

Understanding Muslim Radicalization Through Digital Media: Strategies to Foster Social Cohesion and Build Peace Across the Global North and Global South

Kabir N.A.¹

¹Department of English and Humanities, BRAC University, Bangladesh

*Corresponding author: n.kabir@bracu.ac.bd

Abstract

Muslim radicalization is a global concern. Some Muslims in the Global North and Global South have endorsed the ideology of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and have resorted to terrorism. In 2015, approximately 250 Americans joined the Islamic State, and some still sympathize with it. Based on in-depth interviews and analysis of literature and media reports, this paper offers an understanding of radicalization and the reasons why some Muslims are drawn to extremism, with a particular focus on the role of digital media and the radicalization of young Muslims. It assesses the messages of Islamists and evaluates the factors contributing to Muslim radicalization through a review of literature that offers theological, sociological and psychological explanations. The methodology section discusses how the interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory qualitative method. In the “Results” section, the researcher discusses four interviews that focused on digital media’s impact on young Muslims in different circumstances. The themes that emerged from the interviews are youth culture, cultural issues, US foreign policy, and self-radicalization. The researcher also discusses three incidents of terrorism that connect the Global North and Global South. Then the researcher provides recommendations for fostering social cohesion through digital media. The researcher emphasizes biculturalism, cyber education, responsible use of cyber laws, producing counter-narratives through YouTube, and the assessment of national and international policies by respective governments. This paper concludes with a discussion of some limitations of these digital media strategies but is optimistic that digital media can foster a peaceful world. This paper aligns with the conference theme “Sustainable development and peacebuilding”, and SDG 16, “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions”.

Keywords: biculturalism, digital media, grounded theory, Muslims, radicalization, social cohesion

Introduction

Radicalization is a local, national, as well as international problem. The term radicalization refers to a social and psychological process by which an individual or group comes to endorse an extremist political or religious ideology. The individual may or may not resort to extreme violence. Factors such as collective identity, group membership, loyalty to the group, and willingness to work for the group are likely to draw the radicalized individual to terrorism.

Muslim extremist groups such as al-Qaeda, which was founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s, conducted terrorist attacks on the United

States on September 11, 2001. They justified their actions against the USA (and its allies) by claiming that they opposed US intervention in Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Later, in 2014, Iraqi-born al-Baghdadi proclaimed his Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), would be the new legitimate Islamic caliphate for all Muslims. In this paper, I use the terms ISIL and Islamic State interchangeably.

The Islamic State called on Muslims to move to the caliphate and told them that it was a sin to live in any other setting (Dar al-Kufr) now that there was a purely Islamic entity (Dar al-Islam). This led hundreds of young Sunni Muslims from the Global North and Global South to



travel overseas (e.g. to Syria) to join ISIL. In 2019, al-Baghdadi died in a US-led raid on his hideout in northwest Syria. Yet the ISIL ideology is still endorsed by some radicalized Muslims globally through digital media. They may still resort to terrorism (as discussed later in this paper). A discussion of radicalization in the two spheres – the Global North and Global South – is vital for understanding digital radicalization because it demonstrates that some Muslims from both spheres have been drawn to ISIL's ideology through the same pathway using digital media. In this paper, first, I discuss the literature on Muslim radicalization. Secondly, I discuss my research objectives. Thirdly, I discuss my methodology, including the application of grounded theory to analyze my interview data. Fourthly, I present the results of the analysis of four interviews and draw connections with the existing literature. Fifthly, I discuss three incidents of terrorism that connect the Global North and Global South and provide recommendations for building harmony and social cohesion through digital media. Finally, I provide my conclusion.

Research Objectives

From 2009 to 2014, I interviewed 400 American Muslims, aged 15 years and over. Based on these 400 interviews, I have published two books on Muslims in America Kabir (2014, 2017). Through qualitative research, I examined their identity and sense of belonging, their views on Islamophobia and US politics, and their hopes and dreams. Soon after, radicalization of some young American Muslims became a concerning matter. Until November 2015, about 250 American Muslims (including some women) had been drawn to ISIL Vidino and Hughes (2015). So, I decided to examine the factors that could lead some American Muslims to radicalization.

