

Person's Attachment to Their Country: Identity Fusion Regarding the Online Radicalization Issues

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Abstract. Online radicalization is a new threat because we all have activities in the online world. As the highest number of social media users, university students are one of the most vulnerable to exposure to online radicalization content. Many efforts have been made to eradicate radicalization. At the individual level, an intense identity fusion between individuals and their countries will become a potential effort. This research was conducted to provide an overview of the conditions of student's identity fusion with their country and the experiences of online radicalization. The description of these two things becomes the basis for mapping the needs of identity fusion and online radicalization experienced by students. This research used qualitative methods with thematic analysis of the 217 respondents who answered the open-ended questionnaire. The research results show that respondents have a relatively strong sense of identity, characterized by positive feelings towards the country, reciprocal contributions between the individual and the country, and feelings of attachment to the country. Meanwhile, students' experiences of online radicalism are seen in the form of non-violent radicalization. It is hoped that strong identity fusion can prevent individuals from radical activities that lead to extreme actions and violence.

Keywords: Identity Fusion, Online Radicalization, University Students.

1 Introduction

The development of radicalism is considered rapid, both in the form of networking activities and creativity carried out [1]. The internet and social media have become a strategic choice for radical and terrorist groups as a medium for spreading radical ideas. This condition happens because the internet network can replace the role of mainstream media, which radical terrorist groups do not have [2]. In addition, the internet can also provide opportunities for individuals to participate in new groups anonymously [3].

Online radicalization, specifically, can be defined as a process where someone interacts using various facilities on the internet and then accepts the understanding that violence is the right way to solve problems [4]. Radicalism needs to be addressed as an initial warning. In the

process of spreading, radicalization can be one of the stages or steps before terrorism occurs. In general, terrorists who carry out destructive acts and suicide bombings have a radical understanding of various things [5]. It can be said further that there is a close relationship between radicalism and terrorism. It is undoubtedly a big challenge for the country because it can threaten the integrity of the nation and country [6]

Research on online radicalization continues to develop today. Koehler has explained the role of the internet and the process of radicalization for individuals. He stated that the process of individual radicalization can be formed via the internet [7]. Another research conducted by Ummah also stated the same thing. According to him, the trend of Indonesian radicalism is stated to continue to increase, and its spread is more likely to occur via the internet [2] Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media became one of the most effective means of inciting the younger generation to be contaminated by radical ideas [8] West Sumatra itself was shocked by the arrest of 16 suspected NII network terrorists who were spreading radical ideas [9]. For this reason, more energetic strategies are needed to reduce the demand for radicalization and violent extremist messages [10].

Preventive measures are essential to stop the spread of online radicalization. Blocking sites that contain terrorism and radicalism is one such measure [2]. Additionally, increasing citizens' sense of nationalism can help prevent radicalization [11]. Nationalism fosters a love for the country, patriotism, and a willingness to make sacrifices for the nation and country. Deep emotional attachment and feelings are necessary for individuals to develop a sense of identity fusion with their country, which is the connection between an individual and their social group that creates a sense of connectedness [12]

Identity fusion theory, introduced by Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, and Huici in 2009, refers to the principle of attachment between individuals (attachment in close relationships) [13]. Identity fusion is defined as a deep feeling of unity between an individual and his group members [12]. Individuals who merge have deep feelings for group members. The fused individuals then see themselves through the group members. Apart from that, they also perceive the group through their selves. The influence of this appraisal encourages a strong feeling of connectedness to the group [14].

High identity fusion within the individual is predicted to be able to explain the phenomenon of pro-group behavior [15]. It is confirmed by previous research, which shows that individuals who are very integrated are likely to donate their wealth to other people or help victims of natural disasters [16]. In Indonesia, research on football club supporter groups stated that the more the respondent felt integrated with the support group to which he belonged, the higher the supporters' desire to make sacrifices to defend their group [17]. In addition, research in the context of individuals and their countries was carried out by Landabur, Miguez, and Laborda [18]. In this research, it is explained that identity fusion can predict individual self-sacrifice for their country.

