

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNET ACCESS ON VULNERABILITY TO RADICALIZATION IN KENYA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE OF STUDY: This research aimed to investigate university students' perceptions of the influence of internet access factors on vulnerability to radicalization in Kenya and its implications for counseling.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM: Internet use has many positive aspects, but it also presents new challenges, including the potential for individuals to be exposed to and be influenced by extremist groups. The students in public universities are vulnerable to radicalization because they are in a stage of individual search for a sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals.

METHODOLOGY: The study adopted the mixed method convergent parallel research design targeting students, counselors, and peer counselors from two purposively selected public universities in Kenya. A sample of 644 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula, and data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Analysis utilized chi-square tests with SPSS version 23.0 and NVivo 12, achieving instrument reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79).

RESULTS: The results of the study showed a significant association between university students' perception of the purpose for internet access, exposure to radicalization materials online and reasons for joining extremist groups and vulnerability to radicalization.

Conclusion: The study concludes that internet access significantly affects students' vulnerability to radicalization. Addressing this issue requires targeted counseling interventions to reduce susceptibility to extremist ideologies.

Recommendations: Counsellors and educators need to provide digital literacy to help vulnerable individuals critically assess online content, identify extremist propaganda and avoid joining extremist groups.

Keywords: *Student's perception, influence of internet access, vulnerability to radicalization, implications for counselling.*

INTRODUCTION

Radicalization is a gradual process through which an individual or group comes to adopt an extremist belief system that rejects established order, embraces a polarized worldview, and potentially legitimizes the use of coercion or violence in pursuit of political, religious, or social goals (Hamed El-Said, 2015). Kimari and Wakesho (2017) report that the United States of America and other countries have adopted a ‘softer’ approach to terrorism and violent extremism, termed as countering violent extremism (CVE). The “softer” approach to terrorism refers to non-coercive strategies such as counter-radicalization, preventing violent extremism (PVE), and de-radicalization programs that address the root causes of extremism through community engagement, education, rehabilitation, counselling and ideological dialogue rather than military or security force action. Regionally, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) developed a CVE strategy and established the IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (ICEPCVE) program on strengthening resilience to violent extremism in Africa.

Figueiras and Ipince (2018) observe that governments and institutions seek to detect radicalised individuals within educational institutions through surveillance strategies, fierce sanctions and harsh punishment. This is a short-term intervention whereas a long-term preventive intervention would involve counselling individuals who are vulnerable. Blattman and Ralston (2015), point out that CVE preventive soft-skill approach involves social interventions that aim to provide life-skills for vulnerable individuals to induce resilience, self-control and behavioral change, through training, education and psychological assistance.

There is increasing research attention towards understanding the increase in radicalization worldwide and why the youth are vulnerable (RAN Research, 2016). The Global Terrorism Index (2017) records that lethal terrorist attacks have taken place in Croatia, Syria and Iraq. This data indicates that radicalization is a global phenomenon that needs to be addressed at early stages in order to counter terrorist attacks. According to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2014) the Global Terrorism Database report 1970- 2013, records that more than 3,400 terrorist attacks targeting educational institutions took place in 110 countries. These educational institutional attacks comprised 2.7 per cent of all terrorist attacks worldwide during the same period. In the year 2004 at the Beslan school attack siege in Russia, the most lethal terrorist attack in an educational institution, took place whereby 344 people were killed and 700 wounded.

Cachalia *et al.* (2016) observe that terrorism in Africa has had an immense influence in terms

of lives lost, physical injury and trauma, the displacement of families and communities, increased insecurity and varied barriers to development. A high number of young people have been recruited into extremist causes and extremist groups globally rely on young people to make up the numbers that reinforce their cause, thus making the youth more vulnerable than other groups. The authors further note that the demographic growth of the youth in Africa, along with the various socio-economic challenges this presents for societies, further adds to the vulnerability of youth to radicalization. Many of the youths who may be vulnerable are in the universities in Kenya therefore it is important that counselling be used to counter violent extremism.

An empirical study undertaken by Botha (2014) asserts that most of the young people who join violent groups are youths aged between 20 and 25 years. This category is believed to be active on the internet and vulnerable to propaganda and manipulation. According to Jamah (2015), the internet is increasingly being used by terrorists to recruit unsuspecting youths in Kenya and around the globe. The repercussion of recruitment of Kenyan youths into the terror groups is the increasing number of attacks on learning institutions. Bar (2016) notes that terrorists and extremists also manipulate and exploit the grievances of the alienated youth to create despondency.

Radicalization has caused death, psychological and socioeconomic effects on the lives of individuals, families and the entire country. Counselling is important in addressing these effects of radicalization to counter and prevent violent extremism.

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory Report (2020) indicated that in Kenya 69 attacks, 122 terrorism related fatalities and 49 persons were injured in the year 2020. In 2018, 23 attacks 56 fatalities and 49 persons were injured as a result of terrorism. The report further posits that the number of attacks per target type included attacks on civilians, civilian vehicles, telecommunication masts and schools. CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory Report (2022) further reported that seventy-seven terror-related attacks were reported in the year 2022. This is a 36% increase compared to 51 attacks recorded in 2021. Out of a total of 77 reported attacks during the period close to 50% were targeted at security officials. Civilians were frequent targets of terror-related attacks by suspected violent extremist groups. In Mandera on 25th October, 2022 a standard seven student was injured when suspected Al Shabaab attackers hurled explosives into a primary school in Fino, targeting teachers and students. Suspected Al Shabaab militants also raided two mosques in Mandera armed with AK47 rifles. This data shows that extremism and terror attacks are still on the rise in Kenya and vulnerable groups include students in