From 2017 to 2021, I interviewed 51 Muslims, aged 18 years and over, from eight states and the District of Columbia. This led to the publication of my recent book, *American Muslim perspectives on radicalization* Kabir (2023). The 51 interviews unveiled several possible reasons for Muslim radicalization, for example, psychological reasons, at-risk youth, intergenerational conflict, depression, Islamophobia, bias, and flawed US foreign policy. For this paper, I particularly

delve into the role of digital media in the radicalization of some Muslims in the Global North and the Global South.

Research Questions

- How is digital media assisting in indoctrinating some Muslims globally?
- How can digital media foster peace and social cohesion through different strategies?

Literature Review

Researchers on radicalization have pondered why some young Muslims have resorted to extreme violence and adopt a jihadi identity. They have offered some theological and sociological explanations. Ahmed (Ahmed, 2020, p. 52) observed that many Muslims scholars view jihad as “striving for excellence.” This means Muslims should try to follow the righteous path in a peaceful manner, that is, follow the five pillars of Islam. Ahmed (Ahmed, 2020, pp. 52–53) also noted that Salafism is a branch of Sunni Islam. It advocates the restoration of the “true” Islam. Salafis justify a jihad against aggressors who want to instill democracy in Muslim countries. Salafis believe that loyalty should only be shown to Muslims, and there should be minimal contact and interaction with non-Muslims. Mandaville (Mandaville, 2020, pp. 49–50) stated that Salafi jihadis emphasize the Quranic requirements of Muslims or shariah. They challenge the legitimacy of political systems run by “infidels.” Examples of Salafi jihadist groups are al-Qaeda, ISIL, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and al-Shabab in Somalia (Mandaville, 2020, p. 50).

Khosrokhavar (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 81) suggested that two factors push people toward radicalization. The first factor is the living conditions in ghettos, such as the French banlieues, and the second factor is a feeling of intense dehumanization. It “convinces them that the situation is hopeless, that all doors are closed to them and that their horizons are definitely blocked” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 81).

In the context of Australia, I have previously observed that Islamophobia can push Muslims to radicalization Kabir (2019). Islamophobia can involve singling out Muslims through discrimination or harassment in public spaces. It may push them

toward radicalized groups, and it makes it easier for terrorists to pull them to their groups.

In his book *Islamist militancy in Bangladesh*, Mostofa (Mostofa, 2021, pp. 163–164) observed that in Bangladesh militant groups target middle-class youths who lack knowledge of Islam, often those who are unemployed and feel a sense of injustice and Muslim victimization. These vulnerable youths may also have personal grievances such as experiencing poverty or corruption.

Islamists' Use of Digital Media

Terrorists may use the internet to provide instructions on bomb making or to spread their messages and recruit supporters, and vulnerable people are likely to be drawn to their messages.

Some radical Islamist websites have been active in recruiting Muslim extremists globally. The al-Qaeda-affiliated online publication *Inspire* and the Islamic State's *Dabiq* magazine have assisted some young Muslims to self-radicalize. These magazines were published in several languages including English *Bunker* and *Bunker* (2018). These e-zines mainly focused on the narratives of Muslim victimization and Islamophobia globally. For example, they discussed the US-led invasion of Iraq and abuses in Abu Ghraib prison where Iraqis were detained by US soldiers in 2003–2004 Kabir (2014).

In order to draw the attention of Muslim youth residing in the Global North and Global South, *Inspire* used a western magazine-style format for its cover page, and used catchy headlines such as "WHAT TO EXPECT IN JIHAD." Sometimes, it used western pop culture or rap music with inspirational jihad wording. It also used words like "LOL" that connected to youth pop culture. It encouraged Muslims to be superheroes by fulfilling their jihadi religious duty (Sivek, 2013, pp. 594–598). With their Muslim identity, some youths were interested in gaining glory, and some might have thought that it might be fun to fly to the terrorists' zone for an adventure (as they did through their video games).

