

Countering Islamic Radicalism among Indonesian University Students: An Investigation on Social Media Using LINE Official Account

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Abstract

Social media platforms continue to be vastly utilized in university contexts as channels for the dissemination of zealous religious ideas. As a group, students are vulnerable to radicalism and are easily affected by extremist perceptions. This study investigated how the LINE Official account could be utilized to spread moderate Islamic perspectives in the Muslim student community in Indonesia's universities. It also examined how such an account could contribute to the mitigation of radicalism among students. This study contributes significantly to the literature because most extant research on counterradicalism movements remains centered on actions involving numerous stakeholders. It is hence necessary to initiate individual-focused movements that employ technology. The data used for the present study were obtained by analyzing conversations and comments available on the LINE platform. The study's findings suggest that LINE Official accounts can be employed as tools to oppose radicalism and spread moderate views among university students in Indonesia.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, LINE Official Account, Moderate Islamic Thought, Radical Islamic Narrative

Introduction

Technological advances over the last 20 years, especially in social media, have exerted wide-ranging influences on all dimensions of human life. They have also created novel opportunities for radical organizations to construct effective online communities based on users generating, collaborating, viewing, and sharing the desired content.¹ The proliferation of social media allows extremist information to easily spread through diverse age groups without space and time limits. Several instances of radicalism and social activism have recently occurred across the world: among others, the recruitment of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) members, and the social movement in Hongkong.² Such events have revealed that social media platforms function significantly as effective and efficient media activators. This ability of social media has generated new risks regarding the spread of violent extremism, the adoption of new recruitment strategies by militant groups, and the diffusion of radical ideologies. Brutal extremist groups have exploited this new information environment to their advantage by adopting easily accessible information technology and social media platforms to expand their reach and recruit vulnerable individuals. Hence, both policymakers and academics who have long sought to understand the radicalization process are extremely concerned about the issue of online radicalization.³

Marshall McLuhan mooted the concept of a global village in the early 1960s in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McLuhan believed that information would one day become open and would be accessible to all. The idea appeared unbelievable at that time, but his conception can be deemed extremely advanced because communication and information technologies were not as sophisticated then as they are

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¹ Geoff Dean, Peter Bell and Jack Newman (2012), "The Dark Side of Social Media: Review of Online Terrorism," *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 1-24; Kieron O'Hara and David Stevens (2015), "Echo Chambers and Online Radicalism: Assessing the Internet's Complicity in Violent Extremism: The Internet's Complicity in Violent Extremism," *Policy & Internet*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 401-422.

² Francesca Bolla Tripodi (2019), "Radicalism, Authoritarianism, and the Role of New Media," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 1021-1026; Yani Tri Wijayanti (2020), "Radicalism Prevention through Propaganda Awareness on Social Media," *Jurnal SPIKOM*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 142-155.

³ Mehmet F. Bastug, Aziz Douai and Davut Akca (2020), "Exploring the 'Demand Side' of Online Radicalization: Evidence from the Canadian Context," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 43, No. 7, pp. 616-637; Anne Aly et al. (2017), "Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 1-9; Colleen E. Mills et al. (2019), "Social Learning and Social Control in the Off- and Online Pathways to Hate Crime and Terrorist Violence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 44, No. 9, pp. 1-29; James Cole (2012), "Radicalisation in Virtual Worlds: Second Life through the Eyes of an Avatar," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 66-79; Julian Droogan, Lise Waldek and Ryan Blackhall (2018), "Innovation and Terror: An Analysis of the Use of Social Media by Terror-Related Groups in the Asia Pacific," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 170-184.

now. No Internet existed when McLuhan conceived of the global village. In fact, scant television and radio channels existed at that time.

Interestingly, McLuhan's ideas have come completely true in our times. Contemporary societies are not restricted to people belonging to specific geographies or nations and individuals have become international citizens. For instance, Indonesians can easily and instantly access news and events occurring in the United States, Europe, or Africa because communication and information technologies enable them to effortlessly and swiftly access information from all regions of the world.⁴

Communication and information technologies are currently growing and developing at an extraordinary pace. Everett M. Rogers described four eras of the growth of human communication: writing, printing, telecommunication, and interaction.⁵ Developments occurring between the writing and interaction stages produced amazing discoveries such as the printing press invented by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz in Germany. A few centuries later, printing technology enabled human beings to cheaply broadcast information through penny press newspapers, of which the *New York Sun* was the first exemplar. Soon, the telegraph allowed quick long-distance communication and in turn, triggered experts to develop newer technologies including radio and television.

Finally, humankind arrived at the current stage of interactivity through the presence of computers. This era began with the invention of the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC), a simple computer devised in 1946 by a group of scientists at the University of Pennsylvania. ENIAC encompassed more than 18,000 vacuum light tubes. This simple invention led to ever-smaller, incrementally sophisticated, and increasingly flexible devices that have now progressed to their current stage of ubiquitous usage.

We have realized that the development of communication and information technologies cannot be represented through a series of sequential numbers such as one, two, three, four, and so on. Rather, their growth is more aptly measured as a series of jumps beginning with one, two, three, skipping to six, then leaping to sixteen, and so on. Unsurprisingly, recent communication and information technology developments are quite amazing. Originally, the discovery of some simple devices spawned the development of various other electronic devices. Eventually, this technology progressed, and devices started to become integrated. The Internet denotes the most significant invention of human civilization to date and represents the most impactful communication and information technology device humanity has ever created.