institutions of learning thus the need to have preventive measures to counter violent extremism. Online platforms provide access to radicalizing material, including extremist propaganda, discussion forums, and social media networks (HM Government, 2021). The anonymous nature of the internet allows individuals to explore radical ideologies without immediate social consequences. These online groups often offer students a sense of belonging thus making them particularly appealing to students seeking answers to personal or social issues (Conway, 2017). Internet access is a significant factor that influences vulnerability to radicalization of university students. The internet, with its vast reach and access to extremist content, can provide students with an environment where these ideologies are easily accessible and reinforced. Addressing this factor through counselling students and psychoeducation on influence of the internet can help mitigate the risk of radicalization. Academic institutions are ideal spaces for fostering dissent and complex opinions, allowing for ideas to be expressed, discussed, heard and examined (O'Donnell, 2016). The provision of counselling services to the vulnerable youth can counteract the increase of violence extremist ideas through fostering positive values, a sense of belonging, developing cognitive, emotional and social skills, and improved social conditions for individuals and communities (UNESCO, 2017).

Whittaker *et al.* (2021) asserts that the digital ecosystem presents students with extremist beliefs through many mechanisms, including Algorithmic Echo Chambers. Platforms such as X, TikTok, and YouTube employ algorithms based on user interaction. Upon engaging with a contentious or political videos, the site persistently curates analogous, more extreme material, therefore normalizing radical perspectives (Haroon *et al.*, 2022). Extremist recruiters are using university forums, message boards, and social groups by disguising propaganda as intellectual discourse, free-speech promotion, or revolutionary ideology, therefore attracting students who are investigating new political or social identities (Vergani *et al.*, 2020).

Radicalization often transitions from public social media platforms to private, encrypted applications such as Telegram or Discord. Students are invited to exclusive groups where they cultivate deep internet connections and encounter unmediated radical ideologies (Conway *et al.*, 2019; Europol, 2023; Koehler, 2021). Extremist organizations use voice conversations and gaming servers (e.g., in titles such as Call of Duty or Roblox) to disseminate propaganda and attract susceptible young people during gameplay. Alternative online gaming environments and their corresponding communication channels facilitate extremist actors' engagement with youth through informal contacts, the dissemination of ideological information, and recruiting operations disguising as typical gaming activity (Davey & Ebner, 2019; Munn, 2022). Youths

are psychological targeted in the radicalization process by capitalizing on their need for identification and belonging by presenting concerns through reductive binary perspectives and providing a feeling of purpose and importance (Borum, 2011; Kruglanski *et al.*, 2014; Vergani *et al.*, 2020).

The Ran Research Paper (2016) points out that radicalization gap analysis research in universities is of concern and requires notable attention. Investigating what brings about certain susceptibilities is important to conceptualize protective factors. A study of student's perceptions is important as this shape how students interpret their surrounding and sense of belonging. A study on perceptions allows the researcher to address cognitive and emotional frameworks that contribute to extremist ideologies and behaviour. If students feel isolated or excluded their identity is affected and radical ideologies can be appealing and provide a sense of belonging. It has been acknowledged that some radicals have a university degree, that universities can act as both creators and barriers to radicalization, and that they can be platforms for radical preachers' dissemination efforts. The authors also point out that at the same time there are a series of gaps concerning: the concrete role the university environment plays in radicalization; the effectiveness and desirability of allowing or curtailing access to radical messages; the specific pedagogical and social challenges posed by the fact that university students are adults in educational settings. The authors further posit that research in universities is needed to address youth identity crisis and how education and counselling can build resistance and resilience to various types of extremism.

Counselling is a strategy that should be extensively used to complement security- focused counter terrorism measures with a framework for CVE measures, which include the provision of employment options, business opportunities and life skills, among other interventions, aimed at reducing youth vulnerability to violent extremism (Ogada, 2017). According to the Ran Research Paper (2016) a research gap in the study of radicalization is in the area of better understand the role of peer groups and online communities in the radicalization processes; the role of particular milieus in preventing or facilitating radicalization; the role of small group dynamics, including group polarization, and group think; ways in which communities can be made more resilient and how they can acquire social and political intervention; and the prerequisites for a healthy and inclusive community. These are some of the issues that the study seeks to address.

Statement of the Problem

As a response to ever growing radicalization, the Kenyan government has put in place counter-terrorism strategies by the enactment of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, establishment of the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE), County Action Plans (CAPs) and Anti-Terrorism Police Unit. Learning institutions have also improved their security systems and surveillance as they seek to counter terror activities. The National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) was also adopted by the 47 counties through customized County Action Plans (CAPs). Both NSCVE and CAPs are dependent on collaboration between the national government, civil society organizations, local communities, development partners and county governments for their success. However, despite these measures, radicalization still continues to increase. These security-oriented interventions to Counter Terrorism are short term, the focus should therefore be the provision of long-term interventions that would involve counselling individuals who are vulnerable to induce resilience, self-control and behavioral change, through training, education and psychological assistance. Radical groups and terrorists have targeted learning institutions, especially public universities, because they are well positioned for maximum exchange of cultures, politics and ideas contrary to rigid ideologies of extremist groups. Some of the drivers of radicalization include the family and internet access.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to examine University students' perceptions on how internet access factors contribute to students' vulnerability to radical ideas. The study intends to provide preventive measures and counselling interventions to counter radicalization among university students in Kenya.

Objective of the Study

To establish university students' perception on the influence of selected internet access factors on vulnerability to radicalization.

Hypothesis of the Study

The study was guided by the following hypothesis:

H₀: There is no statistically significant university students' perceived influence of selected internet access factors on vulnerability to radicalization.

Vulnerable individuals like students in universities, who maybe struggling with identity and belonging as they are in the fifth stage of Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

could experience cognitive dissonance when their current worldview is contradicted by negative experiences like perceived injustices and societal exclusion. In such cases, radical groups can offer a sense of belonging, certainty, and a cohesive narrative that resolves dissonance by providing an alternative worldview that justifies their feelings and experiences (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014).