From 2014 to 2016, through *Dabiq* magazine, the Islamic State presented a caliphate as an alternative society for individuals to live a more meaningful life. It was to be a society without racism or inequality. It propagated that the Muslims' enemies were "the Crusaders and Zionists," and presented these as the main reason to join ISIL. In its extreme version of Islam, ISIL proclaimed that

"Jews, the Crusaders, their allies [including Muslims], and with them the rest of the nations and religions of kufr [disbelief], all being led by America and Russia, and being mobilized by the Jews" need to be killed Beaumont (2025). ISIL used the Islamic term *Hijrah* to remind Muslims that, when need arises, they should leave their country and join the jihad against non-believers. The year when Prophet Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE to escape persecution is known as *Hijrah Kabir* (2023).

Koehler (Koehler, 2020, pp. 456–459) observed that many violent (non-Muslim) extremist groups are keen to recruit "high-risk" youth who are susceptible to drugs and alcohol. Through the social media platform "TikTok," which is popular among "Generation Z," they promote specific subcultural products that attract younger target groups, for example, music and fashion. Similarly, ISIL posts interesting rhymes and lyrics to recruit minors. During adolescence the human brain undergoes rapid changes which can result in anxiety, and that can assist the radical sites to recruit the most vulnerable youths.

Beaumont Beaumont (2025) observed that the Islamic State has lost about 95 percent of the territory that it gained in Iraq and Syria in 2014, yet it retains influence through online propaganda, as revealed by the recent Bondi Beach alleged terrorist incident in Australia in December 2025 (discussed later).

Methodology

This research is part of a larger study that involved 51 interviews in nine places in the USA from 2017 to 2021. The states were Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Michigan, New York, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and the capital city, Washington, District of Columbia. The participants were Muslims, both male and female, aged 18 years and over, and they were from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. To recruit the participants, I used the snowballing technique and representative sampling. Through snowballing, participants referred me to other prospective participants. For representative sampling, I interviewed Muslim leaders, imams of mosques, social workers, council members, counsellors and others. The participants of this study

are kept anonymous.

I have applied a grounded theory approach in coding and comparing the interview data and deriving meaning from the data. Charmaz (2006) noted that the grounded theory method is associated with qualitative inquiry. The data should be assessed with an objective mind, and without any preconceived ideas. In other words, the researcher should let the data speak for itself, and the researcher should derive themes, content and meaning from the data.

The one-to-one interviews had a duration of 30 minutes to one hour. They were digitally audio recorded and transcribed. From my semi-structured open-ended questions, the participants spoke on various topics related to radicalization. From these 51 interviews, I drew the themes for my book, such as cultural, psychological, social, and security issues. For this paper, I am drawing on only four interviews from the pool of 51 interviews because they particularly show how some young Muslims can be drawn to radicalization through digital media. These four interviews took place in Virginia, Michigan and New York in 2017–2019.

I have also applied content and critical discourse analysis of relevant newspapers to find the meaning and relevance of news items.

Ethical Considerations

I was a visiting researcher at Georgetown University, Washington, DC when I conducted the interviews. I received ethics approval from the Institutional Review Board at Georgetown University. The participants in this study had to sign consent forms before their interviews. In the consent form they were informed of the confidentiality arrangements, in particular that their names would remain anonymous. They were also informed about the benefits of this research.

Results and Discussions

Results

Youth Culture

A youth leader, Yasser (male, African-American heritage, aged in his 40s), observed:

We have a lot of youth in America who are getting involved in violent behavior. I personally believe they're [ISIL] giving them X extreme ways of getting involved. "Here's a weapon. Here's a

plane ticket. Just go. Somebody will meet you there." And they feel like they're part of this James Bond movie and like, "Whoa, yeah, I'm part of something." It gets exciting and you think you're playing a video game. (Interview, Virginia, 2017).