Terrorist groups such as ISIS have also found ways to employ recent exponential technological developments to globally recruit youth as *mujahid* to establish *Khilafah* on Earth.⁶ Individuals and organizations use social media tools to radicalize people for political and social change. This usage becomes increasingly popular as the Internet penetrates more of the world, and mobile computing devices become more accessible.⁷ As previously mentioned, McLuhan's assertions about the global village have come completely true. Citizens of different nations in discrete parts of the world interact easily and increasingly, unobstructed by distance and geographical boundaries. For example, the more the media disseminate news about terrorism, the more international communities want to know about such radical groups, and the more groups such as ISIS can propagate their *jihad* through Internet sites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media to recruit youth across the world.⁸ It has been proven that more than 3,000 young people from Western countries have joined ISIS and have been brainwashed to do whatever their leaders command, even agreeing to suicide bombings to become a brave *jihadi* force.

⁴ Marshall McLuhan, M (1994), *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

⁵ Rulli Nasrullah (2012), *Komunikasi Antar Budaya Di Era Budaya Siber*, Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media.

⁶ Michael Burch and Elise Pizzi (2020), "Strategic Targeting: The Islamic State and Use of Violence in Iraq and Syria," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 34, No. 6, pp. 1-23.

⁷ Robin Thompson (2011), "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media," *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 167-190; Nicolo Miotto (2022), "Visual Representations of Martyrdom: Comparing the Symbolism of Jihadi and Far-Right Online Martyrologies," *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 32, pp. 110-163; Jamileh Kadivar (2022), "Propaganda and Radicalization: The Case of Daesh in Iran," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 70-98.

⁸ Ikhwanul Kiram Mashuri (2014), *ISIS Jihad atau Petualangan*, Jakarta: Republika.

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Several youngsters in Indonesia are also interested in radical groups such as ISIS.⁹ They come to know about such radical groups and movements through social media. For example, a student with the initials IA enrolled in the department of international relations at a university in Malang in East Java was arrested by the Indonesian National Police's Densus 88 in May 2022 for alleged involvement with the ISIS network. IA disseminated ISIS propaganda through social media and was suspected of fundraising in Indonesia to help ISIS. A lecturer stated that IA was exposed to ISIS ideology in his second semester.¹⁰ ISIS diffused propaganda material intensively on the Internet in 2013; at that time, another student of a public university in Malang in East Java in Indonesia became eager to join the terrorist organization. After the student was investigated, he confessed that he often viewed ISIS content and shared his learnings with his ISIS-assigned bride through the Internet. In fact, he often sent out videos about ISIS and disseminated any news related to the militant group. Although he later changed his mind, it took a few semesters for the authorities to convince him.

In general, the process of radicalization is perpetrated on students in a structured manner using a rational approach. The first step is brainwashing. Students are instructed about the so-called truth, claiming that the taught religious views are the most correct. Radical ideas form unconsciously in students if this step succeeds and crystallizes.

In a broader context, some students enrolled at universities in Indonesia harbor radical Islamic views and engage in acts such as accusing the Indonesian government system. They want Indonesia to be replaced by the *Khilafah* because the democratic Indonesian government system is considered unIslamic. Such students openly diffuse *Khilafah* propaganda in the campus environment through social media. Propaganda material is also disseminated through bulletins, group studies, and even video invitations uploaded on YouTube. Therefore, research conducted by the State Intelligence Agency in 2017 predictably noted that around 39% of the university students enrolled at several universities were exposed to radicalism.¹¹

A recent survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta reported the result that many schools and universities in Indonesia are influenced by the spread of intolerance and radicalism. This survey also revealed that 48.95 percent of respondents, who comprised high school or university students, believed that religious education influenced them to not associate with other religious communities. Worse, 58.5 percent of the respondents expressed radical religious views.¹² The Director of the National Counter Terrorism Agency in Hamli said that almost all state universities are exposed to radicalism. The National Counter Terrorism Agency revealed the names of seven renowned state universities infiltrated by radicalism: University of Indonesia, Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), Diponegoro University (Undip), Ten November Institute of Technology, Airlangga University (Unair), and Universitas Brawijaya (UB).¹³

The issue of radicalism is not new to scholarly literature. Research done by The Institute of Research and Community Services of UNUSIA (LPPM UNUSIA) revealed that exclusive Islamic or transnational Islam movements are growing in many state university campuses. The dissemination of such movements occurs through cadre formation in several on-campus campus religious institutions. Such activities are successful partly because of the weakness of on-campus student movements propagating inclusive Islamic ideas¹⁴. The same process of infiltration applies to schools. Studies conducted in Malang in East Java in Indonesia have also disclosed how Islamic lecturers delivered religious arguments against radicalism to university

⁹ Ali Maksu et al. (2022), "Islamic Movements in Indonesia: A Critical Study of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Jaringan Islam Liberal," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 71-82.