Maskaliunaite (2015) holds that people can respond to cognitive dissonance by over-justification. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that people will justify and rationalize their actions and beliefs to reduce psychological discomfort. The more the investment radicals have made in the radicalization process, such as terminating familial bonds to join a radical organization, the more they would perceive that their involvement justified the sacrifice of those familial ties. The author further observes that cognitive dissonance will lead radicalized individuals to intensify their commitment to their extremist beliefs or affiliations. This theory is important as it plays a role in the emergence of radicalization and explains the cognitive processes in an individual when radicalized.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework exhibits a diagrammatic representation of relationship between variables

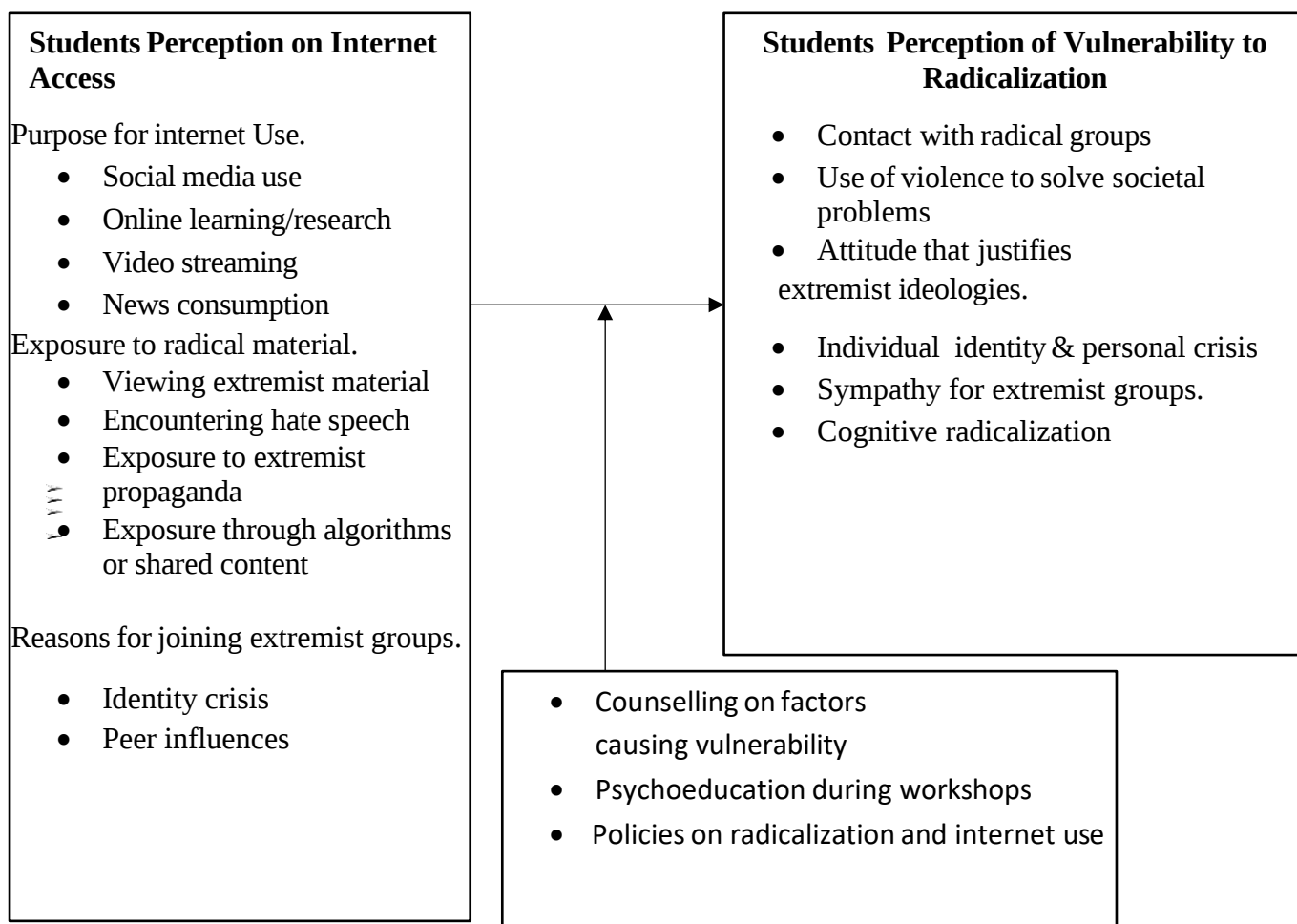


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

From the conceptual framework, the independent variable encompasses students' perception of the influence of internet access factors. On the other hand, the dependent variable is students' vulnerability to radicalization. In an optimal situation, the conceptual framework suggests that students' perceptions on internet access factors cause vulnerability to radicalization. However, in reality the conceptual framework shows that there are intervening variables which may affect the causal relationship of internet access factors and vulnerability to radicalization. These intervening variables are counselling on vulnerability to radicalization, policies on radicalization and internet usage in the university and psycho-education to students on vulnerability to radicalization during workshops. The effects of these variables were reduced by holding them constant throughout the research period.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The mixed method convergent parallel research design was used. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently. The target population comprised of all the 443,783 students enrolled in 31 accredited universities, 120 student counsellors and 960 student peer counsellors. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two public universities in Kenya. Determination of sample sizes were done using Yamane's formula and then proportional sampling employed. The study sample size comprised of 644 respondents.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents a cross-tabulation of students' perceptions on the purpose for internet access and their perceived justification of extremist ideologies. The results show the distribution of responses across a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation between purpose for internet access and vulnerability to radicalization