Yasser observed that seeking adventure is a part of youth culture. Young people want to feel important and to be noticed, and they can prove themselves by fighting against social injustices. Yasser's views resonate with Khosrokhavar's (2017) observations on radicalization as a response to injustice or dehumanization (as discussed in the literature review section). Similarly, research has also found that young people have been inspired by watching the movies Rambo I, II, and III. Rambo (played by actor Sylvester Stallone), being a lone soldier with masculine muscles, could single-handedly punish wrongdoers (Revitt (1985)).

Cultural Issues

A participant observed that the cultural restrictions imposed by diasporic parents can draw some children to social media. Rahman (male, US-born of Pakistani heritage, 17 years) said that he was a victim of too much parental control. It affected his developmental age and caused him to hang out with the wrong group. So, he could relate to vulnerable youth who are drawn to extremist ideologies. Rahman also said that South Asian children are not allowed to talk to their parents openly. If they argue, parents may consider them *beadab* (meaning lacking manners or uncivil). So, "There is a constant hindrance of parents and children relation. They make a narrow passage. Then eventually children find their space in ISIL, social media, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter" (Interview, Michigan, 2017).

Previous studies (Kabir (2014); Sirin and Fine (2008)) also found that some American Muslim youth face parental restrictions at home and experience Islamophobia outside their homes (that is, they are viewed with suspicion as the "other" after the 9/11 terrorist attack in the USA) during a crucial developmental stage. However, most young Muslims negotiate their identities and deal with everyday cultural and global challenges due to their bicultural skills. They navigate between their ethnic culture and the mainstream culture skillfully, for example, integrating with their school friends through communication, sports,

and so on Kabir (2025).

US Foreign Policy

Roxana (female, Bangladeshi-born US citizen, 20 years) pointed out the positive side of social media, but also recognized that some people are likely to be inspired by ISIL's messages. Roxana commented:

We are the Generation Z. So, we are making new trends which are not negative trends. These are very positive trends that we re-post and share. For example, we re-post or share #MeToo Movements or posts where it's showing that these people in Palestine and Jerusalem are being killed, or these women are being killed. And these thoughts, positive thoughts are being encouraged. That's how people are opening "GoFundMe" website pages or they're advocating about all of these and making a stand, and they're starting to talk about this. (Interview, New York, 2019).

Hashtag #MeToo on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram is a global movement among women where survivors of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or sexual bullying share their stories.

Roxana was distressed about the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict between militants in Gaza in Palestine and the Israeli forces. The Palestinian militants (Hamas) launched hundreds of rockets toward the cities of Israel in 2019 and Israel retaliated with more than 250 strikes. Four Israelis were killed by rockets, and 19 Palestinians including two pregnant women and a toddler were killed. She said that as a young American Muslim she feels sad that her fellow Muslims are being tortured. Under these circumstances, some Muslims are likely to join radical groups to fight against social injustice (Interview, New York, 2019).

Self-Radicalization Through the Internet

Zahir (male, aged in his 30s, Bangladeshi heritage) said that in 2006, when he was a college student, he was self-radicalized, and planned to leave for Iraq to help the Muslim cause. He was disturbed by the sufferings of the people of Iraq. Zahir stated:

I was about 20 years old in 2006. Think about it. In the middle of the night, you are on your YouTube channel. You are on your internet searching what's going on in the world. It's pretty devastating. In the middle of the night when my parents were fast asleep, I used to watch videos

on YouTube, and see the atrocities committed by US foreign policy in the Muslim countries in Afghanistan and Iraq. I wanted to help them, go overseas as aid worker, or go by other means. I was very emotional. I started posting war posters on my Facebook. So, one day the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] knocked on my door, and stopped me from leaving the country. (Interview, Virginia, 2017; see also Kabir, 2023).