¹⁰ Kompas (2022), "Mahasiswa UB Malang Ditangkap Densus 88. Pengamat: Anak Muda Rentan Terpapar Radikalisme," <https://surabaya.kompas.com/read/2022/05/26/212108278/mahasiswa-ub-malang-ditangkap-densus-88-pengamat-anak-muda-rentan-terpapar?page=all>.

¹¹ Wishnugroho Akbar (2018), "BIN Ungkap 39 Persen Mahasiswa Terpapar Radikalisme," *CNN Indonesia*, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20180429023027-20-294442/bin-ungkap-39-persen-mahasiswa-terpapar-radikalisme>.

¹² Terry Muthahhari (2017), "Survei UIN Jakarta: Intoleransi Tumbuh Di Banyak Sekolah Dan Kampus," *Tirto*, <https://tirto.id/survei-uin-jakarta-intoleransi-tumbuh-di-banyak-sekolah-dan-kampus-czQL>.

¹³ Bintoro Agung (2018), "Kedokteran Dan Eksakta Di 7 PTN Terpapar Radikalisme," *CNN Indonesia*, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20180525210629-12-301431/bnpt-kedokteran-dan-eksakta-di-7-ptn-terpapar-radikalisme>; Bagong Suyanto, Mun'im Sirry and Rahma Sugihartati (2022), "Pseudo-Radicalism and the De-Radicalization of Educated Youth in Indonesia," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 153-172.

¹⁴ LPPM UNUSIA (2019), "8 Universitas Negeri Terjangkit Gerakan Islam Eksklusif," <https://lp2m.unusia.ac.id/8-universitas-negeri-terjangkit-gerakan-islam-eksklusif/>.

students.¹⁵ A similar research initiative probed radicalism among university students in Surabaya.¹⁶ Yusuf al-Qardhawi examined a case study to determine the characteristics of radicalism,¹⁷ and numerous other scholars have investigated aspects such as how religious radicalism can be counteracted in schools. However, the present investigation of how LINE can become a tool for the dissemination of moderate Islam and encourage counterradicalism is unprecedented and interesting. LINE is a new communication application that allows members to make voice calls and send messages for free, notwithstanding time or place. Subscribers can also share texts, photos, videos, and stickers on their timelines to exchange stories with close friends. Radical and moderate Islamic narratives are spread through such timelines and attempt to dominate each other. However, scant existing research has investigated how LINE is used to oppose radicalism in Indonesian university students. Such investigations are essential because many university students become influenced by radicalism on social media and tend to become radicalized in the context of understanding Islam. Therefore, the present study intended to reveal how LINE Official accounts are employed to diffuse moderate Islamic narratives through social media. To achieve this objective, it explored the use of a LINE Official account to alleviate student radicalism in the context of an Indonesian university by analyzing the available conversations and comments.

Literature Review

Overview of Radicalism

Radicalism, is a serious threat to national security, even when it occurs on campuses of educational institutions. Hence, a stringently and continuously managed deradicalization model must be developed through the involvement of all existing elements.¹⁸ Radicalism occurs because of the beliefs or actions of people advocating holistic social or political reforms; the term Islamism alludes to militant or fundamentalist groups believing in the unity of Islam and politics.¹⁹ Such discourses apropos Islam and Islamism still concern societies worldwide.

Experts contend the existence of two types of Islamist groups, moderate and radical. Moderate Islamists reject violence in the name of religion and tend to accept democratic attitudes. Conversely, radical Islamist groups are often characterized by violence, reject democratic principles, and repudiate Western influences.²⁰ Radical Islamist groups also think that the Indonesian secular political system must be replaced by Islamic ideology and political Islam. Hence, such groups view top government officials as infidels. Some radical religious movements highlight aspects of fundamentalist aggression and extremism. Such radical Muslim groups are fanatical and aim to replace Indonesia's prevailing secular and political ideology and system.

Islamist groups are said to emerge both because of structural issues such as poverty, economic inequality, injustice, and global politics and because of the influence of certain ideological principles that underlie the existence of several normative doctrines.²¹ Such dogmas can shift the awareness of radicals and elicit an ideology of resistance to what is considered unIslamic. In this process, two radical groups of Islamists, radicals, or *Salafis* have emerged: *Jihadists* reject democracy, repudiate all Western influences, and justify violence and terrorism; *non-jihadist* Islamist factions and institutions accept democracy and reject violence and terrorism. However, both *jihadist* and *non-jihadist* radicalized Muslims accept the idea of the Islamic State and Islamic *Sharia* (law).

¹⁵ Ahmad Munjin Nasih et al. (2014), "Pemaknaan Dosen Agama Islam terhadap Radikalisasi Kehidupan Beragama Mahasiswa di Malang Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Sosial*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 126-132.

¹⁶ Ahmad Mohammad Al Hammad (2018), "Radikalisme Di Kalangan Mahasiswa Surabaya: Studi Kasus Kreteria Radikalisme Menurut Yusuf al-Qardhawi," Master's Thesis, UIN Sunan Ampel.

¹⁷ Abdul Munip (2012), "Menangkal Radikalisme Agama Di Sekolah," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 159-181.

¹⁸ Umi Sumbulah (2017), "De-Radicalisation of Indonesian Students: A Case Study of UIN Malang," *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp. 155-164.