Based on this, the country can be defined as part of a group. In identity fusion theory, this is explained through the principles of local fusion and extended fusion [13]. Local fusion occurs within smaller and homogeneous groups, such as work teams, fraternities or specific associations. Meanwhile, extended fusion occurs within larger groups, which consist of many individuals who do not have contact with each other, such as national or religious groups [19]. In the context of extended fusion, pro-group behavior occurs due to the projection of relational

ties onto group members who are not directly tied. Until then, these relations are transformed into fictitious relatives. It explains the reason why individuals with high identity fusion are willing to sacrifice for more heterogeneous groups [20].

Identity fusion predicts pro-group behavior, actions to protect the group, and self-sacrifice [21]. Individuals with a strong sense of identity fusion with their country are more likely to exhibit pro-country behavior [18]. For this reason, having intense identity fusion is a potential strategy to counter online radicalization. Therefore, this research was conducted to find out the picture of the identity fusion of university students with their country. Furthermore, researchers also intend to find out students' views on online radicalization. The results of these two data will then be analyzed so that we can get a picture of the identity fusion and online radicalization experienced by students.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

There were 217 respondents in this study. Researchers determined several criteria for research participants: University students in Padang and Male or female. Students were chosen to be research participants because as the highest number of social media users, university students, or people aged 18-34 years were most affected by influence and recruitment factors. [8], [22].

2.2 Research design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a thematic analysis process. Two research variables will be studied that is identity fusion and online radicalization. This research seeks to explain the picture of identity fusion experienced by students and identify students' experiences of radicalization. This research was carried out online by randomly distributing questionnaires to participants who met the research criteria.

2.2 Prosedure

Researchers used an open questionnaire to determine the identity fusion and experiences of online radicalization experienced by students. The questions for identity fusion that are given are: 1. Describe your experiences towards the country of Indonesia. 2. Describe your feelings towards the country of Indonesia. 3. What are the similarities/bonds that attach you to your fellow Indonesian citizens? The questions for online radicalism that are given are: 1. What is your feeling about the current Indonesian government? 2. Can you change this current situation? If yes, let me know what is your plan 3. What do you think about online social movements? 4. Tell us about the accounts/information on social media that you have encountered that have influenced your ideology towards social movements. In addition, an identity fusion scale in the form of Swann's pictorial scale [23] was also included in this research.

2.3 Data analysis

Researchers used thematic analysis techniques to analyze research data. There are several stages of analysis carried out. First, understand the data by reading the results of the questionnaire repeatedly; Second, code the data. Third, look for themes that suit the research objectives. Then, finally, the existing codes form significant themes.

3 Results and Discussion

Radicalism is an ideology that is a common enemy of the Indonesian people because it can break the unity and integrity of the nation. Radicalism and terrorism are combined into one thing that needs serious attention from the country [5]. One preventive measure that can be taken is to build attachment between individuals and their country. At the individual level, this effort is realized with the concept of identity fusion. The fusion of identities can create a new spirit of unity to achieve a high sense of nationalism for its citizens. In this research, the picture of the fusion of students' identities with their country is depicted in the following three themes:

3.1 Emotional evaluation of the country

The overall meaning of the country can be seen from the emotional condition of the research participants towards their country. These dynamic conditions are manifested in the form of positive and negative emotions. The majority of emotions seen are positive emotions. This emotional condition is described by interpreting existing regions and cultures' beauty, uniqueness, and diversity. Research participants felt proud, happy, and grateful and wanted to explore Indonesia more deeply. The emotional evaluation of the country can be seen from the following quote:

"I am very proud to be part of the Indonesian citizen which has a very diverse ethnic and racial culture. The unique culture in each region makes me want to know more about the culture in Indonesia."

"I feel very proud to be part of Indonesia. I am grateful to live in a country that has all the riches. Indonesia, which is rich in natural products, culture, tourism, and even has and recognizes 6 religions, makes me feel very grateful and love the country of Indonesia."