Zahir's statement resonates with Roxana's interview. It also aligns with Khosrokhavar's Khosrokhavar (2017) and Mostofa's Mostofa (2021) observations that when Muslims can sense the extent of dehumanization in the Islamic world, and the flawed US foreign policy, they may choose to join Muslim militant groups.

Discussion

Acts of Terrorism by Radicalized Muslims

In this section, I discuss three cases of terrorism in the Global North (Australia and New Zealand) and Global South (Bangladesh) which involved radicalized Muslims with Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Indian heritage. I examine the factors that may have motivated the perpetrators to commit acts of terrorism, and discuss whether these horrendous incidents resonate with the interviewees' opinions and the literature discussed in this paper.

The Holey Artisan Bakery Attack, Bangladesh, 2016

On the evening of July 1, 2016, in the exclusive suburb of Gulshan in Dhaka, Bangladesh, five gunmen (aged 20–22 years) armed with assault rifles and machetes entered the Holey Artisan Bakery, shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) and killed 22 people, mostly foreigners. Then the five militants held 13 people as hostages in the café. After 12 hours of negotiations, commandos stormed the café, rescuing the 13 hostages and killing the militants.

The militants belonged to the banned organization Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh. ISIL claimed responsibility for the café attack, but the Bangladeshi government dismissed suggestions of ISIL's presence in the country. Two of the militants were studying at the Malaysian campus of Monash University, an Australian univer-

sity, and the others lived in Bangladesh. They communicated through digital media. So, it was a coordinated attack. Allegedly, the ringleader Tamim Chowdhury succeeded in brainwashing these young Muslims.

It should be noted that most of these militants belonged to the affluent class in Bangladesh. So, Mostofa's Mostofa (2021) economic theory that militants are drawn from underprivileged groups does not fit this terror act. Perhaps, the ISIL strategy of targeting places where Muslims, according to their Salafi jihadist doctrine, were viewed as "westerners" or "infidels" led to this horrendous violence Mandaville (2020).

An ISIL-Inspired Attack in Auckland, New Zealand

On September 3, 2021, Ahamed Aathill Mohamed Samsudeen, a Sri Lankan refugee in New Zealand, walked into the Countdown Supermarket at Lynn Mall in Auckland. He took a knife from the shelves of the supermarket, and stabbed and wounded seven people before the police shot him dead. Samsudeen was a Tamil Muslim who came to New Zealand on a student visa to seek refugee status in 2011. He was granted refugee status in 2013 in New Zealand on the basis that he was abducted, beaten, and tortured in Sri Lanka before coming to New Zealand. Sri Lanka witnessed 26 years of civil war (1986–2009) between the Sinhalese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The psychologist who interviewed Samsudeen to assess his refugee status noted that he was a "highly distressed and damaged young man." His condition deteriorated due to his "immaturity and isolation" in New Zealand. Samsudeen's family said that he had mental health issues and that he spent a lot of time on the internet. Samsudeen was an ISIL supporter. He posted on his Facebook page, "One day I will go back to my country and I will find kiwi scums in my country (it's very easy to find) and I will show them" (cited in Kabir, 2023). New Zealanders are sometimes called Kiwis, derived from the native bird kiwi.

Samsudeen's case supports the research findings of Mostofa Mostofa (2021), who observed that militant groups target Muslims who lack knowledge of Islam, often those who are unemployed and feel a sense of injustice and Muslim victim-

ization. Also, Samsudeen had personal grievances so he was attracted to the ISIL ideology that he received from digital media. It was a lone wolf (non-coordinated) terrorist act.