Purpose for internet access	Measure	SD	D	I	A	SA	Total
Never	Count	5	12	8	37	68	130
	Expected Count	2.8	17.8	17.8	50.6	41.1	130.0
	% of Total	1.5%	3.6%	2.4%	30.0%	20.7%	39.5%
Very rarely	Count	0	10	6	30	18	64
	Expected Count	1.4	8.8	8.8	24.9	20.2	64.0
	% of Total	0.0%	3.0%	1.8%	9.1%	5.5%	19.5%

Purpose for internet access	Measure	SD	D	I	A	SA	Total
Rarely	Count	2	18	15	42	9	86
	Expected Count	1.8	11.8	11.8	33.5	27.2	86.0
	% of Total	0.6%	5.5%	4.6%	12.8%	2.7%	26.1%
Very often	Count	0	4	11	13	4	32
	Expected Count	0.7	4.4	4.4	12.4	10.1	32.0
	% of Total	0.0%	1.2%	3.3%	4.0%	1.2%	9.7%
Always	Count	0	1	5	6	5	17
	Expected Count	0.4	2.3	2.3	6.6	5.4	17.0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.3%	1.5%	1.8%	1.5%	5.2%
Total	Count	7	45	45	128	104	329
	Expected Count	7.0	45.0	45.0	128.0	104.0	329.0
	% of Total	2.1%	13.7%	13.7%	38.9%	31.6%	100.0%

Note. SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; I = Indifferent; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree.

Overall, the findings in Table 1 suggest an association between purpose of internet use and agreement with extremist justification statements. The largest proportion of respondents (38.9%) agreed that extremist ideologies could be justified, while 31.6% strongly agreed, indicating that a majority of respondents (70.5%) showed some level of agreement. This suggests a relatively high perceived vulnerability to ideological justification among students in the study population. When examining internet access patterns, students who reported using the internet “never” or “rarely” still demonstrated high levels of agreement with extremist justification statements. For example, among those who reported “never” using the internet for the stated purpose, 30.0% agreed and 20.7% strongly agreed. Similarly, in the “rarely” category, 12.8% agreed and 2.7% strongly agreed. This indicates that vulnerability is not exclusively confined to heavy internet users, although patterns differ in intensity. However, students who reported more frequent internet use (“very often” and “always”) also showed engagement with extremist justification views, though in smaller absolute numbers due to lower sample sizes. For instance, among those who used the internet “very often,” 4.0% agreed and 1.2% strongly agreed, while among those who “always” used the internet, 1.8% agreed and 1.5% strongly agreed. This suggests that frequent internet exposure may still contribute to ideological susceptibility, but the effect is not strictly linear. The expected counts indicate that observed responses in higher agreement categories (Agree and Strongly Agree) were generally above expected values in several groups, particularly in the “never” and “rarely” categories. This pattern may suggest an uneven distribution of responses, implying that other contextual or psychosocial factors beyond internet usage frequency may also influence vulnerability to

extremist ideologies. Chi square test of independence on cross tabulation between perception of students on the purpose for internet access and vulnerability to radicalization was done and the results presented on Table 2.

Table 2: Chi-square statistics on the relationship between purpose for internet access and vulnerability to radicalization

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	71.314	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	73.668	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.604	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	329		

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

The Chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant association between students' perception of the purpose for internet access and their vulnerability to radicalization, $\chi^2(16, N = 329) = 71.314, p < .001$. This indicates that the relationship between the two variables is not due to chance, and that patterns of internet use are significantly associated with how students perceive or justify extremist ideologies. The likelihood ratio test further confirmed this relationship, $\chi^2(16) = 73.668, p < .001$, reinforces the association. Additionally, the linear-by-linear association test was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 15.604, p < .001$, suggesting the presence of a meaningful trend in the relationship between the variables. Overall, these results indicate that students' purpose for internet access is significantly related to their vulnerability to radicalization. This implies that variations in how students engage with the internet (e.g., academic use, social networking, entertainment, or informational purposes) may influence their exposure to, and acceptance of, extremist ideological narratives. There is a statistically significant relationship between internet use and vulnerability to radicalization. The relationship is strong enough to reject the null hypothesis of no association. The results suggest that internet engagement patterns may play a role in shaping ideological susceptibility among university students. To determine the strength of the relationship between students' perception of the purpose for internet access and vulnerability to radicalization, a measure of association was computed using Phi and Cramer's V. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Symmetric measures of association between purpose for internet access and vulnerability to radicalization

Measure	Value	Approximate Significance
Phi	.466	.000
Cramer's V	.233	.000
N of Valid Cases	329	

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

The results of the symmetric measures indicate that there is a statistically significant association between students' perception of the purpose for internet access and vulnerability to radicalization ($p < .001$). The Phi coefficient value of .466 suggests a moderate to strong association between the two variables. However, since Phi is most appropriate for smaller contingency tables, Cramer's V is considered the more appropriate measure for interpretation in this case due to the larger table dimensions. Cramer's V value of .233 indicates a weak to moderate relationship between the variables. This suggests that while there is a statistically significant association between internet use patterns and vulnerability to radicalization, the strength of the relationship is moderate. In practical terms, this implies that internet access behavior contributes to vulnerability, but it is not the sole or dominant predictor; other social, psychological, and environmental factors likely play a significant role.