Several quoted statements from participants prove that there is pride in the wealth of the Indonesian country, which is manifested in the form of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, which is considered to be a unique characteristic that other countries do not have. Previous research stated that the main source of national pride that teenagers experience is related to the social and cultural diversity of the Indonesian nation. Individuals feel proud of ethnic, racial, cultural, religious and culinary diversity. This pride is considered reasonable, considering that Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world, so it has very varied ethnic and cultural groups [24], [25], [26]. The pride associated with Indonesia is beneficial because an individual's emotional bond with a place produces a positive tendency to protect that place [27].

However, research participants' statements did not only lead to positive emotions; some participants expressed disappointment with the conditions of society, which were considered unequal. This condition is related to the poor governance system run by the government. Some of these quotes can be seen as follows:

“Indonesia is a beautiful, peaceful, rich, dirty, and poor country at the same time. Beautiful because of its nature and friendliness, peaceful because its tolerance is higher than in other countries, rich because of its abundance of natural resources, dirty because of its stupid culture (such as corruption and littering), and poor because of its inability to manage natural resources accompanied by many greedy people in the government.”

“When I hear the word Indonesia, I immediately think of its very chaotic system and politics. Corruption is rampant, many police officers have experienced a drastic decline in morale, resulting in many criminal cases where the perpetrators are the police themselves, and many legal processes are one-sided. In essence, I feel disappointed and very concerned about the condition of Indonesia.”

Participants described the emotional dualism that emerged, where the emergence of positive emotions was also accompanied by negative emotions containing disappointment with the government's performance, corruption, and perceived uneven development. [28] states that two factors are causing the decline of nationalism among young people, including internal and external factors. The flow of globalization causes external factors, while internal factors come from disappointment with government performance. The potential for nationalism to fade due to disappointment with the government causes anger, considering that young people are the driving pillars of a country. For this reason, the emergence of negative emotions is one thing that reduces the power of merging the identity of the individual and the country. Individuals who compromise their collective ties can weaken their willingness to fight for the group, reducing feelings of integration with their country [29].

3.2 Active Role of the Country and Individuals

Individuals who are integrated with their country feel they have a stake in each other. The country is interpreted as having a role for individuals, especially in forming their identity as Indonesian citizens and fulfilling basic rights. For research participants, the presence of the country is interpreted as providing access to free education and health, protection and security, and a place to live. Apart from that, participants also stated that identity was another thing given to them by the country. Identity as an Indonesian citizen is demonstrated by the characteristics that characterize citizens, such as friendliness and politeness. For example, the attitude of helping each other is a form of describing the identity that has been embedded in them since childhood. This character is obtained from the culture inherited from them. As a multicultural country, Indonesia has various ethnicities, such as Javanese, Batak, Javanese, Chinese, or a combination of both. For citizens of the Republic of Indonesia, which consists of hundreds of tribes, ethnic identity is one of the many factors that form a larger and equally important group identity, namely Indonesian national identity [30]. Indonesia's National Identity is diverse, which is an embodiment of cultural values that had developed before the arrival of the major religions in the archipelago in various aspects of life from hundreds of

tribes, which were then integrated into one Indonesian unit to become a national culture, with the foundation of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika [31].

Several previous studies have suggested the role of ethnic identity in predicting national identity [32], [33], [34]. Ethnic and national identities are consensual and mutually supportive [35]. Through other research, national identity is known to positively correlate with ethnic identity, while religious identity is related to national identity through ethnic identity [30]. Based on this, individuals who are integrated with their country consider the country to have contributed to forming a national identity for that individual.

Apart from the country's contribution to individuals, research participants also felt that the same contribution from the citizens themselves accompanied the gift from the country. Individuals are seen as agents who also actively contribute to the country, which can be seen as active involvement in country activities. For research participants, this realization can be seen from their efforts to become good citizens by obeying the rules, paying taxes, and carrying out actions to defend the country, which are realized by studying seriously and achieving in the student context. The spirit of defending the country can be reflected in the awareness of young people (students) regarding the rules that must be obeyed and implemented, as well as the political literacy of young people (students) who can finally position themselves in pursuing education with full awareness and enthusiasm for seeking high knowledge and national political scene for change in Indonesia [36].

The existence of a reciprocal relationship between the country and the individual and the individual towards the country depicts the relational bond between the individual and the country [29]. Relational ties are part of the aspect of identity fusion proposed by Swann [37] which states that individuals who merge with a group have the perception that group members make the group strong and the group makes the members strong.