Bondi Beach Attack, 14 December 2025

According to media reports *Police say Bondi Beach mass shooting suspects "acted alone"* (2025), on December 14, 2025, an Indian national who migrated to Australia called Sajid Akram, aged 50, and his son Naveed, an Australian-born citizen aged 24 years, allegedly killed 15 people in an ISIL-inspired attack targeting a Jewish Hanukkah festival. Sajid was killed by the police on the spot and Naveed was taken into custody and charged with 15 murders and other serious offences. Police said that it was a lone wolf attack, that is, that these two individuals acted on their own. In October 2025, they recorded a video protesting against "Zionists" while sitting in front of a flag of the Islamic State jihadist group *Police say Bondi Beach mass shooting suspects "acted alone"* (2025). On December 16, 2025, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that Sajid Akram was a fruit retailer, and his son Naveed was an unemployed bricklayer Duffin, Schultz, Rachwani, and Walter (2025a). The Akrams might have been responding to the suffering of the people of Gaza since the Israeli– Hamas War commenced in October 2023. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has stated that Israeli authorities and Israeli security forces have committed four of the five genocidal acts defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide OHCHR (2025). On August 2, 2025, it was reported that, in addition to the genocide, about 175 people including 93 children have died of starvation in Gaza Palestinian Return Centre (2025). On August 3, 2025, thousands of demonstrators in Sydney, Australia, chanted "Ceasefire Now" and "Free Palestine," and called for an end to the Israeli– Hamas War that started in October 2023 "Tens of thousands protest Israel's war on Gaza in Australia's Sydney" (2025). It was a peaceful demonstration. Yet Akram and his son Naveed may have been indoctrinated with ISIL's message of violence against Zionists, and they allegedly targeted innocent and peaceful Jewish

people at Bondi Beach Duffin, Schultz, Rachwani, and Walter (2025b).

Many people stay up to date with the news through digital media. They voice their opinions through peaceful protests, and demand social or political change. Yet, unfortunately, a few people reveal their rage through terrorism, as seen in the Bondi Beach attack.

The reasons of these three horrendous incidents that took place in Bangladesh, New Zealand and Australia can be related to the literature discussed in this paper. However, the Bondi Beach incident discussion resonates with the perspectives of the two participants in this study, Roxana and Zahir, that some people may react violently against social injustices.

Fostering Social Cohesion

As the participants discussed, cultural, psychological, social and political factors can draw an individual toward radicalization, and digital media can play a part. However, efforts should also be made to counter radicalization using digital media, as discussed next.

Biculturalism

Young people should be encouraged to adopt biculturalism. They need to be proud of their own culture and ethnicity but at the same time they need to integrate with the mainstream culture through sports, debating clubs, music, and so on Kabir (2012). Digital media also provides a platform for young people to be a part of global culture. For example, some Bangladeshi girls watch Japanese and Korean films through digital media and that enhances their knowledge about these cultures. It can also lead to mutual respect between cultures. Similarly, through video games, a Bangladeshi youth can play video games with a mainstream American in the USA, and later they can have a conversation on Facebook Messenger (personal communications, Bangladeshi female youth, Britain, 2008, and male university student, Bangladesh, 2019). Young people can benefit from engaging in esports (virtual games) that involve brainstorming, strategic thinking, and social connections (as opposed to the brainwashing on digital sites of Muslim extremists) (personal communication, female university student,

Bangladesh, January 2026). So, global connections through digital media can also enhance young people's confidence.

Cyber Education

As the participants pointed out, digital media can also provide a platform for disengaged and depressed people. For this reason, policy makers should formulate strategies for integrating digital literacy into formal and informal education settings. Educators should advise young people how to participate safely in digital cultural spaces Bala (2024). Also, educators should advise their students to be alert to which digital platforms they visit. They should refrain from visiting radical and right-wing sites. Non-government organizations should offer educational workshops for parents and policy makers in both rural and urban areas. Parents must be educated to restrict access to radical sites on their children's computers (personal communication, male computer science student, Bangladesh, January 2026).