The null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant university students' perceived influence of selected internet access factors on vulnerability to radicalization was therefore rejected. The findings in the study agree with findings by Talukdar and Tanvir (2022) that 2013 terrorist organizations have utilized the internet to disseminate their ideas, rendering online radicalization a significant threat for Bangladesh. The real world has been converted into a virtual realm, enabling recruiters to connect with a broader audience than previously possible. Neuman's (2013) findings also concur with the study findings in a study on the Association between Students' Exposure to Radicalization Materials and Vulnerability to Radicalization". According to approximately 40 interviews with government officials and other stakeholders, internet radicalization is a significant focus for countries in their Countering Violent Extremism initiatives. The author further posits that

A robust consensus exists among various U.S. government entities, departments, agencies, and independent analysts, asserting that the increasing significance of the internet in radicalization constitutes the most substantial innovation influencing homegrown radicalization since the

September 11 attacks in 2001. Moreover, as the internet continues to advance, so too do the tactics used by those seeking to exploit this technology for the purpose of instigating terror. According to the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (2011) the internet is important in the radicalization process. The findings reveal that there are limited instances of individuals becoming radicalized only online, although indications suggest that this phenomenon may escalate in the future. Moreover, there is limited evidence about the internet's influence on recruitment to terrorist networks or the use of violence; hence, offline socialization continues to be significant. Evidence indicates that Al Qaeda is increasingly prioritizing individual radicalization according to the findings. Recent research on online impacts on terrorist behavior has yielded data both supporting and contradicting the view of internet activities as a distinct risk factor. Distinct lines of research indicate that offenders radicalized online provide a lesser danger to society in comparison to those engaged in more extensive, face-to-face social interactions (Hamid & Ariza, 2022; Kenyon *et al.*, 2021).

Binder and Kenyon (2022) provide a contemporary synthesis of prior research which supports the study findings. The authors categorize online activity into five primary domains: Financing, networking and coordination, recruiting and radicalization, information transmission, and mobilization to action. The authors further conclude that all extreme groups participate in online activities which resemble typical internet use. The Internet was seen as essential in the creation, dissemination, and consumption of extremist material about radicalization.

Studies by Harris-Hogan (2012) are contrary to the study findings as the author posits that the internet played a minor role or its role came at a later stage in the radicalization process, within the Australian neo jihadist context. The author emphasizes that this mostly occurs only when individuals are linked to the network or, at the very least, involved in its peripheral. Individuals are far more vulnerable to recruitment into terrorist networks through intimate social relationships than through any internet means. Zammit (2012) similarly asserts that the internet does not seem to have a substantial impact on jihadist radicalization relative to human connections with radicalizing influences in Australia.

Association Between Students' Exposure to Radicalization Materials and Vulnerability to Radicalization

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted among 329 university students to establish whether there was significant association between students' exposure to radicalization materials and perception on reasons to justify extremist ideologies. Table 4 shows the cross tabulation between these variables.

Table 4: Exposure to radicalization materials

	Measure	SD	D	I	A	SA	Total
Never	Count	6	18	10	54	86	174
	Expected Count	3.7	23.8	23.8	67.7	55.0	174.0
	% of Total	1.8%	5.5%	3.0%	16.4%	26.1%	52.9%
Very rarely	Count	0	6	9	30	7	52
	Expected Count	1.1	7.1	7.1	20.2	16.4	52.0
	% of Total	0.0%	1.8%	2.7%	9.1%	2.1%	15.8%
Rarely	Count	1	12	16	32	9	70
	Expected Count	1.5	9.6	9.6	27.2	22.1	70.0
	% of Total	0.3%	3.6%	4.9%	9.7%	2.7%	21.3%
Very often	Count	0	8	7	8	1	24
	Expected Count	0.5	3.3	3.3	9.3	7.6	24.0
	% of Total	0.0%	2.4%	2.1%	2.4%	0.3%	7.3%
Always	Count	0	1	3	4	1	9
	Expected Count	0.2	1.2	1.2	3.5	2.8	9.0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.3%	0.9%	1.2%	0.3%	2.7%
Total	Count	7	45	45	128	104	329
	Expected Count	7.0	45.0	45.0	128.0	104.0	329.0
	% of Total	2.1%	13.7%	13.7%	38.9%	31.6%	100.0%

Note. SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; I = Indifferent; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree.

Table 4 shows the relationship between students' exposure to online radicalization materials and their vulnerability to radicalization. The findings indicate that a large proportion of respondents (52.9%) reported never being exposed to radicalization materials, yet within this group, a considerable number still agreed (16.4%) or strongly agreed (26.1%) with statements justifying extremist ideologies. This suggests that vulnerability to extremist ideology is not limited to those frequently exposed to radical content online.

Among respondents who reported rare or very rare exposure, similar patterns emerge, with a notable proportion still expressing agreement with extremist justification statements. For

instance, in the “rarely exposed” category, 9.7% agreed and 2.7% strongly agreed, indicating continued ideological susceptibility even at lower exposure levels.

However, respondents who reported higher exposure levels (“very often” and “always”) also demonstrated engagement with extremist justification, although their absolute numbers are smaller due to lower representation in the sample. In the “very often” category, 2.4% agreed and 0.3% strongly agreed, while in the “always” category, 1.2% agreed and 0.3% strongly agreed.

Overall, the distribution suggests that while exposure to radicalization materials is associated with increased vulnerability, the relationship is not strictly linear. This implies that exposure may interact with other influencing factors such as individual psychological characteristics, peer influence, and offline social environments in shaping vulnerability to extremist ideologies. Chi square test of independence on cross tabulation between exposure to radicalization materials and vulnerability to radicalization was done and the results presented on Table 5.

Table 5: Chi-square Statistics on Cross Tabulation Between Exposure to Radicalization Materials and Vulnerability to Radicalization

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	78.160	16	< .001
Likelihood Ratio	82.159	16	< .001
Linear-by-Linear Association	27.761	1	< .001
N of Valid Cases	329		

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between students’ exposure to online radicalization materials and their vulnerability to radicalization. The results indicate that there is a statistically significant association between the two variables, $\chi^2(16, N = 329) = 78.160, p < .001$. This implies that the pattern of responses observed is not due to random variation, but reflects a meaningful relationship between exposure to radicalization materials and vulnerability to extremist ideology.