3.3 Equality with Fellow Citizens

The third theme that emerged was related to connectedness with the country, characterized by a sense of equality with citizens of other countries, a feeling of love for one's country, and solidarity. Research participants felt that there was a bond that united Indonesian citizens. This bond is perceived in the form of similarities. Some similarities felt are the same place of birth, language, physical characteristics, character and fate. This perception of connectedness is relevant to identity fusion in research conducted by [38], that individuals who merge show attachment to their group so that they can integrate themselves into the group as a whole. This condition is reinforced by the frequency obtained from the image scale of identity fusion, namely that 110 people out of 217 respondents completely merged with their country.

Apart from describing the picture of identity fusion experienced by students, this research then identified the extent of the spread of online radicalization experienced by UNP students. This issue is important because, in its spread, the internet has become the main facilitator in providing the ideological pillars of radical social movements [3]. The research results then explain the extent of involvement of research respondents in radical social movement activities. To visualize the data, researchers analyzed using word frequency via n.vivo. Data visualization can be seen in Figure 1.

The research results show that most respondents have the same voice in their intention to change the government. According to research respondents, the effort needed to change the government is to carry out social movements. Referring to the point of understanding radicalism above, the desire to change the status quo is one indication of radicalism that appears among research respondents. Apart from that, the intention to change government can be one of the triggers for the emergence of radical ideas from a sociological perspective. From a sociological perspective, the triggers for radicalism are the identity crisis that befalls the younger generation, moral shock, and differences in ideology and social networks [42]. In this case, the internet is the main facilitator because it provides an ideological pillar with the infrastructure for radical social movements [3]. The internet develops the ideology of radicalization through chat rooms and homepages [7]. However, although the responses from research respondents indicate early-stage radicalism, it is important to understand further the drives, needs, and forms of behavior that lead to radicalization, especially online (Whittaker, 2022).

4.2 Online Social Movement Activities That Have Been Carried Out

The second theme reveals that research respondents agree that online social movements effectively change the government. However, the current involvement of research respondents is still in activities considered normal, for example, by signing a rejection petition and then participating in criticizing the government via social media. Researchers have not found any involvement of research respondents in online movements that lead to extreme actions or violence.

However, many people who radicalize do not commit violence but still seek change. It relates to participation in non-violent activism, such as demonstrations or attempts to gain political influence through political politics, especially for the large number of people who are radicalizing. The appeal of extremist ideology lies not in its use for designing collective action but as a source of individual and group identity. Radicalization may aim to create meaning and achieve political or social change [43].

Radicalization that does not lead to violence refers to the process in which individuals become radicalized by having views on changing the status quo but do not commit aid or abet terrorist activities. Other research that has been conducted previously defines non-violent radicalism as certain extreme cognitions, attitudes and emotions that are not explicitly linked to peaceful or non-violent paths [44]. Non-violent radicalism is also operationalized as activism or involvement in social movements to protest the status quo and replace it with a new social and political order or system without linking peaceful or non-violent paths to activism.

It can be further explored that the ideology of change that emerged among respondents initially identified radicalization but in the form of non-violence. This condition is reinforced by the fact that research respondents did not find any involvement in online activities that lead to extreme or violent actions.

5 Conclusion

The psychological attachment between individuals and their country has the potential for realizing pro-country actions. The merging of an individual's identity with their social identity

as an Indonesian citizen is a characteristic of developing a strong attachment between the individual and the country. This condition is certainly potential, considering that the challenge of division in the name of the country is still a threat today. In this research, the fusion of students' identities with their country is realized by emotional evaluation of the country, the active role of the country and individuals, and a sense of equality between citizens. Meanwhile, the identification of online radicalism found in research is seen in the emergence of a desire to change the status quo. The desire for change through social movements is based on disappointment, unequal conditions, and corruption committed by the government. Even so, the indications of radical ideology that emerged were still in a non-violent form because no respondents were found to be involved in extremely violent activities online. Overall, these findings suggest that a strong sense of identity in respondents can prevent further involvement in radical activities in the future.

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