¹⁹ Charlie Winter and Usama Hasan (2016), "The Balanced Nation: Islam and the Challenges of Extremism, Fundamentalism, Islamism and Jihadism," *Philosophia*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 667-688.

²⁰ Umi Sumbulah (2017), "De-Radicalisation of Indonesian Students," pp. 155-164.

²¹ Masdar Hilmy (2016), "Mengurai Jalan Buntu Teoretik Dalam Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial: Islamisme Radikal Dalam Perspektif Teori Modus Produksi, Naskah Orasi Ilmiah, Disampaikan Pada Pengukuhan Jabatan Guru Besar Dalam Bidang Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial," Naskah Akademik presented at the Pengukuhan Guru Besar, Surabaya.

Social media is a product of technological development that has provided countless tangible and unique benefits to people across the world, including *jihadists* or Islamic extremists.²² Several recent studies have revealed that thousands of websites and social media platforms function as immensely effective media for the dissemination of Islam-related information and the recruitment of new *jihadists*.²³ Such new media channels are also tremendously effective for propaganda purposes because they allow direct communication with various communities through interactive forums, chat rooms, and other social media aggregations such as WhatsApp groups, LINE Official accounts, and Facebook groups.²⁴ These media allow recruiters to radicalize individuals through two-way interactive messaging channels that can easily and directly expose people to the desired information.

Several research findings have indicated the extremely modern and sophisticated nature of the current propaganda strategy applied toward Islamic radicalization. Besides using online social networks, this strategy also entails the production and dissemination of high-quality videos and publications²⁵ that aim to deliver media content to new members or expose people outside the organization. Such content is intended to autonomously inculcate radicalization and indoctrination through involuntary media exposure.²⁶ Social media substantially influence the shaping of the social context and psychology of the disseminated content and can trigger a massive and systematic movement of radical understanding.²⁷

Social media allow various forms of online radicalization propaganda to be posted; often, social media platforms are also used to share doctrinal information as textual or nontextual content such as links to video games developed by Islamist groups intending to recruit members.²⁸ For example, an avatar game based on extremist dreams and perspectives could present a virtual experience of a journey to the second life. Such content is packaged and presented as high-quality three-dimensional graphic design with the potential to influence the ideas and emotions of their audiences. Hence, it becomes a very effective and efficient means of disseminating propaganda aimed at radicalization.²⁹

LINE is an instant messaging application that can be used on diverse devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers. LINE can be operated via Internet networks through which users can engage in activities such as exchanging messages, pictures, and videos. Users can also share posts on their timeline. LINE is ranked the fifth most popular social media platform in Indonesia, after YouTube 88%, WhatsApp 83%, Facebook 81%, and Instagram 80%. The top four brands are followed by LINE 59%, Twitter 52%, LinkedIn 33 %, and Snapchat 26%.³⁰ By 2021, LINE had globally accrued 178 million active monthly users. Figure 1 presents LINE's active monthly user numbers between 2014 and 2021:

²² Anne Aly et al. (2017), "Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization," pp. 1-9; John Curtis Amble (2012), "Combating Terrorism in the New Media Environment," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 35, No. 5, pp. 339-353.

²³ Bastug, Douai, and Akca (2020), "Exploring the 'Demand Side' of Online Radicalization," pp. 616-637; Anne Aly et al. (2017), "Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization," pp. 1-9; Mills et al. (2019), "Social Learning and Social Control," pp. 1-29; Cole (2012), "Radicalisation in Virtual Worlds," pp. 66-79; Droogan, Waldek and Blackhall (2018), "Innovation and Terror," pp. 170-184; Amble (2012), "Combating Terrorism in the New Media Environment," pp. 339-353; Sajid Amit, Imran Rahman and Sadiat Mannan (2020), "Social Media and Radicalisation of University Students in Bangladesh," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 228-243; Peter R. Neumann (2013), "Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 36, No. 6, pp. 431-459.

²⁴ Zoey Reeve (2019), "Engaging with Online Extremist Material: Experimental Evidence," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 33, No. 8, pp. 1-26; Anne Aly et al. (2017), "Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization," pp. 1-9.

²⁵ Droogan, Waldek and Blackhall (2018), "Innovation and Terror," pp. 170-184.

²⁶ Jytte Klausen (2015), "Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 1-22.

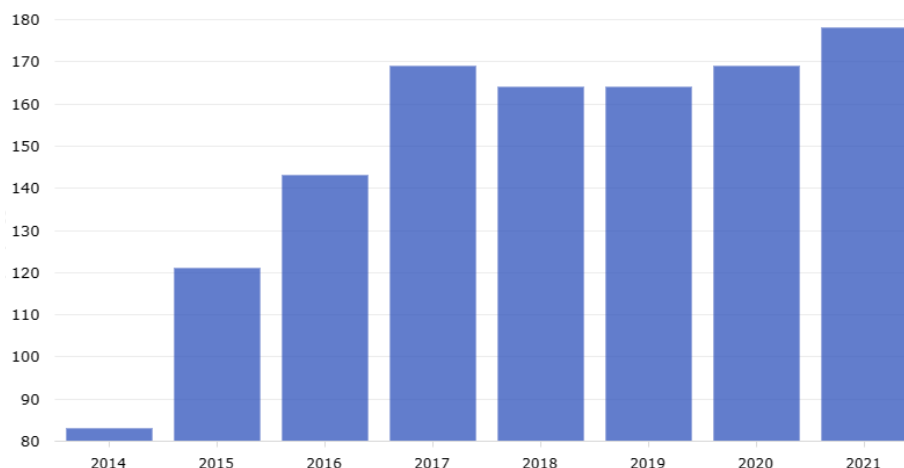
²⁷ Yusuf Hanafi et al. (2022), "Sentiment Prevalence on Jihad, Caliphate, and Bid'ah among Indonesian Students: Focusing on Moderate-Radical Muslim Group Tension," *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 2054532.