The likelihood ratio test further supports this finding, $\chi^2(16) = 82.159, p < .001$, confirming the association across alternative estimation methods. Additionally, the linear-by-linear association test was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 27.761, p < .001$, indicating the

presence of a significant trend in the relationship. This suggests that as exposure to radicalization materials increases, there is a corresponding increase in vulnerability to radicalization among students.

Overall, these results demonstrate that exposure to radicalization materials online is significantly associated with students' susceptibility to extremist ideologies. This supports the view that online environments play an important role in shaping ideological exposure and potential radicalization pathways among university students. To determine the strength of the relationship between students' perception of exposure to radicalization materials and vulnerability to radicalization a measure of association was computed using Phi and Cramer's V. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Symmetric measures of association between exposure to radicalization materials and vulnerability to radicalization

Measure	Value	Approximate Significance
Phi	.487	< .001
Cramer's V	.244	< .001
N of Valid Cases	329	

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

The symmetric measures in Table 6 were used to determine the strength of the relationship between students' exposure to online radicalization materials and their vulnerability to radicalization. The results show that the relationship is statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that exposure to radicalization materials is meaningfully associated with vulnerability to extremist ideologies among university students.

The Phi coefficient value of .487 suggests a moderate to strong association between the variables. However, because Phi is more appropriate for smaller contingency tables, Cramer's V is considered the more suitable measure for interpretation in this study due to the larger table dimensions.

Cramer's V value of .244 indicates a weak to moderate relationship between exposure to radicalization materials and vulnerability to radicalization. This suggests that although exposure to extremist content online is significantly related to vulnerability, the strength of this relationship is not strong. In practical terms, this implies that exposure contributes to vulnerability, but it is not the sole or dominant factor influencing radicalization among students.

Overall, the findings suggest that online exposure plays a role in shaping ideological susceptibility, but other contextual, psychological, and social factors likely interact with exposure to determine the extent of vulnerability to radicalization. The null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant university students' perceived influence of selected internet access factors on vulnerability to radicalization was therefore rejected.

Association Between Reasons for Joining Extremist Networks and Vulnerability to Radicalization

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to establish whether there was significant association between students' perceived reasons for joining extremist networks and their perceived justification of extremist ideologies as an indicator of vulnerability to radicalization's study used sample size of 329. Table 7 shows the cross tabulation between these variables.

Table 7: Cross Tabulation between Reasons for Joining Extremist Networks and Vulnerability to Radicalization

Reasons for joining extremist networks	Measure	SA	A	I	D	SD	Total
Strongly agree (SA)	Count	0	7	9	49	62	127
	Expected	2.7	17.4	17.4	49.4	40.1	127.0
	Count						
	% of Total	0.0%	2.1%	2.7%	14.9%	18.8%	38.6%
Agree (A)	Count	2	21	18	40	20	101
	Expected	2.1	13.8	13.8	39.3	31.9	101.0
	Count						
	% of Total	0.6%	6.4%	5.5%	12.2%	6.1%	30.7%
Indifferent (I)	Count	4	7	5	19	13	48
	Expected	1.0	6.6	6.6	18.7	15.2	48.0
	Count						
	% of Total	1.2%	2.1%	1.5%	5.8%	4.0%	14.6%
Disagree (D)	Count	1	8	7	13	7	36
	Expected	0.8	4.9	4.9	14.0	11.4	36.0
	Count						
	% of Total	0.3%	2.4%	2.1%	4.0%	2.1%	10.9%
Strongly disagree (SD)	Count	0	2	6	7	2	17

	Expected count	0.4	2.3	2.3	6.6	5.4	17.0
	% of Total	0.0%	0.6%	1.8%	2.1%	0.6%	5.2%
Total	Count	7	45	45	128	104	329
	Expected Count	7.0	45.0	45.0	128.0	104.0	329.0
	% of Total	2.1%	13.7%	13.7%	38.9%	31.6%	100.0%

Note. SD = Strongly disagree; D = Disagree; I = Indifferent; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree.

Table 7 presents the relationship between students' perceived reasons for joining extremist networks and their vulnerability to radicalization. The findings indicate variation in responses across all categories of vulnerability, suggesting a relationship between motivations for joining extremist networks and ideological susceptibility.

A notable proportion of respondents who strongly agreed that certain factors influence joining extremist networks (38.6%) also showed mixed responses in relation to justification of extremist ideologies. Within this group, 14.9% disagreed and 18.8% strongly disagreed with extremist justification, while smaller proportions agreed (2.1%) or strongly agreed (0.0%). This indicates that even among those who acknowledge motivations for joining extremist networks, there is still considerable resistance to justifying extremist ideologies.

Similarly, among respondents who agreed that factors contribute to joining extremist networks (30.7%), responses were distributed across all categories of vulnerability, with 12.2% disagreeing and 6.1% strongly disagreeing with extremist justification, while 6.4% agreed and 0.6% strongly agreed. This reflects a mixed level of ideological susceptibility within this group.

Lower levels of agreement and stronger disagreement are observed among respondents who were indifferent or disagreed with the reasons for joining extremist networks, suggesting lower engagement with extremist justification ideologies.

Overall, the distribution indicates that perceived reasons for joining extremist networks are associated with vulnerability to radicalization, but the relationship is not uniform. This suggests that while motivations such as identity seeking, peer influence, and ideological appeal may contribute to susceptibility, they interact with other protective factors that reduce outright acceptance of extremist ideologies.

Chi square test of independence on cross tabulation between reasons for joining extremist networks and vulnerability to radicalization was done and the results presented on Table 8.

Table 8: Chi-square Statistics on Cross Tabulation Between Reasons for Joining Extremist Networks and Vulnerability to radicalization

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	56.700	16	< .001
Likelihood Ratio	55.886	16	< .001
Linear-by-Linear Association	23.019	1	< .001
N of Valid Cases	329		

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

A Chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relationship between students' perceived reasons for joining extremist networks and their vulnerability to radicalization. The results indicate a statistically significant association between the two variables, $\chi^2(16, N = 329) = 56.700, p < .001$. This suggests that the pattern of responses is not due to chance, but reflects a meaningful relationship between motivations for joining extremist networks and students' susceptibility to extremist ideology.