Cyber Laws

Some countries have passed anti-terrorism legislation, such as the USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, and the United Kingdom's Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and Terrorism Act 2006. The Information Technology Amendment Act 2008 in India contains a provision on cyber terrorism. Since cyber terrorism is a global threat, countries in the Global North and Global South should work together to introduce anti-terrorism laws against cyber criminals in any jurisdiction. Yet countries need to ensure that a balance is maintained between the protection of human rights and the need for effective security measures (Cassim, 2012, pp. 404–406). The heavy-handed application and potential misuse of anti-terrorism laws, such as through Islamophobia, can lead to abuse of human rights, and thereby pave the way to radicalization Kabir (2019).

Counter Narratives through YouTube

Researchers and academics should produce animated videos in their local languages, for example, in Bengali for the people of Bangladesh, or in Tamil or Sinhalese for the people of Sri Lanka, to counter radical messages. These videos

would reach audiences globally. The Islamists' sites highlight selective verses from the Quran to support their own vindictive aims. There should be narratives that counter the jihadi interpretation of Islam and propagate that Islam is a peaceful religion.

National and International Policies

To reduce the chances of Muslim radicalization, each national government should implement policies to safeguard vulnerable minorities, for example traumatized refugees as in the New Zealand case discussed above. Respective governments should also take initiatives to block radical websites.

In the international context, the Trump administration in the USA needs to assess its foreign policy, for example, to stop supporting Israeli attacks on Gaza "Israeli strikes on Gaza are relentless as displaced endure flooded camps" (2025). The controversial American foreign policy may assist Muslim extremist groups to recruit vulnerable Muslims, or it may motivate a few Muslims to choose to be lone wolf attackers, for example, as allegedly happened in the Bondi Beach attack. The US government needs to change its biased foreign policy. This will reduce the rise of anti-semitism and attacks on Jewish people like the one at Bondi Beach.

Limitations

Some approaches to countering radicalization aim to reduce the risk of radicalization occurring online through educational measures. Education may build awareness of democracy, pluralism and peaceful ideas to promote harmony and social unity. Yet extremist content can rapidly proliferate beyond the capacity of reasonable control measures. For example, in 2019, following the Christchurch terrorist attack on Muslims by an Australian non-Muslim, which was livestreamed by the perpetrator, platforms like Facebook and YouTube were unable to stop the rapid spread of the video as millions of reproductions were uploaded while users avoided systems in place to prevent this Wolbers, Dowling, Cubitt, and Kuhn (2023). The suspension of online accounts that produce or disseminate violent extremist messaging may not be effective because problematic in-

dividuals can move from site to site, establishing a presence on platforms where moderation standards are lower Wolbers et al. (2023).

However, it is still worth pursuing all of the suggestions mentioned above because social cohesion, education and cross-cultural understanding can still win out against violent extremism.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the literature on radicalization and Muslim extremists' use of digital platforms to recruit vulnerable Muslims. Through the selected interviews and case studies of terrorism involving radicalized Muslims in Bangladesh, a Sri Lankan refugee in New Zealand, and Australians of Indian heritage, I evaluated the factors that can lead to radicalization through different digital media channels, and whether they aligned with the participants' statements and academics' observations.

Digital media provides immense resources for global connections, networking and mostly positive outcomes. However, to counter radical and extremist sites, digital providers need to be more proactive in monitoring the damaging sites. Through online and offline venues, educators need to advise their students not to get carried away with fake news and to stay away from radical sites. Young people need to adopt a bi-cultural stance and develop cross-cultural understanding through art, music, movies, and educational videos. Finally, biased national policies need to be addressed so that minorities are not marginalized. Internationally, the US administration should reconsider its foreign policy. Let digital media assist us in revitalizing and reshaping a peaceful world.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2020). *The "war on terror," state crime & radicalization*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bala, A. V. (2024). Digital media and cultural identity: Exploring intersections, impact, and challenges. *Gusau Journal of Sociology*, 4(3), 305–317.
- Beaumont, P. (2025, December 22). What is the status of islamic state, the group linked