²⁸ Anne Aly et al. (2017), "Introduction to the Special Issue: Terrorist Online Propaganda and Radicalization," pp. 1-9.

²⁹ Bastug, Douai, and Akca (2020), "Exploring the 'Demand Side' of Online Radicalization," pp. 616-637; Droogan, Waldek and Blackhall (2018), "Innovation and Terror," pp. 170-184; Neumann (2013), "Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States," pp. 431-459.

³⁰ Andu.Link (2019), "Most Active Social Media Platform," <https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-indonesian-digital-report-2019/>.

Figure 1: The Number of Active Monthly Users of the LINE Application between 2014 and 2021



These data also reveal that Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, and Thailand became LINE's main markets in 2021, accounting for around 75% of the total global active monthly users. In Indonesia, LINE users are predominantly teenagers aged between 18 and 25 years. Currently, LINE is used by 90 million Indonesians, 80% of whom are active users. Globally, this application is used in 23 countries.³¹

LINE has evolved from year to year, and offers diverse features. The application continues to develop the space for expression to attract generation Z. Since 2021, LINE has introduced the OpenChat feature allowing users to join varied communities through which they can freely connect with others and share information outside their immediate networks. This feature is increasingly used by tertiary educational institutions to enhance the scope of higher education, for instance, during the admission of new students, to enable students to introduce themselves to each other and exchange information on-campus life, or to enable collaborative study.

Before the OpenChat feature was introduced, LINE users engaged in community-based activities by creating groups, sharing posts on their timelines, and through LINE Official accounts. Organizations and institutions can create LINE Official accounts to share posts on their timelines. A notification that the official account has shared a post then appears on the smartphones of the account's followers. This feature makes LINE a messaging application that attracts the younger generation, including university students. Most students have LINE accounts; hence, any information related to student activities can be disseminated through LINE. Certain groups desiring to spread radicalism to students who want to study religion but do not know where they can do so use the opportunity presented by social media to expand their networks. The LINE application represents one such channel.

LINE differs from other social media in several aspects and its advantages are vested in its features, which include: (1) a simple and distinctive chat display that classifies groups, personal chatrooms, and official accounts, (2) a timeline display that delivers information, status updates, and promotions from personal chatrooms or official accounts along with stories that offer users the impression of a friendly application, (3) a news portal titled LINE Today that updates users with relevant and interesting news items and presents weekly news summaries, (4) an in-application file storage service labeled LINE Keep in which files can be stored in the form of videos, photos, files, and chat backups, and (5) unique and exclusive stickers and avatars that interest younger generations.

Method

This study employed the case study design. The data for this study were obtained from personal chats (e.g., conversations and comments) accessed from a LINE Official account operated by a moderate Islamic student community at a public university in Indonesia.³² This community endeavors to disseminate a moderate Islamic perspective among university students to offset radical narratives. Participant responses were also noted and critically analyzed in this study to match questions with answers.

³¹ Tempo.co (2017), "Pengguna Aplikasi LINE di Indonesia Didominasi Remaja," <https://tekno.tempo.co/read/848829/pengguna-aplikasi-line-di-indonesia-didominasi-remaja>.

³² Robert K. Yin (1994), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, United States of America: Sage Publications.

The participants comprised university students engaged in discrete moderate Islamic campaigns on social media along with local organizations such as Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (Muslim Students' Association) and Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Student Movement). They were recruited using the convenience sampling technique to enable researchers to collect existing data. Some participants were also affiliated with international Islamic organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and ISIS. A few participants had previously been active members of radical Islamic groups at the university. The study data were descriptively analyzed, allowing the researchers to attain a clear understanding of messages shared by the participants in the LINE Official account. The study data encompassed conversations and comments posted from 2017 to 2020 by the followers of the LINE Official accounts of student members of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) enrolled in Indonesian state universities. Data spanning 2017–2020 were collected because radicalization-related issues began to emerge and were employed as political tools in those years. NU's LINE Official account had 5,051 followers during the studied period (2017–2020). This number diminished to 3,032 in 2022 because this account no longer actively shared posts and because inactive LINE users may have deleted their accounts. For analysis purposes, the researchers selected the posts of three participants because their content reflected the most intriguing and representative content and ideas. These selected participants were coded as P1, P2, and P3.