The likelihood ratio test also confirms this relationship, $\chi^2(16) = 55.886, p < .001$, strengthening the robustness of the findings across different statistical estimators. Furthermore, the linear-by-linear association test is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 23.019, p < .001$, indicating a significant linear trend in the data. This suggests that changes in perceptions regarding reasons for joining extremist networks are systematically associated with changes in vulnerability to radicalization.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that students' perceived reasons for joining extremist networks are significantly associated with their vulnerability to radicalization. This implies that motivational factors such as identity seeking, perceived injustice, peer influence, or ideological attraction may play an important role in shaping susceptibility to extremist beliefs among unvisited students.

The measure of strength of effect on cross tabulation of between reasons for joining extremist networks and vulnerability to radicalization was done and results presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Symmetric measures of association between reasons for joining extremist

networks and vulnerability to radicalization

Measure	Value	Approximate Significance
Phi	.415	< .001
Cramer's V	.208	< .001
N of Valid Cases	329	

Note. $p < .001$ indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Table 9 presents the symmetric measures used to assess the strength of the relationship between students' perceived reasons for joining extremist networks and their vulnerability to radicalization. The results indicate that the relationship is statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming that motivations for joining extremist networks are associated with vulnerability to extremist ideologies among university students.

The Phi coefficient value of .415 suggests a moderate association between the two variables. However, since Phi is generally more appropriate for smaller contingency tables, Cramer's V is considered the more reliable measure of association in this study due to the larger table dimensions.

Cramer's V value of .208 indicates a weak to moderate relationship between reasons for joining extremist networks and vulnerability to radicalization. This suggests that although motivational factors significantly influence vulnerability, the strength of this relationship is relatively modest. In practical terms, this implies that while reasons such as identity seeking, social influence, and ideological appeal contribute to susceptibility, they do not operate in isolation and are likely moderated by other psychological, social, and environmental factors. The null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant university students' perceived influence of selected internet access factors on vulnerability to radicalization was therefore rejected.

Finding in the study are similar to a study conducted in Bangladesh examined youth vulnerability to violent extremist groups in the Indo-Pacific, identifying youth as the primary target group for radicalization and recruitment by such groups. The study involved participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, highlighting that rising unemployment and substantial engagement with the internet and social media among youth contribute to radicalization and recruitment. The study highlighted internet radicalization as a significant contributor to radicalization in Bangladesh (Idris, 2018). Findings in the study also compare to a survey done by The Horn Institute and Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution (2017) on

the Nature, Drivers and Perceptions of Muslim women and girls toward violent extremism in Kenya that focused on Muslim women and girls in the violent extremist hot-spot areas of Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu and Kwale at the coast; Mandera, Wajir and Garissa in north eastern; and Isiolo in eastern Kenya. The findings indicated that it is not universally accurate that the youth who join violent extremist organizations originate solely from impoverished families; instances of middle-class youth succumbing to extremism have also been seen because of easy access to technological platforms. From the focus group discussions conducted most of the key informants identified online platforms as one of the places where radicalization occurs one of them asserted that:

“Many students have access to the internet and spend much of their time online and can get exposed to radical groups and content online. The internet does play a role in exposing students to radicalization since it broadens the way of thinking of the youths by bringing up the controversies of many contentious issues. On the other hand, some students are careful and choose to consume content that’s non radical from social media and which positively build them. Someone can control his/her accessibility of content in the internet so I don’t think online radicalization is a major factor.”

Briggs (2011) study concur with the study findings as it emphasized the dangers associated with the internet in facilitating the rapid dissemination of radical and extremist ideologies and actions. Specifically, the social and interactive aspects of the internet and other social media platforms were seen by several participants as pivotal in the manifestation of discourses around extremism and terrorism. These communication technologies were seen as dynamic, fluid environments where radicalization as a social process may be either exacerbated or mitigated by the manner in which users of the internet and social media platforms influence and guide the dissemination of information, opinions, and perspectives (Von Behr *et al.*, 2013).

Contribution of Guidance and Counselling in Addressing Vulnerability to Radicalisation in Kenya

Peer Counsellors’ Responses on Guidance and Counselling Addressing Vulnerability to Radicalization

Table 10 shows peer counsellors’ responses on whether guidance and counselling can be used to address vulnerability to radicalization.

Table 10: Peer Counsellors’ Responses on Guidance and Counselling Addressing Vulnerability to Radicalization

Theme	Sub-theme	No. of references	Percent
Root cause identification	It creates a platform to address the cause of radicalization	8	44.4
Alternative solutions	It helps students to find options of getting resources to meet their basic needs instead of joining radical groups.	3	16.7
Awareness of Counselling services	It informs students on the disadvantages or the causes of the radicalization	3	16.7
Coping mechanisms	It helps instill adaptive strategies under different situations	2	11.1
Attitude change	It changes perceptions of students They begin seeing things in a different way	2	11.1
Grand Total		18	100.0

Table 10 presents qualitative findings from peer counsellors regarding the role of guidance and counselling in addressing vulnerability to radicalisation. The results show that the most frequently cited theme was root cause identification (44.4%), indicating that peer counsellors perceive counselling services as primarily important in helping to identify and address the underlying causes of radicalisation among students. This suggests that counselling is viewed as a preventive intervention that focuses on early identification of risk factors such as social, economic, and psychological challenges.

The second most cited themes were alternative solutions (16.7%) and awareness of counselling services (16.7%). This indicates that guidance and counselling are also perceived to play a role in providing students with alternative coping options, such as accessing support systems and resources, as well as increasing awareness of the risks and consequences associated with radicalisation.