- to the bondi attacks? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/22/could-the-bondi-terror-suspects-be-linked-to-islamic-state>
- Bunker, R. J., & Bunker, P. L. (2018). *Radical islamist english-language online magazines: Research guide, strategic insights, and policy response*. Strategic Studies Institute.
- Cassim, F. (2012). Addressing the spectre of cyber terrorism: Comparative perspective. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 15(2), 380–415.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Duffin, P., Schultz, A., Rachwani, M., & Walter, R. (2025a, December 16). Bondi shooters visited philippines weeks before beach massacre. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/alleged-bondi-terror-gunman-naveed-akram-told-family-he-was-going-on-fishing-trip-20251214-p5nn1s.html>
- Duffin, P., Schultz, A., Rachwani, M., & Walter, R. (2025b, December 16). Bondi shooter's terror links revealed as police investigate manifesto. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/bondi-gunman-linked-to-is-radical-sydney-islamic-centre-20251216-p5no2o.html>
- Israeli strikes on gaza are relentless as displaced endure flooded camps. (2025, December 30). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/30/israeli-strikes-on-gaza-are-relentless-as-displaced-endure-flooded-camps>
- Kabir, N. A. (2012). *Young british muslims: Identity, culture, politics and the media*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Kabir, N. A. (2014). *Young american muslims: Dynamics of identity*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Kabir, N. A. (2017). *Muslim americans: Debating the notions of american and un-american*. Routledge.
- Kabir, N. A. (2019). Can islamophobia in the media serve islamic state propaganda? the australian case, 2014–2015. In J. L. Esposito & D. Iner (Eds.), *Islamophobia and radicalization* (pp. 97–116). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kabir, N. A. (2023). *American muslim perspectives on radicalization*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kabir, N. A. (2025). American muslims' experiences of the american dream. In R. C. Hauhart, M. Sardoč, & T. Deželan (Eds.), *The routledge handbook on the american dream* (Vol. 3, pp. 140–161). Routledge.
- Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New Press.
- Koehler, D. (2020). Violent extremism, mental health and substance abuse among adolescents: Towards a trauma psychological perspective on violent radicalization and deradicalization. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 31(3), 455–472.
- Mandaville, P. (2020). *Islam and politics*. Routledge.
- Mostofa, S. M. (2021). *Islamist militancy in bangladesh: A pyramid root cause model*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- OHCHR. (2025, September 16). *Israel has committed genocide in the gaza strip, un commission finds [media release]*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/israel-has-committed-genocide-gaza-strip-un-commission-finds>
- Palestinian Return Centre. (2025, August 2). *175 palestinians, including 93 children, die of starvation in gaza*. Retrieved from <https://prc.org.uk/en/news/7448/175-palestinians-including-93-children-die-of-starvation-in-gaza>
- Police say bondi beach mass shooting suspects "acted alone". (2025, December 30). Retrieved from <https://www.rte.ie/news/world/2025/1230/1550868-bondi-killers-alone/>
- Revitt, J. (1985, July 3). Rambo: First blood part ii. *The Advertiser*, 4.
- Sirin, S. R., & Fine, M. (2008). *Muslim american youth: Understanding hyphenated identities through multiple methods*. New York

- University Press.
- Sivek, S. C. (2013). Packaging inspiration: Al Qaeda's digital magazine inspire in the self-radicalization process. *International Journal of Communication*, 7, 584–606.
- Tens of thousands protest israel's war on gaza in australia's sydney. (2025, August 3). *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/3/tens-of-thousands-protest-israels-war-on-gaza-in-australias-sydney>
- Vidino, L., & Hughes, S. (2015). *Isis in america: From retweets to raqqa*. Retrieved from <https://extremism.gwu.edu/isis-america-retweets-raqqa>
- Wolbers, H., Dowling, C., Cubitt, T., & Kuhn, C. (2023). *Understanding and preventing internet facilitated radicalisation* (No. 673).