Some of the data are no longer available because of policy changes effected in the LINE app, transforming the originally free features to paid subscriptions. Hence, the data (e.g., posts and comments) on the official accounts also disappeared, including personal conversations (e.g., direct messages) between administrators and followers who shared accounts relating to the process of radicalizing students on state university campuses in Indonesia. Also, data related to the mention of campuses where followers come from. This LINE Official account was originally created to oppose radicalism in Indonesian state universities. Due to interesting content, many people shared posts on this account, so many followers came from outside the universities. Of the number of followers on the official account, there were several usernames involved in the discussion process that took place on the official account line of students at one of the state universities in East Java.

Results and Discussion

Many of the present study's participants were aware of their previous involvement with radical Islamic ideas. A personal chat sent by P1 depicted this discernment:

I am medical student. I am happy with your posts because I am able to know about moderate Islam and I am really interested in knowing more about it. Let me tell my experience first. I have ever joined radical understanding about Islam during I am in this campus. I have had phase where I feel I am the only one who is right in understanding Islam. The others who have different thinking, I consider them wrong. I have also joined hijrah movement in which monopolizing the truth of Islam has become something usual. Until finally, I know about moderate Islam and learn from your writings that you have posted in this LINE Official Account. If you have suggestions to me, how I have to learn Islam correctly from the beginning because moderate Islam can only be accepted rationally in my mind after I think form long time.

Interestingly, students from various universities in Indonesia followed this LINE account. For example, P2 studied at a state Islamic university in Indonesia. She voiced her experience of being previously trapped in radical Islamic concepts and contended that she had struggled hard to escape such thoughts:

I haven't joined NU organization yet so do my family. No one has joined NU in my family. Only a few of my friends have joined NU. However, I feel sympathy to NU in this last 5months, because I think NU is the most convenient for the guidance of Islam in Indonesia and best suited in my heart and mind. Everyone will be NU in the right time. Firstly, for your information, I have had radical phases such being supporter of HTI and also once became agnostic person. Yet, finally, I feel more believe in Allah and Islam after I know NU. Moreover, at the first time, I was a kind of person who always obeyed religion because my parents and environment of SDIT (Integrated Islamic Elementary School) are very strict and bounded with teaching of Ikhwanul Muslimin. I was pro to the Khilafah system and became a big fan of Felix Siauw. But finally, when I came to college, I debated with my colleague who is atheist because she broke my heart as a Muslim. She gave a lot of explanations and

thoughts that Allah is one of Gods who only exists within human mind of Muslim and she also objected lots of Zakir Naik's arguments.

However, all university students did not like this LINE account on which the posts taught them to become more open-minded. A radically indoctrinated participant condemned the account as "misleading" people. This kind of narrative was visible in the comments section with the greeting "Happy Christmas" to inculcate values of tolerance among religious communities in Indonesia. P3 said:

Congratulate to unsaved group. This account is misleading, misleading, don't talk about something where you don't have its knowledge. Don't bring misleading doctrine through this account, please understand Qur'am and sunnah. You are in wrong way in learning religion admin. Liberal, you are. Pretend to be tolerant to other religious communities, but like to insult other Moslems. Crazy you are!

The spread of radicalism among university students in Indonesia causes concern to many parties. An article published by the Indonesian Institute of Science (LIPI) in 2017 stated that the influence of radical understanding and ideology was increasingly troubling because this militant movement was growing among student groups. This rise was quite worrying because it could cause the nation to disintegrate in the next two or three decades if the government and moderate circles of society did not act against this trend.

Now I feel self-composed with all Islamic principles within NU especially nationality principle. My feeling about Islam like is getting stronger and I feel I am in the right way. It is really different feeling between nowadays and when I joined radical organization. I felt doubt when I joined them where I was in Neo-Khawarij circle that make me think I was in a wrong way. From those processes, I got outcome. For example, I become more tolerant and be kind to non-Muslims. As they don't insult Islam, I never blame them. I preciously feel uncomfortable with those who selfishly want to build Khilafah and tend to spread hoaxes. Nevertheless, I will be fine with Salafi or Wahabi who still nice to discuss with me. In my opinion it is okay for those who don't join NU as long as they still strive for the unity.

Emergent radicalism has encouraged scholars to closely scrutinize and investigate why such extremist ideas threaten Indonesian unity and diversity. It is not easy to understand radicalism from an academic perspective. It can be problematic to use the term "radicalism" to explain a phenomenon and such terminology remains questionable in many aspects (Yunanto 2018).³³ First, does the term "radicalism" connote the same as puritanism or nativism, or is it related to a contemporary issue? Is this term different from fundamentalism, extremism, fanaticism, sectarianism, and revivalism? Second, is radicalism synonymous with violence, political activism, or the concept of religion? In the present instance, radicalism is defined on the basis of Kallen's explanation as cited by Seligman (1972). This definition contends that radicalism exhibits three characteristics: (1) it represents a response in the form of evaluation, rejection, or opposition to ideas, institutions, and values, (2) it denotes an ideology aiming to institute fundamental changes to what is rejected or evaluated to suit the desired conditions, and (3) it demands high confidence from actors in the offered ideology or program.