Additionally, coping mechanisms (11.1%) and attitude change (11.1%) were identified as important outcomes of counselling interventions. These findings suggest that counselling is also seen as contributing to the development of adaptive coping strategies and cognitive or attitudinal shifts that reduce susceptibility to extremist ideologies.

Overall, the findings indicate that peer counsellors view guidance and counselling as a

multifaceted intervention that addresses radicalisation through prevention, awareness creation, psychosocial support, and behavioral change. The emphasis on root cause identification highlights the preventive rather than reactive role of counselling services in mitigating vulnerability to radicalisation among students. This is a phenomenon also noted from the focus group discussions conducted in which one of them asserted that:

“Guidance and counselling play a significant role in fighting extremism by providing relevant information touching on safe religious practices and fighting myths on radicalism. Students exposed to radicalism can be identified early enough and they can be taken through the counselling process.”

The importance of guidance and counselling was echoed by most of the key informants whereby one of them said that:

“Through guidance and counselling underlying psychological issues that could be push factors to vulnerability radicalisation can be addressed i.e. family conflict, low self-esteem. Guidance and counselling can do a lot by having preventive measures for vulnerable students like addressing identity issues to avoid role confusion, address root causes to radicalization, psycho education on countering radicalization and identifying vulnerable student so as to curb extremism.”

Student Counsellors’ Responses on Guidance and Counselling Addressing Vulnerability to Radicalization

Student Counsellors’ Responses on Guidance and Counselling Addressing Vulnerability to Radicalization

Table 11 shows student counsellors’ responses on whether guidance and counselling can be used to address vulnerability to radicalization.

Table 11: Student Counsellors’ Responses on Guidance and Counselling Addressing Vulnerability to Radicalization

Theme	Sub-theme	No. of references	Percent
Psycho- Education	It can create awareness through psycho education	4	33.3
Preventive measures	It can provide relevant information touching on safe religious practices and fighting myths on radicalism	4	33.3

Addressing root cause	It can help address underlying psychological issues i.e., family conflict, low self-esteem	3	25.0
Behaviour Change	It can bring about positive behaviour change	1	8.3
Student Identification	It can help in identifying susceptible students at all education levels	1	8.3
	By starting guidance and counselling all the way from primary and running with it through University.	1	8.3
Proper care	It can help enforce proper care among students	1	8.3
	Grand Total	12	100

Table 11 presents student counsellors' perspectives on the role of guidance and counselling in addressing vulnerability to radicalisation among students. The findings indicate that the most frequently cited themes were psycho-education (33.3%) and preventive measures (33.3%), suggesting that counsellors view guidance and counselling primarily as tools for creating awareness and providing accurate information to counter extremist narratives. Psycho-education is seen as essential in helping students understand the risks of radicalisation, while preventive measures focus on correcting misconceptions related to religion and ideology.

The second most cited theme was addressing root causes (25.0%), indicating that counselling is also perceived as effective in dealing with underlying psychological and social issues such as family conflict and low self-esteem. This highlights the importance of counselling in strengthening students' emotional well-being and resilience, which may reduce susceptibility to extremist influence.

Other themes, including behaviour change (8.3%), student identification at all education levels (8.3%), and proper care (8.3%), were less frequently mentioned but still important. These suggest that counselling is also viewed as contributing to long-term behavioral transformation, early identification of at-risk students, and provision of supportive care within educational institutions.

Overall, the findings indicate that student counsellors perceive guidance and counselling as a multi-dimensional intervention that operates at preventive, educational, and psychosocial

levels. The emphasis on psycho-education and preventive measures highlights its central role in countering radicalisation through awareness creation and misinformation correction.

Findings in the study compare with Sikkens *et al.* (2018) who posit that that family counseling programs have been created for the prevention of violent extremism (CVE). Specialized counselors assist the family of an individual who has become radicalized by offering alternatives to participation in extremist groups, modifying the individual's emotional attachment to the radical environment, and striving for the cessation of their involvement in such groups (Koehler, 2016). This is in line with the feedback of the key informants of the study from the interviews conducted, one of the informants indicated that:

“Guidance and counselling will inform and educate students on the dangers of radicalization and students will get to know other avenues of getting finances, safe religious practices and other solutions to their problems which may be making them vulnerable to radicalization. The counsellors can also identify students who are vulnerable so as to counter violent extremism.”

CONCLUSION

The results of the study showed a significant association between university students' perception of the purpose for internet access, exposure to radicalization materials online and reasons for joining extremist groups and vulnerability to radicalization.

The statistics of Chi-square test of independence likelihood ratio (χ^2 (16)=73.668, $p<0.05$) showed that there was a significant association between the perception on purpose for internet access and perception on reasons to justify extremist ideologies among university students. 9 cells (36.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .36. The Cramer's V = 0.233 at an approximate significance=0.000 indicated moderate and significant association between the two variables.

The results of Chi-square test of independence likelihood ratio (χ^2 (16) =82.159, $p<0.05$) showed that there was significant association between access to radicalization materials online and perception on reasons to justify extremist ideologies among university students. 11 cells (44.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .19. The Cramer's V = 0.244 at an approximate significance=0.000 indicated moderate and significant association between the two variables.

The results of Chi-square test of independence likelihood Ratio (χ^2 (16) = 55.886, $p<0.05$) showed that there was significant association between reasons for joining extremist networks

and reasons to justify extremist ideologies among university students. 9 cells (36.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .36. Further, the Cramer's V = 0.208 at an approximate significance=0.000 indicated moderate and significant association between the two variables. The peer counsellors and student counsellors identified online platforms as one of the places where radicalisation occurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Counsellors need to provide digital literacy to help vulnerable individuals critically assess online content, identify extremist propaganda and avoid joining extremist groups.

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