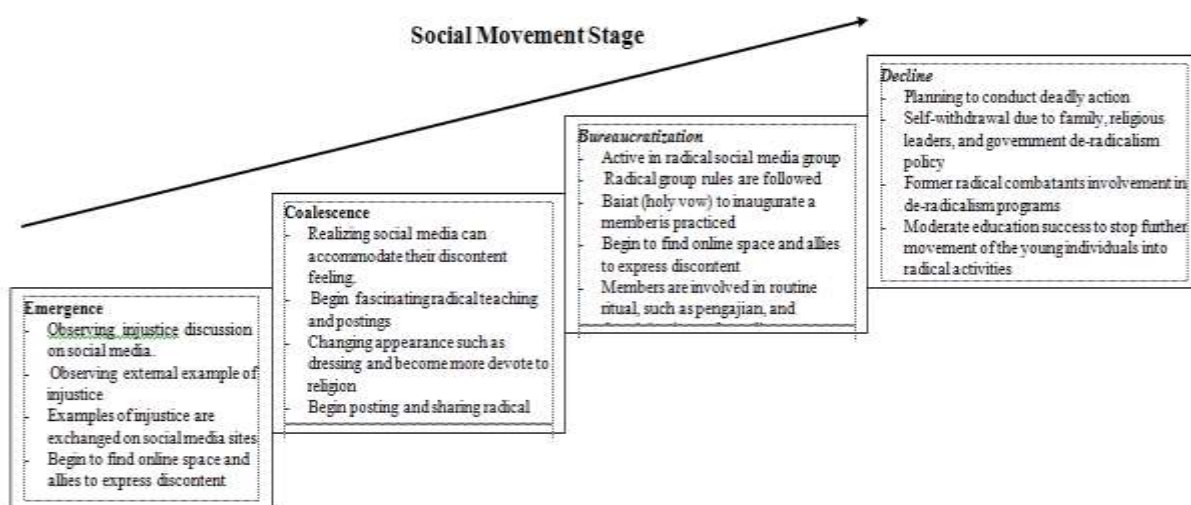


Figure 1. Radicalism process from Social Movement Stages

VI. CONCLUSION

Our study shows that the social movement theory is able to explain stage by stage young individuals engagement with radical actors in social media sites. The four stages of social movement from social movement theory are reflected in our study. The possibility of young generation involvement in radical activities on social media sites is increasing as they move from a stage to another stage of social movement on social media. Even though previous studies argue that young generation are directly recruited after they experience of social or political discontent, we found that the university students who have been recruited by online radical actors and institutions were preceded by indoctrination through online radical teaching, Islamic jihadis videos and images, and Muslim radical connections from Middle East countries.

The implication of our study is that the social movement concept applied in offline context can also be applied to understand radical movement in online social media sites. Young individuals are involved in online radicalism activities on social media sites that occurred on stage by stage movement starting from dissatisfaction feeling to admiring radical ideology, from weak interaction to full radical action such as spreading radical propaganda and coordinating attacks. The findings may help government and security institutions to take strategic actions in preventing the young generation from online radical influences. Finally, we suggest the government to use the findings to establish new strategies in combating online Radicalism in social media sites.

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