This explanation aligns with the fact that many university students on LINE spread radical narratives from the subtle to the most fundamentalist levels. Public universities and state Islamic universities were selected as samples as they represent constructs of exposure to radicalism with the largest market share and the highest student interest in the topic. Several of these universities are also included in the 15 QS World Rankings of the best tertiary educational institutions in Indonesia, which makes them attractive to radical activists desiring to inculcate a radical understanding of Islam in a golden generation of the best students. Radical Islamist movements are disseminated through cadre formation in numerous religious institution campuses through activities undertaken by Campus Dakwah Institutions (LDK) in the form of Islamic religious assistance. For example, such inculcation would begin with misleading students to issue accusations against other students who do not profess congruent views about Islam. Thus, the studied LINE Official account was created to function as the right da'wah and spread Islam Wasatiyya on LINE in university environments. LINE was selected rather than Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or other social media platforms because observations revealed that LINE had 59% active users in Indonesia and it was

³³ Sri Yunanto (2018), *Islam Moderat vs Islam Radikal*, Yogyakarta: Medpress.

Countering Islamic Radicalism among Indonesian University Students: An Investigation on LINE Official Account the most widely used social media channel by university students on campuses of leading public universities in Indonesia.

The studied LINE Official account was created at the end of 2017, aiming to disseminate information on nationality, Islam, and Indonesia so that radical propaganda entering campuses could be counteracted. As the youth of Indonesia, university students must be protected from Islamic perspectives that threaten the integrity of the United State of the Republic of Indonesia and jeopardize the diversity of the Indonesian nation. Thus, the content posted on this LINE account encourages the values of moderate Islam, nationality, and respect for diversity to return students contaminated by the virus of radicalism to the conception of moderate Islam. Serious attention must be paid to religious radicalism spreading generally among students in Indonesia, particularly in Malang.³⁴ Different approaches must be adopted to overcome this serious problem. Lecturers must also take on the mantle of deradicalizing students influenced by radical Islamic ideas. Further, the country's bureaucrats must institute appropriate policies. More importantly, social media channels represent the perfect vehicles for the voices of radical Islam as an implication of the development of information and communication technologies. Thus, moderate Islam and deradicalization must also be propagated on social media platforms, especially LINE.³⁵

Further, many obstacles were encountered in the process of managing the studied LINE Official account. For example, NU students were not very enthusiastic about liking and sharing posts from the account. Thus, NU's material was not as massively diffused as the propaganda of radicalism and much of the content was reported by individuals who disagreed with the LINE Official account content posted by the NU Student Community. Such actions indicate that these individuals could not accept differences and tended to monopolize the truth. If this trend is allowed to continue over the long term, such students will become highly radicalized. Moderate Islam has been propagated by NU for numerous years to combat the deceptions and radical contents that proliferate rapidly and sometimes even attack the Ulama or Kiai of NU. Yet, many NU students still do not understand the importance of spreading moderate Islamic content on LINE in university contexts. Malcolm X once stated his opinions about the strength of social media: "the media's the most powerful entity on earth."³⁶ They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses."

On the other hand, this LINE Official account also benefited students and exerted a tangible impact on learners wanting to study Islam on-campus. Moderate Islamic narratives promote the values of humanity and peace and are accepted by Muslims as well as non-Muslims and are becoming increasingly viral among students. The studied LINE Official account was also often used as a place of confession for some students who admitted to problems in searching for their Islamic identity or acknowledge personality issues that they found difficult to disclose to others, such as being gay. The studied account is making a wider impact and attaining a good, smart, and intellectual image in the student community of the university. A study found that web-based and social media networks can develop into weapons of mass persuasion as they become essential aspects of the life of every individual.³⁷

The studied LINE Official account most substantially influenced students when it criticized the Student Executive Institution about the problems of radicalism at the university. The National Counter Terrorism Agency also recently released the names of seven Indonesian campuses as places where radical group indoctrination activities are occurring. It must be admitted that these universities have recently attracted public attention because of the infiltration of radicalism into their campuses. When asked whether radicalism was dangerous, NU students replied explicitly and without hesitation or awkwardness that it was very dangerous. How, then, did such students view radicalism? They strongly rejected radicalism as a perspective but acknowledged that many baseless observations on their timelines evidenced that they could not properly understand radicalism and were unable to define the phenomenon.

³⁴ Ahmad Munjin et al. (2014), "Pemaknaan Dosen Agama Islam Terhadap Radikalisasi Kehidupan Beragama Mahasiswa Di Malang Indonesia," pp. 126-132.

³⁵ Thompson (2011), "Radicalization and the Use of Social Media," pp. 167-190.

³⁶ Agung Vazza (2016), "Social Media and Radicalism Threat," *Republika*, <https://en.republika.co.id/berita/en/speak-out/ocr6fd413/social-media-and-radicalism-threat>.

³⁷ Wildan Nasution (2017), "Counteracting Radicalism in Social Media," *Megapolitan*, <https://megapolitan.antaranews.com/berita/26947/counteracting-radicalism-in-social-media>.

Popular Scientific Dictionary defines the word “radical” in the following etymological terms: 1. concerning the root of something; 2. atomic groups, both as compounds or groups themselves; 3. firm in demand and actions; 4. principal phenomena; 5. stringent in demanding change (in the government, the law, etc.). The word “radicalist” describes people who want change and desire to institute major reforms in government. Similarly, radicalism is a political notion pertaining to the state of demanding change and advocating a major overhaul as a means of achieving progress (Crenshaw 1987,³⁸ Partanto and Barry 2001³⁹).

Discrete interest groups often differently interpret the term “radicalism.” In his book *Islamic Radicalism, NU The Future of Moderatism in Indonesia*, Rubaidi (2007) defines the word in the context of religion as religious movements that try to completely overhaul existing social and political order by using violence.⁴⁰ Hasani and Naipospos’s (2010) book on *Religious Radicalism in Jabodetabek & West Java* describes radicalism through the lens of the social sciences as a view that wants to make fundamental changes according to its interpretation of social reality or ideology.⁴¹

Soekarno’s quote regarding radicalism is construed in a different light in definitions posted in the official media accounts of the Student Executive Institution: Radicalism as a text cannot be separated from the context. Soekarno’s opinions on radicalism must be read within the boundaries of his time, or in their context. Soekarno’s work “Reaching Free Indonesia” was written in Pangalengan on March 30, 1933, when Indonesia was not yet independent. Thus, radical acts could be justified in the context of the struggle for Indonesian independence from colonialism. However, it is not acceptable to quote Soekarno’s opinions on radicalism to justify radicalist Islamic views in the current context.

In our opinion, it was not wise for the Student Executive Institution to interpret the term radical in the stated manner in its social media posts. Our view is justified because the meaning of the term “radical” as noted in the *Indonesia Dictionary* is not fully construed; instead, a partial and single meaning of the term, “forward in thinking and acting” is adopted in the post to bolster the interests of the Student Executive Institution. Other connotations, for example, “stringently demanding change (in government, laws and regulations, etc.)” are neglected. Hence, the interpretation is suspect, as if it intends to persuade people that radicalism is not wrong. However, the posts were quite clever because they smoothly persuaded people and ended by inviting them to contemplate the stated issues.

Further, in the context of our current experiences, fundamentalism and simple radical understanding concerns people who consider other religious communities as enemies or threats to them and their religious beliefs. Such extreme perspectives make them strongly desire national governance based on their religious teachings. Everyone who harbors such ideas is considered radical because diverse radical actions are based on these two aspects: considering other religious communities as enemies and threats and wanting to make one’s religious teachings the basis of one’s political state.

The infiltration of radical ideas into university campuses is not a new phenomenon.⁴² Islamic radical understanding has existed on campuses since the New Order era. Many stories can be heard of students who dropped out of college merely to join the movement to establish an Islamic State. Such actions stem from an incomplete understanding of religion and eventually victimize students. In the past, we have observed radicalism in the form of rebellion, as by the Darul Islam/Islamic Armed Forces of Indonesia (Indonesian: *Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia* or DI/TII). These groups desired the establishment of an Islamic State and rebelled for that purpose.

According to Islamic law, The United State of the Republic of Indonesia is a legitimate country and its government is also legitimate. Islamic teachings forbid followers to commit rebellions against legitimate governments. Islamic education explicitly states the mandate of obedience to institutions, including

³⁸ Martha Crenshaw (1987), “Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 13-31.

³⁹ Pius A. Partanto and M. Dahlan Al Barry (2001), *Kamus Ilmiah Populer*, Surabaya: Arkola.

⁴⁰ A. Rubaidi (2007), *Radikalisme Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama Masa Depan Moderatisme: Islam Di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Logung Pustaka.

⁴¹ Ismail Hasani and B. T. Naipospos (2010), *Radikalisme Agama Di Jabodetabek & Jawa Barat: Implikasinya Terhadap Jaminan Kebebasan Beragama/Berkeyakinan*, Jakarta: Pustaka Masyarakat Stara.

⁴² Alexander R. Arifianto (2019), “Islamic Campus Preaching Organizations in Indonesia: Promoters of Moderation or Radicalism?,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 323-342; Mun’im Sirry (2020), “Muslim Student Radicalism and Self-Deradicalization in Indonesia,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 241-260.

Countering Islamic Radicalism among Indonesian University Students: An Investigation on LINE Official Account legitimate governments, as long as they do not command followers to sin (*durhaka*) against Allah.

Al-Imam Al-Nawawi affirms the *ulama's* consensus in his book *al-Minhaj Syarh Shahih Muslim* in Nasih (2014) that committing treason or rebelling against a legitimate government is illegitimate, even if the government is wicked or unjust.⁴³ “As for getting out of obedience to the government and fighting it, the law is *haram* based on *ijma'al-muslimin*, even though they are wicked and unjust.” Muslims have agreed to insurrections against legitimate governments only when they caused acts such as vilification, violence, inter-group disputes, and other immoral consequences.

Conclusion

This study suggested that a LINE Official account operated by a moderate Islamic student community at an Indonesian public university successfully directed students toward a judicious understanding of Islamic traditions and wisdom. However, such a social media group remains lacking. A pleasing consequence of the present study entailed a return to moderate Islam by some students who had previously joined radical Islamic groups within the university. Moderate Islamic groups can thus increasingly utilize social media platforms such as LINE to disseminate a moderate understanding of Islam and its teachings at universities. Such drives are mandated along with continuing campaigns to alleviate radicalism in university student communities.

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⁴³ Ahmad Munjin et al. (2014), “Pemaknaan Dosen Agama Islam Terhadap Radikalisasi Kehidupan Beragama Mahasiswa Di Malang Indonesia,” pp. 126-132.

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